

From Archive to Living Heritage

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"The value of documentation lies not only in the resulting media but also in the learning process for those who carry on a tradition"

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Participatory Documentation Methods in Crafts

By Gunnar Almevik

The idea of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), in which traditional craftsmanship is identified as one of five domains for safeguarding, is based on a people-up system with appropriate community-based methods to elicit local heritage values. However, by far the two most highlighted implementation tools on the operational agenda are “the urgent safeguarding list” and “the representative list,” the methodology of which we are familiar with through western museum tradition. Critical research has revealed how the international procedures for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage revolve around a list of selection and display, subordinated to national and regional political interests.¹ Yet the operational directives for implementation do provide other less conventional tools. There is support firstly for exemplary methods of working with intangible heritage, secondly for participation

of communities and groups in non-governmental organizations and centers of expertise.² These latter participatory tools reflect the principles and objectives of the convention, yet they are far from being the ones in focus.

The subject of this article is the documentation of intangible heritage, whose safeguarding is a core activity. Grounded on the fact that perceiving precedes predicating, documentation directs what is to be safeguarded. There has to be an awareness of the world before it can be made explicit and communicable. An ambiguity in the regulated heritage practice is that documentation is put forward as expert knowledge.³ In the ICH convention texts, nations are obliged to establish documentation institutions for their intangible cultural heritage and facilitate access to them. What about participation? How will these expert institutions pick up and extract the invariants of people’s intangible

heritage? As Randall Mason states:

*Rhetorically, we all agree on the call for more participation.... But it will take real changes in professional attitudes as well as continual testing of new, context-appropriate methods.*⁴

What context-appropriate methods do we need to involve craftspersons⁵ in documentation of craft procedures and crafted objects within their scope of competence and sense of heritage? How can we design for participation in heritage conservation and museum practice?

The context of research is provided by the Swedish Craft Laboratory, which is a socially committed craft research center at the University of Gothenburg. The center was established in 2010 in cooperation with heritage organizations, craft enterprises, and trade organizations to empower craftspeople in the complex processes of making, in fields where craftsmanship has lost influence in design and planning. The general agenda of the Craft Laboratory is to bring research into practice and involve craftspersons in the processes of inquiry.

The results that are presented and reflected upon in this article originate from four different documentation projects with the common objective of developing useful documentation methods within traditional crafts. The research is practice-led and experiential, using practice as an arena for inquiry and the methods of practice as methods of inquiry.⁶ The documentation projects are designed differently and differ from one another primarily in the position of the craftspersons in the action of documentation. The projects are concerned with methodologies that elicit sensory aspects of embodied skills, and with participatory procedures in documentation involving craftspersons and maker communities in the agenda.

The research intersects craft research and heritage studies and takes on an action-oriented perspective on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.⁷ Concepts and perspectives are influenced by environmental dynamics, and the methods-in-action draw on community-oriented conservation and collaborative craftivism.⁸

The text takes off from a craft documentary, used as a critical example in accordance with which the museum practice is further analyzed. In this first section of the article, documentation of crafts is put in historical context and analyzed in relation to its epistemology, as the methodology is subsumed to interiorized perceptions within heritage conservation and museum practice of what is considered knowledge and what is possible and desirable to know about. The following section is practice-led and presents and reflects upon results from collaborative documentation projects carried out within the Craft Laboratory.

The Director's Cut of Tradition

The regional museum in Västerbotten has produced artistically refined records of traditional crafts and cultural environments through the medium of film. The film *Liesmide* ("Scythe Forging") documents the work of two brothers in Hötjärn, Lövånger, in the region of Västerbotten.⁹ The film starts when the two brothers, who have learned the craft of forging scythes from their father, enter the old smithy and start to prepare the iron. The timeline follows the procedure step-by-step from cutting up the iron to forming the scythe and welding and hardening the steel. There is no sound from the actual environment. The voiceover narrator presents information on the blacksmith's terminology for tools, procedures, and parts of the scythe in a pedagogical manner.

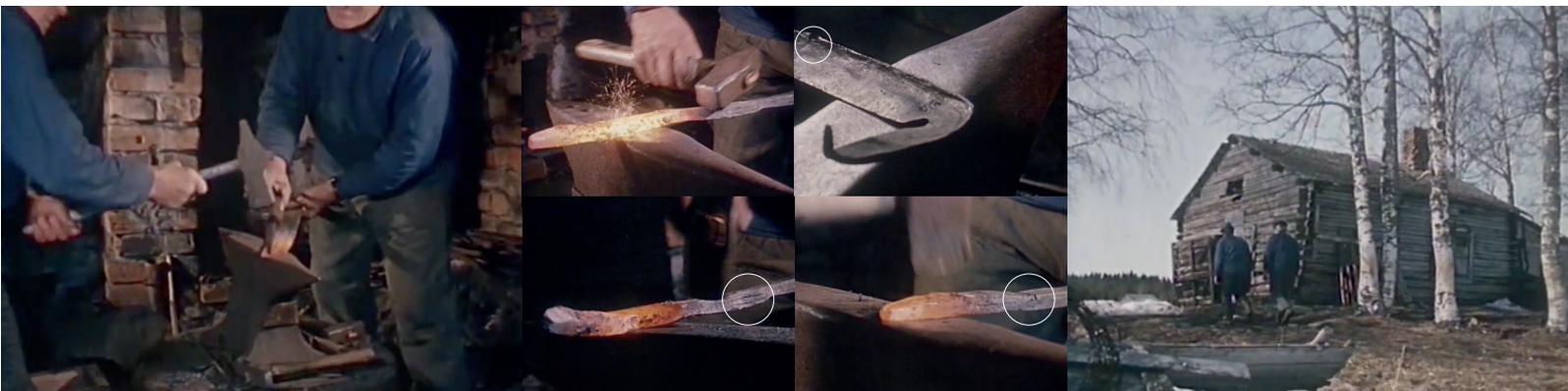


Fig 1-6. Pictures from the film *Liesmide*. The two brothers who demonstrate the forging of scythes in the film once assisted their father in smithy. From a smith's perspective, the film shows a break in tradition. The iron is worked very hard, sometimes at far too high a temperature, and sometimes cold. The welding does not hold and there are cracks in the scythe blade, which means that it would not withstand the strains of real use.

The blacksmiths Patrik Jarefjäll and Otto Samuelsson have studied the documentary and tried to learn the forging procedures through this craft film. The content of the film is reduced to 18 minutes and 17 seconds, fragmented into 151 clips. The real forging process that Jarefjäll and Samuelsson re-enacted took approximately six hours to perform. Essential information had been cut out and the editing had displaced procedures in the timeline in a way that disconnected the record from reality.

This peculiar craft is framed as a heritage object and transformed into archive material. The craftsmanship is interpreted and displayed by museum officers to whom the dark smithy and glowing and sparkling steel seem a mystery. Even though procedures are outlined in order and a narrator pedagogically informs us about sequential steps

and terminology, the attentiveness to the presence is weak. In the crucial steps of annealing and tempering the steel, the narration states that tacit judgments are made but does not disclose the content of these judgments.

To better see the colors of the annealed steel, the father [of the brothers] had shutters on the windows of the smithy to better see the colors. He judged the temperature by the color. [Next sequence] The scythe is polished with a piece of a brick. This is done to see better if the tempering has succeeded.¹⁰

The meaning behind and beyond the present craft is mysterious hideouts of tacit knowing. Each sequence in the film is given the same value, each repetitively following the previous one to achieve the end product. The documentation creates an aura of heritage and evanescence, instead of being keenly alert to the sensuous aspects of the making process to bring these material objects into being. What



Fig 7. 1933, Olle Homman at the Nordic Museum taking notes and making drawings of the logs from the old chapel in Gråträsk, Norrbotten. In the background the new chapel is under construction in the traditional log timber technique. Photo by John Granlund, the Nordic Museums archive.

is the right color of the steel? What is the sound? What is the grip and turn of it and how are the movements choreographed in such a tight space? How can the documentation extend perception and consolidate the gains of perceiving?

The Pastness of Crafted Things

During the last century, museums and archives in Sweden have collected a considerable amount of artifacts and produced records referring to threatened traditional crafts. Of the seventy million collected objects in public museums, cultural historical objects represent the majority.¹¹ The historical interest in crafts is notable through the many tools, work equipment, and even whole workshops taken into museum custody. The artifacts are labeled with identity and provenance but there are very few facts about how to *use* the tools or manufacture the objects.

Contemporary critical research uses historical

collections and records to expose the discourse of heritage production and the historiography within traditional museum disciplines such as ethnology and archaeology.¹² A common interpretation is that heritage production in the early twentieth century was tangled up in the modern project. Modern society was waiting at the door, and it was urgent to document the past for the benefit of future research.¹³ It was feared that traditional culture and craft would become extinct unless safely placed in archives, museum collections, or reservoirs like the Skansen Open Air Museum in Stockholm. Safeguarding meant producing documents for archives and collecting artifacts for museums, and in the process removing obstacles to the development of modern society.

Karin Gustavsson shows in her research on ethnographic fieldwork how the museum disciplines shaped their culture of knowledge and ideas about scientificness.¹⁴ Gustavsson reveals that the in-

ventory forms and drawings in field expeditions functioned not primarily as representations of—in this case—peasant building culture and craft, but as practical operations for establishing order. The documents, the collections, and the archives were things that brought clarity to the situation of uncertainty and confusion that prevailed when knowledge about the complex peasant culture with its traditional crafts was to be saved for posterity. Safeguarding was an act of representation, but with a *selective gaze* for the past that systematically disregarded the present.¹⁵ The living traditions were only interesting if they could mediate something antique or as a reminiscence of things in the process of disappearing. The crafts person is anonymous and presented as a *collective abstraction*, using Edward Said's term, to represent worker heritage, peasant culture or the pastness of craftsmanship.¹⁶

Documentation of craftsmanship in the context of heritage practice is rooted in academic studies of material and visual culture, and approaches phenomena and artifacts “with the text as a filter”.¹⁷ What is lost from this perspective is, according to Tim Ingold,

*the productive processes that bring artifacts themselves into being: on the one hand in the generative currents of the materials of which they are made; on the other hand in the sensory awareness of practitioners. Thus processes of making appear swallowed up in objects made; processes of seeing in images seen.*¹⁸

Dead Denotations of Craftsmanship

Many craft communities and advocates have a reluctant attitude towards documentation and any type of representation of their crafting knowledge.¹⁹ Documentation in heritage practice faces a tension with the practical knowledge tradition that rejects the dualistic idea that one may have knowledge without having the ability to apply or

implement this knowledge. In the mind of many craftspeople, knowledge is personal, tacit, rooted, and transmitted through living traditions.²⁰ You cannot have knowledge without having experienced and mastered the making or performance.

The reluctance about documentation and written instructions also refers to seemingly uncomplicated *do-it-yourself* (DIY) instructions and to scientific management and *methods-time measurement* (MTM) used in industrialization.²¹ There is a tension between professional and amateur experience, and between worker and manager perspectives. Motion studies of craft work have been criticized as dehumanizing to the maker into a biological automat, and reducing complex making processes into a series of sub-tasks that can be preformed by unskilled people. Documentation may symbolize the transformation of craft production into mass production, by transfer of knowledge between workers and from workers into documents, machines, and mechanized procedures. Thus documentations speak the language of industrialism.

In the museum context, craft has been made synonymous with the crafted object, and the making of things, if considered at all, is reduced to comprehensive procedural rules and sequential steps in line with the methods of scientific management. It is rare to find efforts at expanding the understanding of the sensory aspects of making and the complexity of skills that connect things and beings. An illustrative example is the documentation of crane-sawing in the region of Halland from the 1930s made by museum officer Albert Sandklef. The published documentation consists of eight pages, 2900 words, and seven black-and-white photographs, which is the most extensive documentation ever made in Sweden of this peculiar sawing in tandem by hand.²² The record seems to



Fig. 8. The crane-saw is a large saw managed by two or more people to cleave logs into boards by hand. The noun crane has been interpreted as referring to the figure and movement of the large bird of that name: the saw's handle resembles the bird's long inclined neck, and the movements of the person managing the saw are like a crane's dance in spring. Photo by Albert Sandklef. Hallands kulturhistoriska museum.

be very accurate and thorough, with illustrations of the process, the tools, and local terminology. However, the documentation becomes what Richard Sennett refers to as a *dead denotation*: “These verbs name acts rather than explain the process of acting”²³. The presentation focuses on the visible constructions and the easily observable and recordable steps and elements in the process. Essential information to actually perform this craft procedure is missing, such as how to sharpen and balance the saw, the complexity of plumbing and wedging the saw incision, or the rhythm and coordination of the sawing motion.

Tacit Knowing

What is the nature of craftsmanship? How can this knowing-in-action be captured and represented in a meaningful way? William Morris refers to tradi-

tional craft skills as “the art of unconscious intelligence”²⁴. The implicitness of skills and knowing-in-action is commonly referred to as *tacit knowledge*, a field to which Michael Polanyi has made major contributions. His statement that “we can know more than we can tell” suggests an expanded perception of human knowledge.²⁵ To Polanyi, knowledge is first and foremost personal, and we use tacit knowing when we make intelligent use of our bodies as instruments.²⁶ We rely on our bodily judgments while attending to things of the world, and we undertake actions that respond to governing principles without attending to these principles. This intelligence does not exclusively refer to crafts, and thus Polanyi focuses instead on how scientists use tacit knowledge to tackle research problems, to pursue solutions and anticipate discoveries.²⁷

To rely on a theory to attend to things of the world



Fig 9. Patrik Jarefjäll in forging action. All the focus is on the steel and the knowledge-in-action has effectively been interiorized as a tacit vehicle to produce. Photo by Lars Heydecke.

is to *interiorize* a tacit framework for our acts and judgments. To document would be to reverse this process of interiorization from tacit knowing to focal display. *Articulation* means a deconstruction of the tacit framework that governs our actions, and this process of enlightenment may be destructive to the functional use: “By concentrating attention on his fingers, a pianist can temporarily paralyze his movement”.²⁸ Polanyi recognizes the need for analysis so that improvements and adjustments can be reinteriorized for better practice, yet bridging this *communication gap* may be done only “by an intelligent effort”.²⁹

According to Richard Sennett, craftsmanship is transmitted in accordance with the motto “Show, don’t tell”, and he furthermore examines different forms of telling.³⁰ Sennett, however, like Polanyi,

assumes that telling means putting one’s knowledge into words through speech or writing. Sennett recognizes different genres for how to specify and articulate (derived from different expressive instructions to prepare the dish Poulet à la d’Albufera). Tim Ingold argues that

*we can tell of what we know through practice and experience, precisely because telling is itself a modality of performance that abhors articulation and specification... To tell is to be able to recognize subtle clues in one’s environment and to respond to them with judgment and precision... It is rather to trace a path that others can follow.*³¹

How can we expand the conception of telling, and find what Susan Sontag urges us to seek—a relevant descriptive language that attends to the sensuous aspects, the actual appearance, and how it does whatever it does?³²

Participatory Documentation:

From Gaze to Action

In 2010-11 the Swedish Craft Laboratory and National Property Board carried out a survey of the state of traditional craftsmanship in Sweden, focusing on heritage crafts involved in curating places of cultural historical significance. Thorough interviews, dialogue seminars, and questionnaires answered by makers, entrepreneurs, trustees, consultants and conservation officers evince a situation where the craftsmanship is excluded from the increasingly formalized procedures in procurement and management.³³ Documentation skills and participation were elicited as important means to empower craftspeople in the complex processes of making things, in fields where craftsmanship is reduced to a means of production. The survey was followed up with two conferences on documentation, with workshops focusing on actors' perspectives on this key activity in heritage conservation.

The survey and gatherings around documentation showed that craft communities are weak and many practitioners feel lonely in their efforts to maintain skills and develop their practice. The small companies have lost family traditions, and face problems supporting informal training and transmission of craft knowledge.³⁴ These small or micro craft companies demand already trained and skilled craftspeople. The investment and risks involved in apprentice training, combined with the reluctance of the younger generation, highlight the need for alternative forms of learning and transmitting. Notable is that the survey does not show a protective guild spirit; on the contrary many craftspeople and companies demand networks and forums for sharing experiences with others. The main competition consists not of other craft companies but of alternative industrial products and methods. The

survey shows a gap in communication between craftspeople on the one hand and developers and managers on the other. The makers with traditional skills call for increased understanding of their crafts and a position to participate early in the process, while developers and managers demand presentations and quality assessment of skills and crafted products. The makers find that traditional techniques and materials are being outcompeted by new industrial products because they cannot prove the qualities and formal eligibility of their ways of doing things.

Heritage conservation is a negotiating process with formal checkpoints that require communication skills.³⁵ Increased emphasis is placed on all participants negotiating why and for whom things are produced and preserved, and considering the different meanings for different groups of people. Many craftspeople experience a gap between the scope of their competence (what they possess the knowledge and skills to do) and the scope of their practice (what they are expected and assigned to do). People's expectations for craftsmanship have diffused into their view of construction work as merely a means of production undertaken by a reluctant workforce that needs to be instructed by heritage experts and guided in the art of restoration by thorough construction drawings and specifications. This top-down managerial attitude will rather enlarge the erosion of knowledge, and limit the development and transmission of craftsmanship.

Documentation may be a core activity in challenging this problem—to evoke the actor's tacit awareness, to make traditions transparent, and to place on a communication level the many different ways of anchoring judgments and actions in the past. Siân Jones and Thomas Yarrow underline in their research the need for better understanding of



Fig 10. Learning by interviewing, working, recording and reflecting on Sjur Nesheim's craftsmanship in traditional carpentry of framed doors. From the left, Sjur, Tomas Karlsson, Jarle Hughsmyr, Trond Oalann and Emil Småland. Photo by Roald Renmælmo.

how different forms of expertise and skill coalesce in their material interventions in heritage objects: "Different experts do not simply provide different forms of knowledge about a stable object: diverse skilled practices literalize different kinds of material object".³⁶ Expert knowledge does not simply exist as perspectives; craftspersons have different techniques at their disposal that we need to elicit and understand: "[A] hammer and chisel literally offer different points of leverage to a pen and paper".³⁷

Craft Laboratories

The Craft Laboratory used this survey as the point of departure for a research and development program funded by the National Heritage Board and eight of the Swedish regional heritage organizations. The objective has been to investigate and

develop documentation methods for craftspeople within heritage conservation. The operating agenda of the Craft Laboratory was also developed to join the program with supporting learning activities and allocation of resources. Firstly, a seminar series on methodologies in craft research was arranged with a focus on research documentation. The seminar was open to craft practitioners and researchers and attracted many participants. The seminars dealt with topics such as time-space geography, interview techniques, filmmaking, auto-ethnography, procedure analysis and notations, terminology, and concepts in performing crafts.

Another initiative was the development of a course on crafts film. The course was intended to help craftspeople involved in a project use film to docu-

ment their work. Each course comprised four intense gatherings to learn techniques in filmmaking. The emphasis was on sound recording and the process of editing. The participants looked at and discussed old and recent examples of crafts film. The main part of the course was hands-on supervised work with an individual project.³⁸

An action that has strengthened the program for craft documentation and also developed the Craft Laboratory is a form of short-term scholarships for craftspeople. Each year two general scholarships support craftspeople in investigating a problem or developing materials and methods from their craft fields. The scholarships target practitioners with employment or self-employment in a trade of production or conservation but with narrow scope for reflection and investigation. The model is adapted from medicine, where academic hospitals in Sweden provide research grants to practitioners at the clinics to investigate clinical problems and methods with scholar supervision. The grants are short-term, the assignments strictly delimited, and the recipient required to present and communicate some kind of product of knowledge. The results have been presented as articles, reports, books, and films, as well as open workshops and exhibitions. Subjects have included the making of curved frames in interior carpentry, recipes for traditional casein painting, traditional pollarding in cultural landscapes for leaves feed, the use of scythes in grass lawn maintenance in historic gardens, and types and forging methods of medieval building nails.³⁹

Scholarship recipients are encouraged to let their practice play an instrumental part in the inquiry. Investigating the method of doing is similar to traditional action research in the sense that the researcher is a subject undertaking actions that are at the same time the research object. Analytical fric-

tion is created by moving between observation of matter, *self-observation in action*, and self and *participant observation over action*.⁴⁰ Documentation is essential to make this kind of investigation transparent, self-reflected, systematic, and communicable.

Don't-Do-It-Yourself Methodologies

One of the projects, *Between Craftspeople*, explores how documentation through interviews and participant observations can be used as tools in lifelong learning. A total of seventeen craft masters from Sweden and Norway have been interviewed by younger but skilled craftspersons with an interest in learning more about their crafts. The project was motivated to contest the socially alienated "armies of one" and self-sufficient D-I-Y culture, influenced by Otto von Bush and Lisa Anne Auerbach's socially committed "Don't-Do-It-Yourself" methodologies, and to create arenas for sharing knowledge and collaborative craft development.⁴¹

The circumstances of these encounters have varied and thus the narratives differ in scope and depth. One interview took place one-to-one at a kitchen table over a couple of concentrated hours. Another narrative proceeds from a collaboration that has been running for years. Several narrations are concluded from project cooperation and elicit many craftspersons' experiences. The results were presented in a book that includes the craftsperson's own description of their meetings, and discusses craft methods, materials, and tools.⁴²

The aim for these craft documentations differs from conventional research-driven interviews and participatory situations. Here it is about what I need to know to be capable to do the same thing myself. The interest is not primarily the biography of the master, how the craft is caught up in the life history of the person, trade or society. The interest in this



Fig 11-12. Encounters in the project *Between Craftspeople*. To the left: Anna Johansson in dialogue with Tykko Loo about the production of wooden shingles (*stickspån*). Photo by Anna Johansson. To the right: Ulrich Hjort Lassen and Oddbjørn Myrdal investigating tools for timber frame work. Photo by Nils-Eric Anderson.

project has not been the interpretations of meanings behind or beyond the actual craft, but the skills, intentions and constraints of the productive processes.

The discussions between the craftspeople have dealt in particular with the words themselves. How can we talk about a craft? When has the hard plaster dried to “exactly the right level” before it can be scratched with a nail board? What words describe the feel of good graft wood? What judgments lie behind this? Articulation of tacit knowledge is not a simple act. Chris Rust stresses the personal dimension and disputes “the idea that people’s tacit knowledge can be somehow extracted and made explicit in the form of rules for all to employ” as

being “fundamentally misguided”.⁴³ However, the words may function as guides for capturing previous experiences, and for connecting and re-enacting knowledge by memory. The question is, how should the words be used?

Sympathetic Illustrations

The craftspeople that produced the documents have struggled. During the process a series of seminars were held to pick up and discuss experiences. The first question that turned up was: “For whom am I writing this? Is it for somebody already familiar with the craft, or for a general audience?” The answers concluded were: Write for your peers. Write to your future self, when you have forgot-



Fig 13-14. Herman Krupke in plant propagation action.

ten the multiple information of this present, and write to capture the knowledge you would need if asked to produce by this particular procedure after a long time without practicing it. And perhaps also write to a customer trying to judge the invariants and qualities of this craft by the price.

A frequent problem is that the crafting subject and narrator misses touchstone references, as this type of internalized knowledge has become self-evident and habitual. Some also tend to adapt traditional motion studies and produce dead denotations, naming acts. The step-by-step progression communicated by commands and technical terminology may cast an illusory spell over the manual work.

The gardener Tina Westerlund, who participated

in the interview project, has struggled with how to express *sensory judgments* like the “right sound” that the master gardener Herman Krupke listened for when he propagate peonies.⁴⁴ How hard may the water be when cleaning the roots? He looks and feels the root to find the right spot to do the breach. But what is the feeling of “the right spot”? The result in this case may be enlightened by Richard Sennet’s concept *sympathetic illustration*. An expressive instruction becomes a sympathetic illustration, according to Sennet, when the focus is put on the hardest procedures, and the agent selects and demonstrates the essential steps. Tina combines images and texts, where the visual language is focused on the posture and handgrips showing the challenges for dexterity, while the text

is associative with similes using *like* or *as if* to guide and get hold of the reader's experiences:

*The writer of instructional language who makes the effort of sympathy has to retrace, step by step, backward knowledge that has bedded in to the routine, and only then can take the reader step by step forward. But as an expert, he or she knows what comes next and where danger lies; the expert guides by anticipating difficulties for the novice; sympathy and prehension combine.*⁴⁵

Tina Westerlund is still concerned with the attentiveness to embodied sensations in gardening crafts. She has continued with craft research in doctoral studies, and initiated workshops for gardeners to explore a language to evoke acquaintanceship with the domain of plant propagation and sensations in making. A conclusion may be that the value of documentation lies not only in the resulting media but also in the learning process for those who carry on a tradition, and to those who soon will be in the position to pass down the knowledge to the next generation by embodied instruction.

Attending to Senses

In the stone quarry of Glava in Värmland, roofing shingles of shale have been produced since the eighteenth century. The stoneworker Sigvard Nyström is the last in the tradition, and he has no successor to pass down this knowledge on to. The quarry is used to bring milled shale in masses for construction work and the shingle production is not in permanent demand. The professional filmmakers Anette Lykke Lundberg and Joakim Jalin have produced a documentation of Nyström's skill at producing roofing shingles of shale.⁴⁶ Nyström is the subject of the documentary, but he has also participated in the planning, and serves as narrator in the film for his depiction and reflections of his own craft performance. The aim of the documen-

tation is to interest and instruct younger stoneworkers to this particular work.

The film explores above all the importance of sound to this particular craft. The filmmakers planned the documentation together with Nyström and followed him from the blasting of stone from the appropriate stratum through the procedure of choosing and cutting the slabs to the shaping of the shingle. Nyström gives explanations while working and comments on the sensory dimension of judgments in the process, for instance how to split the slabs into thin shale plates:

*You have to be very careful and have a light hammer and hit it very carefully and look closely and listen as you go...to hear because you hear like when it's stuck and then you might have to turn the slab and go the other way.*⁴⁷

One can follow Ingvar in his work and the meaning and reflection upon the different qualities of the sound:

*Here you have to listen to the resonance and follow this crack very carefully so it doesn't end up wrong... You can feel it, or you can hear that the tone is a little subdued, then I have to try with another chisel.*⁴⁸

*Here you can hear that it's stuck rather fast now... if I hit too hard now it will break...here's that firm sound again...have to try to go back...there it sounds a bit looser...get help from another chisel.*⁴⁹

*Now it ought to crack apart soon and then it normally sounds a little like a click...there it came loose.*⁵⁰

In amateur films, the sound is commonly a glaring weakness. In this case, sound is attended to and carefully recorded with several microphone units for the narration, the sound from the work and the environment. The sound recording was processed and edited with its problematic frequency range from the hard and high tones of the hammering



Fig 15-16. Sigvard Nyström in action in Glava Quarry, cleaving the shale slab into roofing shingles. His judgments of sound direct his actions. Pictures from the film.

on stone. Donk, donk, donk, donk: represented as text or a series of mute photographs, this procedure would be meaningless or at least trivialized, as if it were a manual task without judgments or analytical thoughts.

A general conclusion from this outset is the advantages of a documentation approach where the framing of presence does not excessively depend on interpretation at the moment of action. Audio-visual documentation of the subjects may call our senses to an awareness of what they have seen and heard and noticed in the environment and the spatial-temporal interaction of bodies, tools and materials, without converting the information into a different mode.⁵¹ According to Gibson: “Descriptions, spoken or written, do not permit the flowing stimulus array to be scrutinized. The invariants have already been extracted. You have to trust the original perceiver.”⁵² Documentation by means of motion pictures and a good representation of the sound extends perception and “consolidates the gains of perceiving.”⁵³

Plastering and Blogging

Documentation has, at least from a Swedish perspective, been central to the expertise of museum professionals and heritage conservators. International guidelines and national legislation for heritage conservation urge that any action in listed heritage should be based on historical survey and scientific record. However, craftsmen are normally not involved in the documentation during hands-on maintenance or restoration activities—even though they make most of the decisions, have the greatest impact on the final result, spend the most time on site, are closest to the source material, and contribute unique skills to interpretations of historical records and diagnosis of damages. Documentations of building restoration have an overwhelming focus on the object while documentations of actions are limited to questions of what and when. Craftspersons who want to learn from or take on the work of precursors demand records of how and why things were done.

One of the projects investigates the craftspeople's use of a blog as a platform for documentation of a restoration project. The case in this project was the restoration of the decorative plaster elements of the rendered façades of the late-nineteenth-century county governess residence in Umeå, in trustee of the National Property Board. The craft-based documentation was specified already in the procurement documents and priced in the contract. Two of the masons from the company, Jonny Jonsson and Pelle Vestberg, who were awarded the contract were interested in the project and familiar with social media and common digital technology, were given the assignment to update "The Mason's Blog" with pictures and video from the daily work.⁵⁴ The blog was active for two seasons, 2013 and 2014.

The objective of the blog was not to be a personal venture but a platform for documentation and information transfer within the team managing the process. The blog was set up on a free blog site. The masons received instruction and support in uploading pictures, videos, and text descriptions from an iPad to the blog. The iPad had a wireless connection on the scaffolding and became part of the mason's toolbox. Their documentation assignment was to record and publish the essentials in their working procedures following the general questions: How are the procedures in the restoration done? Why are they done in this particular way? What have I learned? What deviation is made from the intended procedure or previous workmanship? Why this deviation? What would I have wanted to know from a documentation like this?

The blog, in contrast to the static inventory form, accumulates a reflected documentation in chronological order and with possible thematic tags. The blog may be developed in a linear order and yet be

rhizomatic, with tags and hyperlinks. Other social media platforms may be used to integrate many different media and augment the narration of crafts with film, photo, collections or 3D models.

As the blog in this case was a public space, the masons had to reflect on their actions and put their tacit awareness on a communication level. The social medium allowed the masons on the building site to communicate with the team of building consultants, managers, and material suppliers. The trustee was located in Stockholm, approximately 600 km from Umeå, and the material supplier a further 500 km away in southern Sweden. The blog also fostered communication with peers and communities of interest to the masons. Since the completion of the project, the blog has had a linear timeline with documents that can be downloaded and compiled into a conventional documentation report. The social media could be used to inform and invite the local community to the restoration space behind the covered scaffolding.

Approaching Presence

Let us finally return to the documentary of the blacksmiths in Västerbotten. As an action of research, this documentary about the making of wrought scythes has been analyzed, used, and evaluated as a learning resource by two trained blacksmiths, Patrik Jarefjäll and Otto Samuelsson.⁵⁵ The methods of investigation and research documentation are reconstructive experiment, film record, time-space geography, and model making. The old craft film provides the hypothesis of the historic craft and also how to perform the reconstruction. In the process of forging, two pieces of steel are amalgamated and transformed into a scythe. Nothing more is added or taken away. The hypothesis to the reconstruction is first tested by shaping and transforming clay models. The objec-

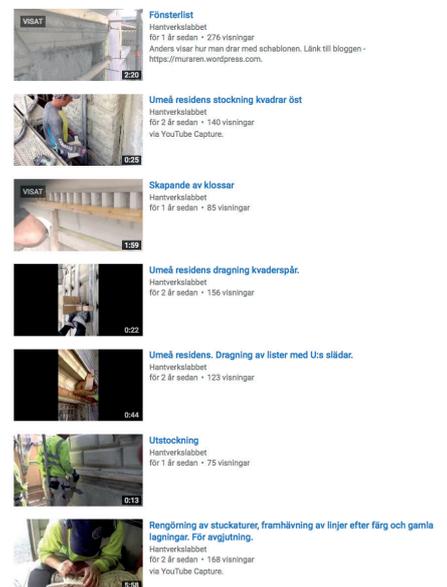
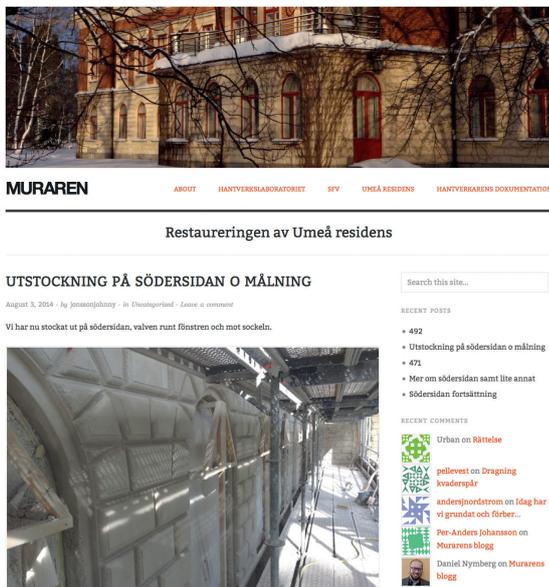


Fig 16-18. The mason's blog of the restoration of the county governor residence in Umeå. By Pelle Vestberg from Wordpress and Youtube.

tive is to envision the changes in form in relation to the actions of forging, and to foresee the coming steps and possible difficulties ahead in the process.

The reconstruction is performed in a production environment that corresponds to the historic smithy. The forging practice in the reconstruction becomes a practice of inquiry. Billy Ehn has stressed the relevance of this type of *autoethnographical method* for craftspersons when exploring their own field of practice. He defines this approach as “a method for cultural research where you are using your own experiences, as a starting point or as examples of more general conditions. You are both the subject and the object of observation”.⁵⁶

In reconstruction, the smiths Jarefjäll and Samuelsson have to adopt the critical mind of the researcher, and as researchers use the craftspersons’

abilities to connect with the site environment and perceive and scrutinize the invariants of embodied actions. John Gibson’s theory of *environmental dynamics* and concept *object affordances* may elicit the craft’s particular contribution to historic inquiry.⁵⁷ There has to be an awareness of the world before it can be put into words, and the embodied action creates an awareness providing other kinds of affordances. The noun affordance pertains to the environment that provides the *opportunity for action*. Affordances require a relationship to the *situated environment* from which the contingencies of actions derive. According to Gibson’s theory, when we perceive an object we observe the object’s affordances and not its particular qualities. The craftsperson’s great challenge is to keep at the same time a retrospective and prospective sense of occurrence, and to make use of the oscillation between *inferen-*

tial logical thinking and an embodied creative flow.

During reconstruction video was taken with automation and auto-perspective in order to collect data on the very fast and sensory judgments used in forging procedures. Film is operative in producing a representation that does not extensively depend on interpretations or translations in mediating. The film frames routine actions and bodily aspects that may be internalized and hidden—even for those who possess a particular ability.

The method used to analyze the forging procedures in the film is *time-space geography* as created by Torsten Hägerstrand.⁵⁸ Conventionally, motion studies reductively break down a process into procedures and sub-tasks, while time-space geography highlights the connectedness of the bodily movement in time and space. The perspective elicits craftsmanship as contingent upon a skilled person's presence in time-space and restricted by the *constraints of capabilities, authorities, and networks*. Skillfulness is not exclusively tied to the maker's genius and intentions, nor carefully guided by universal rules of thumb or predictable behaviors. Skillfulness grows from attentive practice in the face of constraints and bundles of the paths of beings and things in time-space.

David Pye characterizes craftsmanship as *workmanship of risk* and states that “the quality of the result is not predetermined, but depends upon the judgments, dexterity and care which the maker exercises as he works”.⁵⁹ These judgments are not always verbally articulated, resulting instead from a sensory choreography of hand, eye, ear, and brain.⁶⁰ The craftsman needs a craft strategy above the maxims, the comprehensive formula and instructive set of rules, to manage the cybernetic process and judgments of the immense range of

qualities, referring to David Pye, “without which at its command the art of design becomes arid and impoverished”.⁶¹ However, in a craft such as forging sharp tools, Jarefjäll and Samuelsson cannot attend to and assess the different qualities as they work. The different procedures and tasks are not statically categorized and thus appear in the flow of movements. By time-space geography they can shed light on the affordances in the many cybernetic turns and feedback grounded in the knowledge of perception in this particular environment.

The reconstructive experiment could conclude that the wrought scythes that are made in the film documentary lack some of the essential qualities needed to be used as scythes. The blacksmiths work the material very hard—stretching, bending and welding the scythe—sometimes at too high a temperature, where a considerable amount of steel is burnt off. This is visible from the many sparks of iron around the material. The steel in the welding does not always seem to have been fused. The surface has oxidized and the texture is porous with notably enlarged grains in the material structure. These old blacksmiths are not carrying on a functional tradition, but rather exposing a break in tradition.

The filmmakers have not paid interest to whether the brothers carry the tradition of their ancestors, and they obviously lack the expertise necessary to judge general craft procedures in forging. The aim of the documentary seems to be a nice and accessible story. The film becomes a medium for transforming a peculiar craft into a historical object, rather than creating a connection to this situated reality. The rural setting, the faded colors, and the neutral speaker create a deterministic aura of evanescence and function as simulacra of harmony between intangible heritage and museum practice.



Fig 19-20. Patrik Jarefjäll and Otto Samuelsson in the smithy at the Craft Laboratory, Mariestad. Photo Gunnar Almevik.

From Archive to Living Heritage

In the theoretical knowledge tradition represented in museum practice and heritage conservation, the act of interpretation is essential and sometimes ontologically amalgamated as an essence of knowledge. Reflection may become acts of attribution. Interpretations in the hermeneutical tradition commonly presuppose that the meaning is something beyond or underneath the present action. Documentation of craftsmanship needs to seek what Ulrich Gumbrecht defines as a *production of presence*. To Gumbrecht something present is tangible for human hands, implying that it can have an immediate impact on human bodies: “Therefore production of presence points to all kinds of events and processes in which the impact that present objects have on human bodies is being initiated or intensified”.⁶²

There is an old saying, “Let not the cobbler go beyond his last,” meaning that craftspersons should stay within their scope of competence. Documenta-

tion has been and still is considered an expert skill within museum practice and heritage conservation. The results of the research and experimentation within the Craft Laboratory show that documentation may empower craftspersons and communities and function as a core activity to facilitate new forms of learning and transmission of craft knowledge. Whether the craft is considered a traditional production method, a heritage practice for curating historical objects, or an element of intangible heritage, the practitioners and owners of this craft knowledge and expertise need to be part of the negotiations. Experience from the creativity of the productive processes and possession of tacit knowledge in the actual making is an advantage—being attentive to and aware of the things of the world.

Museums could gain new relevance by developing participatory documentation methods to support craftspersons and maker communities in their investigation of craft-related problems, the creation of learning resources, and the transmission of their

craft knowledge. Advocacy is not enough. Documentation may also function as self-authentication for declaring their knowledge, traditions, and sense of intangible heritage. Museums and heritage conservation need to re-think the archive and stop hegemonizing documentation practice if they are to engage a broader audience and support essential co-craft strategies in the weak and endangered craft fields.

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Endnotes

1. Hafstein 2009 and 2014, Smith 2006
2. UNESCO 2011
3. CIDOC 2012:2, Lettellier 2007:17, CIPA 2004
4. Mason 2008:113
5. In this text I use the gender-neutral noun *craftsperson* instead of the common word *craftsman*. The noun *craftsperson* is presented as synonym to *craftsman* in the Oxford English Dictionary and etymologically traced to the 1920s. The plural form may be *craftspeople* or *craftspersons*, where the later alternative depicts a group of individuals rather than an anonymous collective of people. These words have a performative function: they act upon people's identity, sense of acceptance and perception of skilfulness. Traditional craftsmanship is not all about skills. Skilfulness needs to be understood in the social context of tradition. I claim that many cultures of traditional crafts have great challenges. Michael Polanyi recognizes the social construct of tacit knowing by interiorization: "To interiorize is to identify ourselves with the teachings in question, by making them functional as the proximal term of a tacit moral knowledge, as applied in practice. This establishes the tacit framework for our moral acts and judgements" (Polanyi 2009:16). The indwelling in tradition and interiorization of knowledge combined with reluctance about documentation and critical inquiry may obscure dysfunctional or even unethical components of the practice. Eva Silvé and Ingrid Bergström have shown how skilfulness and professionalism within traditional building crafts have components

related to perceptions of modernity and masculinity (Berglund 2009:205, Silvé 2004:15). To be skilful may imply the ability to use tools and materials adapted primarily to the male body. To become a good *craftsman* is very much about learning to behave like a *craftsman*.

6. Rust et al 2007, Wood 2006
7. Sjömar 2011, Palmsköld 2012, Molander 1996 and 2015, Wood 2006
8. Ingold 2013, Gibson 2015, Sully 2015, Deacon 2012, Hennessy 2012, von Bush 2013
9. Tegström and Ågren 1971
10. Ibid
11. Kulturrådet 2009:21. In an earlier survey, Museiutredningen, from 1994 the amount of artefacts in public museums counted 65 million objects.
12. Bengtsson Melin 2014, Palmsköld 2007, Hammarlund-Larsson et al 2004
13. Nilsson 2000, Gustavsson 2014
14. Gustavsson 2014
15. Ibid
16. Said 1993:156
17. Stoklund 2003:15
18. Ingold 2013:7
19. Almevik 2014, Tesfaye 2013
20. Dormer 1994, Adamson 2007, Ingold 2013
21. Sandrone 2007, Adamson 2010
22. Sandklef 1953:32–39
23. Sennett 2008:183
24. Morris 1877:241
25. Polanyi 2009:4
26. Ibid 16
27. Ibid 24
28. Ibid 18
29. Polanyi 1966:6
30. Sennett 2008:181
31. Ingold 2013:109–110
32. Sontag 1966:13–14
33. Almevik et.al 2011, SFV 2011, Ipsos 2011, Lindblad 2012
34. Olofsson 2014
35. Munas Vinas 2006
36. Jones & Yarrow 2014:7
37. Ibid

38. Many of the films are presented in the Crafts Lab's YouTube channel and also downloadable from the University of Gothenburg's media database GUPEA.
39. Appelgren 2014, Källbom 2012, Stenholm Jacobsen 2012, Seiler 2013 and Helje 2016
40. Schön 1983, Molander 1996
41. Auerbach 2008, von Bush 2010 and 2013
42. Almevik et al 2014
43. Rust 2004:76
44. Westerlund 2014
45. Sennett 2008:186
46. Lykke Lundberg, Jalin & Nyström 2011
47. Ibid timeline 8:34–19:06
48. Ibid 16:25
49. Ibid 17:20
50. Ibid 19:00
51. Gibson 2015:215
52. Ibid 249-251
53. Ibid
54. See: www.wordpress.murarens
55. Almevik, Jarefjäll and Samuelsson 2013
56. Ehn 2011:53
57. Gibson 2015:119
58. Hågerstrand 2009
59. Pye 2009:4
60. Ehn 2014:40, Rose 2004:79
61. Pye 2009:7
62. Gumbrecht 2006:18

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