



Glassblowing Workshop, Portland, Oregon

*“The substance of the routine may change, metamorphose, improve, but the emotional payoff is one’s experience of doing it again. There’s nothing strange about this experience. We all know it; it is rhythm.”*

-Richard Sennet, *The Craftsman*

Richard Sennett’s book *The Craftsman* is a call to appreciate and value the kind of creative labour that once dominated in the craft trades, and which he points out is still alive and well in disciplines as varied as Linux code-writing and mobile-phone development.

Sennett does not advocate a return to an economy of pre-industrial manual work, instead he analyses and explains how certain core elements, which were involved in these professions, made them intrinsically fulfilling and meaningful to those working within them. He explains that the distinction between conceptual inspiration and the act of *making* is an artificial, and recent one. It is a workplace separation that tends to generate an unhelpful stratification between ‘unskilled’ inflexible production lines, and ‘creative’ but unengaged researchers and developers.

Alternatively, Sennett suggests treating the act of *making* as a creative endeavour, where research, design and development can occur at the same time as developing the manufacturing process. This not only motivates the designer/maker to have a deep personal connection with the work, but opens up the possibility for mistakes, dead-ends, and tangential explorations within the framework of the process. These mistakes and dead-ends are positive inefficiencies which are necessary for the process to throw up

unexpected opportunities and breakthroughs. And for these positive inefficiencies to occur, be understood, overcome and harnessed, there needs to be the space and time for the maker to repeat their process again and again, developing their own personal rhythm. In the same manner that pianists practice repeatedly, until the core skill of playing becomes instinctive, allowing them instead to focus on variations, emphasis and mood within each repetition, so the maker engages initially through repetition with the core skills of his process until they are second nature, by which time the act of repetition is thrown open to become an active field of experimentation, a generative *rhythm*—adaptive and evolving—of exploration and innovation.

It is when the *repetition of work* becomes the *rhythm of craft* that any form of labour can become creative, meaningful and fulfilling.