REASSESSMENT OF THE CRAFTED MEANS OF PRODUCTION IN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the ways in which a reassessment of the crafted means of production could help provide the workers in the production segments of the design industry with improved conditions and greater credit for their work. With this, it is planned that crafted products would be more open and accessible for the general public. Results from the literature review were compared with the opinions and ideas of experts in the field. The results revealed that the desire to improve the conditions of production workers is, and has been an essential theme in the industry. However, the conditions of the production workforce have remained unchanged due to the existing production system. To generate a sense of value in the production labour force it is necessary to reassess the production system. Ideas related to crafted and local production can facilitate this change.

Keywords: Ethics, craftsmanship, labour force, production processes, industrial arts

1 INTRODUCTION: ETHICS IN DESIGN

Designers seek one simple purpose: to make people's lives better. Ethical research on the design process [1] has shown that designers are preoccupied with pleasing the client or user by making products that can make a positive impact on their lives. Some designers work for the sake of making the world a more beautiful and easier place to live in, thereby spreading joy and pleasure. Because designers are called to please the user, solve problems, generate solutions, and improve methods through criticism, there is a tendency among them to overlook the stages and workers involved in the design process, including production.

1.1 A tangible reality of the production process

When a consumer obtains a piece of furniture, for example, they often appreciate the designer who projected it, the firm that developed and sold it and the qualities and origin of the materials. This paper will focus on the often-overlooked people in the early production stage of the design process that work with their hands to make a tangible reality of what initially only exists in the minds of the designers. These individuals are referred to as workers, operators, craftspeople, artisans and members of the labour force [2]. These labels can depend on the type of work they do and their level of status. The design and manufacturing industry must reassess the system so these workers who don't receive the appreciation and encouragement they deserve, could finally achieved. It is important to mention that some craftsmen and artisans in wealthy and developed countries have indeed achieved good standards, markets and fair working and living circumstances, this group represents the model on how the conditions should be, and because of that, this paper would not be dedicated to them. It is also important to state that this paper does not refer only on craftsmen of developing countries. It is true that most of the workforce in the design process comes from developing countries (such as BRIC), but since the developed countries are the demanders, it is a shared responsibility that concerns both the consumers and the producers. With this I mean that industrialised countries should demand more local production made by crafted ways, this way these means of production would become more common, therefore more accessible and less luxurious. Also the developing countries that work as "factories" should increase the value and relevance of their crafted production in order to make more artisans and fewer workers. Society needs good quality and standards as much as good designs, but even more so, society must be willing to work toward achieving fair circumstances for all the people involved in the production and design process. More than 100 years ago, William Morris said it aptly: 'An art made by the people and for the people, [is] a joy to the maker and the user.'

2 METHODS: LITERATURE STUDIES AND INTERVIEWS

This present study developed in several stages and combined literature surveys with qualitative interviews [3].

2.1 Literature: ideologies on design production

The literature review was conducted to establish a solid methodology for the development of the interview format. The first stage of the literature survey included an analysis of key topics concerning the ideologies and methods of the founders of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Books including *The Stones of Venice* [4]*, Hopes and Fears for Arts* [5] and *Signs of Change* [6] were included to examine the importance of hand craftsmanship and its relationship to dignifying the labour force. These books discuss political and social ideologies, which led to the analysis of additional texts to examine the connection between the socialist currents of the era and the working class. This analysis included *Fields, Factories and Workshops* by Peter Kropotkin [7]. To evaluate the perspectives of modern thinkers, the literature survey incorporated texts written by the authors Peter Stansky [2], Gillian Naylor [8] and Helen Dore [9]. These authors' works provided excellent information on modern theories and tendencies in the field of ethics and production methods [1,10]. Likewise, the review included works discussing the living conditions among people in some segments of the production workforce. Works by Peter Fry [11], Hans Weiss and Klaus Werner were consulted. Researchers also made a comparison of the theories and information gathered from both currents through a qualitative analysis of pattern matching, which identified similarities and differences [12,13]. This literature review provided the foundation for the development of an interview format with a common pathway.

2.2 Qualitative interviews of two experts in the field

The second stage in this present work was qualitative interviews at a product design education in Norway. Informants were selected based on the assumption that the segment of knowledge examined in this study is not highly relatable to the public. Individual interviews with professionals and experts in the field were performed rather than large surveys to provide a more relatable structure [3]. A professor and a technician in product design education at the bachelors and masters levels were interviewed to obtain qualitative data on relevant issues and topics related to the research question.

2.3 Qualitative analysis

The third stage included a qualitative analysis of the data to compare similarities and differences [12] between the literature and the interviews. It was sometimes a challenge to compare the literature and the empirical data [3]. The analysis was based on grounded theory methodology [14] in that relevant data was collected first to allow a conception of the research question. Because this paper is based primarily in literature, this method was useful to identify the essential topics from the various sources.

3 CRAFTSMANSHIP IN PRODUCTION

A large body of evidence exists on the research topic. More than a century ago, individuals such as Augustus Pugin, John Ruskin [15], William Morris [5], Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Peter Kropotkin [7] and, more recently, Gillian Naylor [8], Peter Stansky [2] and Tony Fry [11] attempted to draw attention to the importance of the human resource within the central topic of craftsmanship in the production and industrial processes. These researches tried to increase awareness in society regarding the bad conditions of the working class through examples and facts. The concepts in works such as *Hopes and Fears for Art* and *Signs of Change* by William Morris [5], *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice* by John Ruskin [4] and *Redesigning the World* by Peter Stansky [2] will be discussed in this paper, as they form the cornerstone for this theoretical research.

3.1 The revival of craftsmanship

Two categorical theories were identified in the literature. The first category, represented by workers and craftspeople, explored the thoughts and concerns of people closely related to design, industry, production, labour and the workforce at the end of the 19th Century. At this time, John Ruskin [4], William Morris [2] and Arthur Mackmurdo insisted that better circumstances for the people could only be achieved through a revival in craftsmanship. Those theories can expand the understanding of the situation in the workforce today.

The second category of relevant literature consisted of reflections about the current situation and circumstances production workers industry and design live in today [11]. This literature also discussed recent research on the problems of ethical conditions for the workforce and the perception of human resources [1]. These works debate new theories on how to improve the modern circumstances in the production segments to generate better conditions in sustainability, human rights, ethics in industry and fair trade [10].

3.2 The intrinsic relationship between the worker, the object and the public

To learn how these two different categories of literature, which represent different approaches and subjects, might complement each other, this study first examines the categories of theories individually to find information on methods. Morris and Ruskin were aware of the state of the production workforce in the late 19th Century. They claimed that the capitalist system was making production competitive instead of cooperative, which was driving the workforce and quality of production into a struggle to maintain fair conditions [4,6]. Both writers claimed that the quality of life of these workers was gradually worsening and would continue to do so unless there was recognition of equal importance in the intrinsic relationship between the worker, the object and the public [2].

The researchers asserted that better conditions for the workforce would lead to a more homogeneous society with fewer divisions and economic differences, but also with similar tasks, responsibilities, rights and obligations. Ruskin said, 'In each several profession, no master should be too proud to do its hardest work. The painter should grind his own colours; the architect work in the mason's yard with his men; the master-manufacturer be himself a more skilful operative than anyone in his mills' [4]. Morris claimed,

> Now as I am quite sure that no art, not even the feeblest, rudest or least intelligent, can come of such work, so also I am sure that such work makes the workman less than a man and degrades him grievously and unjustly, and that nothing can compensate him or us for such degradation: and I want you specially to note that this was instinctively felt in the very earliest days of what are called the industrial arts. [5]

There was a generalised concern for workers among many groups in the late 19th Century, which was influenced by the emerging socialist philosophies. Many designers, including Morris, were attempting to merge the socialist doctrine with the design and production industries [2]. Considering this, two topics were held up as especially relevant. The first of these was the position of the machine in the workforce, and the second was the system of competition in which the means of production were founded.

These authors were not against industrialisation or automation of the production duties of workers; '…life without industry is guilt, industry without art is brutality' [15]. They believed the essential purpose of the machine was to make the work of the people easier and more bearable, rid the industry of dull and repetitive toils and give workers a chance to apply their time and efforts to more fulfilling activities. Morris reflected on this idea when he established the separation between Mechanical Toil, Intelligent Work and Imaginative Work [5]. He suggested that mechanical toil was the enemy of the worker, and imaginative work was the desirable end wherein the worker was able to enjoy the duties and provide better results. Nevertheless, despite these ideals, the machine has brought more and harder work to the people in many cases. The automation of tasks and the reduction of labour within those tasks have made work simpler. However, this has resulted, not in less work overall, but in more work in the same number of hours. Machine automation, then, has mainly served those seeking bigger profits. Morris and Ruskin argued against the people who used machines to get profit rather than to provide fair conditions for workers: 'But why is he the slave of machinery? Because he is the slave to the system for whose existence the invention of machinery was necessary' [6].

The second great concern in the industry of the 19th Century was the mind-set where production of goods was viewed as a war rather than a supply of needs. This system of consumerism and mass production created a deep chasm between the labour force and the 'owners' of that labour force, (i.e., the owners of the means of production upon which the unprivileged classes were forced to rely) [6]. During that period, the differences between the labour force and those above it was seen almost as a kind of slavery: 'Our society includes a great mass of slaves, who must be fed, clothed, housed and amused as slaves, and that their daily necessity compels them to make the slave-wares whose use is the perpetuation of their slavery' [6]. Though it was a drastic affirmation, the analogy to slavery increased awareness of the endless circle of poverty within which the production workforce was

living. It also drew attention to the hopelessness of the situation in the absence of reform. Thus, a call was made to the society to treat each one of its members with the same dignity, 'No man would be tormented for the benefit of another—nay, no one man would be tormented for the benefit of Society. Nor, indeed, can that order be called Society which is not upheld for the benefit of every one of its members' [6].

The industrial revolution brought about significant changes in the social and economic structures of society and settled the foundations for what today is the ruling production model. The need today is to examine the situation and learn what can be done to understand and improve these modern models of practice that designers encounter.

Studies on the smaller or larger scale of mainstream production today reveal that the abyss between the labour force and the owners of the production companies still exists today. The situation has not improved since the late 1800s. Today, large segments of society, including whole communities, cities and even entire countries represent the labour force. Likewise, the face of the modern-day owner has evolved. However, it is not the intention of this paper to enlist or give drastic examples of the bad conditions in which some segments of society exist, so this relevant topic will not be addressed in the current work.

3.3 A systemic view

Not only has the gap between workers and owners increased but it has also extended to new places; whole communities, societies and cultures now support the system of competition, while the segment that benefits is much smaller than the segment supporting it. Author Tony Fry explains that people have become too dependent on the artificial worlds they have designed, fabricated and occupied [11], and in order to improve, society must get rid of the idea of 'thinking in the moment'. His basic premise is that people should have greater power to choose the forms of the environments in which they live. That this way of life should enhance the environment in general is the common thread. However, history has demonstrated that the realisation of this idea is often problematic [11].

3.4 A content client and a content worker

To illustrate the central theme of this current research, it is important to discuss how these two approaches are relevant. The theories proposed by Morris, Ruskin and other authors from the turn of the century were the foundations of the Arts and Crafts Movement. These approaches predicted the future conditions of the labour segment and should be re-enlisted to avoid bad working conditions in the future. These theories are not obsolete, but certainly worth pondering today. If society can merge these two approaches—the importance of craftsmanship proposed in the past and modern theories on ethical conditions for workers—researchers can explore the relevant issues that emerge. It would not be practical or effective to take the late 19th Century thinking and forcefully apply it to today's very different circumstances. However, these thinkers proposed important elements that, if adapted to today's perspective with its new theories and practices, could empower disfavoured classes. It is the duty of designers and consumers to consider the workers involved in the design and production processes, because a content worker will create a content client and vice-versa. As it was in the time of Morris, today design naturally connects art and trade and provides a way for artists to make a living and for governments and manufacturers to support artistically valuable causes without losing their reputation for practicality [2].

4 INTERVIEWS

The literature studies demonstrated that people have made extensive efforts in many periods to create better circumstances for workers, but that there has been consistent failure to provide fair conditions in the production and distribution industries. These ideologies emerged with the industrial revolution and took the place of craftsmanship. Recent studies have revealed that the same situation is maintained today. Why these unfortunate circumstances have prevailed for more than 100 years, yet no one has been able to establish change, is an important question. The interviews in this present research were designed to expand knowledge in this area.

4.1 Fair trade: a fashion or an ethical imperative?

One of the professionals interviewed commented that 'people do not really care about other people's condition; the need of cheap and 'good quality' production is more important than the fair treatment of

the labour force, and it is because of the big importance we put in costs, that then we have to give less importance to other subjects.' He continued: 'People design in mass production because they want to achieve the bigger profit.' This respondent also pointed out that hand craftsmanship has become extremely expensive, and the segment of society that can afford these goods has been greatly reduced. Craftsmanship, then, has become a luxury instead of an activity of the people and for the people. He also said that the only way to give the workforce 'importance' was to incentivise fair trade. However, the interviewee noted that there is a risk that fair trade might not provide a better standard of living. Even the mere idea of fair trade could be difficult to instil in the consumer's mind, because people often see these kinds of ideas as 'labels' and 'fashion'. The respondent went on to say that, like every fashion, '. . . what seems to be relevant today might not be tomorrow.'

4.2 Potential niche markets

The second expert interviewee offered a more positive perspective. She affirmed that initiating changed is a shared responsibility between the suppliers, including fabricants, companies, designers, workers and the market on one hand, and the common people, such as buyers and customers, on the other hand. These entities should all take part in providing and demanding crafted products: 'Many things ought to be done at the same time: educating people on a general level, as well as producers, marketing people, politicians and other stakeholders.' She suggested that the modern climate was well placed for this kind of change because more and more people are coming to appreciate crafted production. She went on to say that, 'It might grow into a more substantial niche market—or several different niche markets—as well as an expanded export. Our era of experience economy fits well with a better future for this kind of furniture.'

5   DISCUSSION

Opinions on the subject of improvement in production workforce conditions were divided. All respondents and researchers acknowledged the need for change. However, one respondent suggested that, since there has been no change in the past 100 years, change would not come easily today. However, if society begins addressing these matters, people might grow more conscious of the problem and eventually begin taking a stand. A consistent positive mind set in regard to ethical change was evident in the literature [1,1011] and in the minds of the interviewed experts. This research revealed that there is an awareness that conditions are not good, which was also the case in the late 19th Century. The problem is that this knowledge has not been enough to inspire a change. This present study also showed that there is an overall acceptance of the current system because it benefits a segment of society; though this segment is not the largest it is the most powerful. It is worth mentioning that the literature and the qualitative interviews produced different data. To some extent, the literature offered more 'romantic' solutions, but the brutal reality keeps these solutions from flourishing.

5.1 Conclusion: corporate social responsibility

It is the responsibility of designers to consider themselves and the clients, but also the workers in the segments of production outside their own practice. This could set in motion the establishment of a system designed to make products and production and design processes friendlier for the people who fabricate the goods. If designers equally reflect on the people in the production stage and the income generated for the owners, the beginnings of change could emerge. This change in mind set could also contribute to corporate social responsibility (CSR) where businesses are positively branded in the market [10]. A person involved with design can choose to take a stand in this matter of ethical values to contribute to making design a noble discipline [1,11].

'Is that, indeed, too extravagant a hope? Have you not heard how it has gone with many a cause before now? First few heed it; next most men condemn it; lastly, all men accept it – and the cause is won' [5].

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