



## **Editorial: Crafting Knowledge**

**Maija Mäki, Anna Rauhala, Jaana Saarikoski & Kirsi Sonck-Rautio**

Humans are not the only animals that use tools. Nevertheless, using tools is considered one of the fundamental characteristics of the human species. Understanding the properties and potential of materials in our surroundings, their innovative use and modification, have played a significant role in humans adapting to their surroundings and in the development of human cultures. We learn and know how to use tools and materials; we develop new methods and techniques to manufacture the most complex craft work, and yet we are not always able to explain how we acquired such knowledge. Our intelligent hands just work their magic (Panelius et al., 2012).

Handicrafts and artefacts are an essential part of our material culture. Ethnological research on materials and material culture integrates both the tangible and intangible aspects of craftsmanship. Contemporary research examines skills and creativity, functionality as well as the individual and cultural meanings and values assigned to craft making. Craft making, both as an experience and a process, encompasses maker-related aspects and external factors, some of which are timeless. The maker's cognitive and sensorimotor skills, as well as their affective states, are influenced by materials, design traditions, economic realities and the intrinsic need to create. (Fryckman, 1990; Ehn, 2011; Rauhala, 2019.)

Crafting is an affective process in multiple ways. A craft process as creative practice entails many uncertainties. No matter how well the process is planned, materiality can impact it in unexpected ways, and the end result can be unpredictable. However, when the crafter relies on their tacit knowledge and lets materiality guide the process, new ways of making can emerge. Sometimes allowing oneself to make mistakes is crucial for devising new ways of thinking and doing. Like mistakes, narrowed possibilities can also stimulate creativity: during difficult times, like a pandemic, a war or food and material shortages, people are forced to seek survival strategies. Often in this pursuit, they start using materials in innovative ways. Besides being

a potentially lifesaving practical skill, crafting can also help people cope with emotionally difficult times. It can take the crafter's thoughts to a happy place and serve as a method for managing one's own feelings and emotions. (Collier, 2011; Rauhala, 2024.)

Craft skills may ensure survival or success in life for anyone – a good enough reason to document and research crafting skills – but another benefit of crafting that researchers should not forget is that craftmaking leads to a more comprehensive understanding about materials. For scholars, this means that craftmaking can lead to a fuller understanding of our research topics. Crafting is inherently aligned with recycling, self-sufficiency, and the do-it-yourself ethos. These elements serve as effective and essential factors, as well as creative statements, in a time of accelerating climate change and the Anthropocene. Through trial and error, humanity has come a long way in utilising various materials to produce objects and also in developing craftsmanship and technology as a part of everyday life. This progress is continuing, and in the future we will have every possibility to keep moving towards more and more responsible and wiser uses of natural resources. Essentially, this is about prioritising cultural values.

In this special theme issue (1/2024) of *Ethnologia Fennica*, we present a broad range of articles that deal with crafting, crafting knowledge and creative material practices. What kinds of creative methods have been experimented with, invented and found useful in the material practices of communities and individuals? Furthermore, how have these innovations and different kinds of craft skills in various contexts influenced our societies and everyday life? Finally, how has crafting affected our emotions and values? The issue includes two research articles that explore the crafting theme from the perspectives of skills and materiality. In many cases, the authors are skilful artisans themselves, and they delve into the different crafting skills through their own experiences and visions. Anete Karlson explores the traditional Latvian crafting skill of dyeing fabrics with natural dyes. Karlson has made use of her dyeing skills when researching various ethnographic sources from the 18<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Natural dyeing experiments and processes helps her study, for instance, the value of colours, as in this case. In the article, Karlson claims that dyeing experiments are essential tools for interpreting historical data, like written sources, on historical dyeing techniques. In another research article, Ewa Klekot presents an (auto)ethnographical reflection on pottery craft as a way of life in a modern village in Masuria, in the northern part of Poland. Klekot uses craft-related bodily knowledge and the embodied recognition of materials to critically reflect on the traditional notion of folk art and craft in Poland. She presents pottery craft and life in

the pottery workshop as an environment of knowledge building and experimentation. By co-crafting in the *garncarnia* with local pottery makers, Klekot was able to draw an auto-ethnographical conclusion about the material in motion. In the article, she conceptualises the embodied knowledge of clay and pottery making and its connections to the environment and the village itself. In her ethnographic analysis, Klekot makes visible the features of the folk craft lifestyle in a rural village that are otherwise only available and displayed through crafting practices.

In two review articles, the theme of this issue is approached from the perspective of materiality, sustainability and new, experimental techniques and materials. Linn Sigrid Bratland discusses mechatronic technologies and traditional craft. Her experiences with the crafting process of renovation work have led to some unexpected outcomes, which prompted her to engage in deeper and more theoretical reflections on body-machine relations. Bratland argues that craft not only exemplifies and conveys the meanings of such relationships, it is also a process of intra-acting with and co-creating both physical and conceptual phenomena. In another review article in this theme issue, Stefanie Mallon examines the materiality of mushroom-‘leather’. This is an experimental fabric, made from fungi. Mallon has conducted her own fungus-growing experiments and analyses in the article the properties of the mushrooms and current narratives about sustainability in the fashion industry from the perspective of the information economy. The complex nature of mushroom-‘leather’ shows the challenges of crafting new materials. Mallon shows that mushroom-‘leather’ has many symbolic dimensions, with companies and consumers placing their hopes in its potential as a substitute material for animal skin in clothing and the fashion industry in the future.

The issue also includes several book reviews and one conference report. Aino Laiho and Sauli Okker describe and evaluate the XII Ethnology Days conference, which was held in March 2024, in Helsinki, with the theme being ‘voices and practices in research’. The issue additionally includes one review of a recent doctoral thesis, a study of vernacular garden culture in the province of Kainuu, in northeastern Finland, by Marjukka Piirainen. The review has been written by Kati Mikkola. Lina Metsämäki has reviewed a new book by Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren, who explore the Swedish *folkhem* concept, the ‘people’s home’ family and community model applied in Swedish everyday life from the 1930s to the 1960s.

Three rather extensive article collections are reviewed in this issue of *Ethnologia Fennica* as well. Elisa Kurtti evaluates the new and important methodological guidebook *Kulttuurien tutkimuksen menetelmät*, edited by

Outi Fingerroos, Konsta Kajander and Tiina-Riitta Lappi. Ulla Kallberg examines an article collection about the history of Nordic ethnology at Åbo Akademi University, in Finland. The book commemorates hundred-year history of the university chair in Nordic ethnology, which still makes important contributions to Finnish ethnology, with widespread social significance in Finnish society. Finally, Arja Turunen reviews the handbook on university pedagogy in ethnology and anthropology entitled *Kulttuurien-tutkimuksen pedagogiikka*, edited by Sanna Lillbroända-Annala, Maija Mäki and Pia Olsson. This is the first Finnish publication concerning university pedagogy in cultural research. As Turunen mentions in the review, there are still many more topics to discuss on university pedagogy in the fields of cultural research. It is important to continue to reflect on and evaluate pedagogical solutions and the connections between research and teaching. In *Ethnologia Fennica*, we rarely receive manuscripts concerning university pedagogy in ethnology or related fields. We hope that this tendency might change in the future, and we are welcoming pedagogical manuscripts as well as other types of manuscripts from our multidimensional and fascinating field.

## **AUTHORS**

Maija Mäki, PhD, Senior Lecturer, University of Turku, Editor-In-Chief of *Ethnologia Fennica*

Anna Rauhala, PhD, Senior Lecturer, University of Helsinki

Jaana Saarikoski, MA, University of Turku

Kirsi Sonck-Rautio, PhD, University of Turku, Co-Editor-In-Chief of *Ethnologia Fennica*

---

## **SOURCES**

Collier, Ann Futterman. 2011. The Well-being of Women Who Create with Textiles: Implications for Art Therapy. – Art Therapy. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* 28:3, 104–112.

Ehn, Billy. 2011. Doing-it-yourself. Autoethnography of Manual Work. *Ethnologia Europaea* 41:1, 53–63.

- Frykman, Jonas. 1990. What People Do, But Seldom Say. *Ethnologia Scandinavica* Vol. 20, 50–62.
- Panelius, Martin, Sartti, Risto, and Tuusvuori, Jarkko S. 2012. *Käsikirja*. Teos.
- Rauhala, Anna. 2019. *Neulonnan taito*. Kansatieteellinen Arkisto 59. Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys.
- Rauhala, Anna. 2024. Craft Making at Home: Affective Practices of Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic. In *Reconstructing Homes: Affective Materiality and Atmospheres of Belonging*, edited by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Kristiina Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Viktorija L.A. Ceginskas, Anna Kajander, and Helmut De Nardi, 160–174. Material Mediations: People and Things in a World of Movement 15. Berghahn Books.

---

Cover photo: The mushroom-'leather' hats made by the professionals of Centre of Traditional Technologies (CETRAT). The Centre of Traditional Technologies Příbor focuses its research activities mainly on the rural area of the Western Carpathians. Experiments play an important role in the Centre of Traditional Technologies. CETRAT focuses on experiments that can serve primarily for the needs of ethnological interpretations.  
Picture from SIEF 2023 conference, by Maija Mäki.