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My work centers around the fact that I am a glassblower working with glass objects within a glass tradition. My BFA project from 2009 entitled ”the bastards have landed” was my first attempt at mapping out what that ultimately meant to me as a practitioner in a contemporary craft context. The result of that project was a discovery of my making as a way of using tradition to tell stories about itself. My conclusion was that by using the traditional objects as symbols I had a channel through which I could communicate. Glass is a material who’s domains are closely connected to a domestic and consumeristic environment. It is put in a position where we react to its appearance with our body memory while also carries different social and material values depending on its appearance. When entering the master program at Konstfack University of Art Craft and Design, my idea was that over the next coming two years my focus would lie in the exploration and research of these mechanisms as well as my own position as a maker and practitioner within these mechanisms. Craft, design and making are subjects that are constantly being talked about and analyzed from a number of perspectives. There are philosophers, sociologists, historians and art historians constantly negotiating what the field of craft is dealing with. This is something that I over the years have found as something quite disturbing in some cases. This leaves me in a situation where I am no longer defining my own practice. And when I am to define my practice I always do it through the ideas of people from ”outside” my own position. There are many good writers from various disciplines writing about craft and making that I have had great use of and input from but I feel that there is a big lack of craft practitioners who are defining their discipline from their own standpoint. This situation is to me a bit outdated. So as mentioned above I have entered the master program with an idea to find out how to deal with veiled subjects such as tacit knowledge and material culture in order to try to transform them into a communicative body of knowledge. My work during the past three semesters have been spread out over a number of different projects dealing with these subjects both based on objects as well as forming a discussion together with my master group. The main cause in this thesis is as always in my case to shed light on and to formulate questions and hopefully answers around my own practice and its related subjects. The main reason for this is that craft and making as a tool for knowledge production is a clouded subject but according to me it holds a lot of potential. Not only for understanding questions outside the field but also to unveil and strengthen the practice itself.
QUESTIONS

-How can making (glassblowing) in itself be used as a tool for critical investigation of knowledge about material culture and material values?

-How can I use the order between the object and subject or item and matter connected to materiality as a communicative tool?

-How can I use and communicate this discussion?

METHOD

Explaining the method within this project is maybe the most complicated yet most important task since the project in itself in a way is about method and practice.

My method is based on the workshop situation. A situation where I use crafting as a way of mixing and questioning material values and symbols in order to pose questions that I deal with both in the workshop and verbally through writing.

Reflection is the word that I think describes my method in the most proper manner. The work I make at the bench is reflected in the work I create in front of the computer. In addition to these two fundamental situations I also use other ingredients such as metaphors or related examples (visual and verbal) as reflective examples in an attempt to explain my point.

The choice of methods and design of the communicative work that I am planning to make is a deepening investigation into the practice and tradition that I am a part of. With that said I am willing to say that I am interested in the inside perspective of my working process and how I can use it’s structure to change my own as well as my peers and a potential audience idea about it.

I have chosen to compare my own work with the phenomenon of frigger production. A phenomenon that has been present within the tradition of glassmaking for hundreds of years but rarely is talked about as a “serious” thing because it has not been about being serious. Frigger making is about learning and exploring material possibilities and that is also what I will be using it for.
SELF PRESENTATION

In order to give you as a reader the possibility to somehow get a grip of my position and the starting point in this thesis I am going to provide you with a short presentation of myself. During the last ten years I put a great effort in the technical, conceptual and cultural pursuit of glass making. This pursuit has led me to numerous places, people and educational situations. My technical training in glassblowing started as an assistant to my father, Ragnar Klenell who together with my mother has been running a glass studio in Sunne, Sweden since the early eighties. I later attended the National School for glass in Orrefors. An education originally set up to supply the glass industry with craftsmen.

I started my academical education at Konstfack University of Art Craft and Design in Stockholm and earned my BFA from the institution of Ceramics and Glass in 2009. My work at Konstfack, both as an under-graduate and graduate student has centered around a way of communicating and expanding the practice that I am forming. The practice is glassblowing and it´s given role and domains within the production and forming of material culture. This pursuit of understanding the mechanisms is sprung out of my own professional development as a glassblower, designer and exhibiting artist.
INTRODUCTION TO GLASSMAKING

-And certainly, with its indestructibility, immunity to decay, colorlessness, odourlessness, and so on, glass exists at a sort of zero level of matter: glass is to matter as a vacuum is to air\(^1\).

Glassblowing, the practice of shaping a mass of glass that has been softened by heat by blowing air into it through a tube\(^2\).

The description of the material glass by Jean Baudrillard and the definition of the practice of glassblowing from the online version of the encyclopedia Britannica are according to me both flat and one dimensional. The fact that Baudrillard’s quote is over 40 years old (1968) might contribute to the somewhat essentialist tone of it but this way of looking at a material as something self describing and self speaking is something that I experience as a present idea today.

My idea of glassblowing practiced as craft is the opposite of Jean Baudrillard’s ideas about the material. Glassblowing is about material values and culture, social structures and specific typological and material domains.

While trying not to make this thesis a description of the development of glassmaking and some key historical events that led us to the context that I am working from I will try to lay out a short description of it.

Glassblowing is an ancient craft that was developed somewhere around Syria around 100 BC. During history it has spread out over Europe where it developed in different directions and styles. Some of the important glass historical places and regions are Bohemia, England, Venice, the Netherlands and Småland in Sweden but most countries have had glass production of some sort even if some places have been attributed with a greater importance than others.

Glassmaking in Sweden was first established in the 1600’s and developed into an important production industry with an epicenter around the first half of the 1900’s. This was also the time when artists started to work within the industry as designers.

During the late sixties and early seventies glass was “made accessible” as an artistic medium outside the industry through a development that was described as “the studio glass movement”.

Studio glass is just like studio pottery based on “free” artists running their own production, breaking with the (for the time) established relation between craftsman and artist as separated roles.

Today the Swedish glass industry has decreased dramatically. Years of competition with cheap manpower in other parts of the world and the economic recession has brought it down to only a few factories struggling for survival. On the other hand the number of glass studios outside of the traditional industry are not decreasing as dramatically and artists and glassblowers are finding new

\(^1\) Jean Baudrillard, System of Objects, Croydon 2006 p 42
\(^2\) http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/235045/glassblowing 2011-03-21
ways of making glass without being tied to a production site like a studio or a factory. It has for instance become more and more common to rent time with a factory team or in a small studio. A new situation where glass as artistic medium now partly stands without its traditional production arenas the factory and the studio.

THE FRIGGER

This first part of my thesis is about the concept of friggers or whimseys. The idea of researching the subject is to get a wider understanding of how craft knowledge and skill can be applied in different ways and be used for telling different stories depending on context, maker and authorship.

Friggers (english term) and whimseys (American term). Sometimes called “end of day glass” or glasshouse whimseys is a genre of objects created by glassblowers after hours or during breaks in factories or other production sites for glass. In Swedish there is no term for the actual objects produced but the verb for creating such a piece is “söla” which could be translated to loiter in English.

I will in the following text use the word “frigger” to mean all of the above.

As a part of my research of the subject, I made a visit to the Corning Museum of glass in Corning NY, USA, a institution that hosts not only one of the world’s leading collections of historical glass objects but also a library that holds information on just about everything on the subject of glass art, making and its history. This library has been an important source for me in my research. Thanks to the museums extensive collection of written information on the subject it was not hard to find good source material but one thing that was worth noticing was that almost everything that was written on the subject was made by different enthusiasts and collector clubs. In other words, very little had been published on the subject in “serious” literature. Except for a couple of newspaper articles and collectors guides, most of the material came from different collector club newsletters and antique journals.

Frigger is a term used colloquially by glassmakers, generally as a noun to refer to an article that has been made to demonstrate skill in manipulating molten glass. This definition is rather correct but I think that when categorizing an object as a frigger, one should think about what context it was made in. There is a reason that friggers sometimes are called “end of day glass”. There are no strict definitions of what a frigger looks like. It can be everything from funny figures, hats, rolling pins or other household items to quite ordinary vessels for everyday use or aesthetic pleasure. Pretty much the outcome you would expect from a glass production site. What makes the genre specific is that

the objects are made in a production environment but outside of the ordinary production.

In the article “Glass Friggers” written by Margaret Holland in The Antiques Journals October issue of 1979 you can read: “Free of the toils of set tasks at the end of the day in late 19th century glass works, the workmen used the leftover metal in the pot to make popular novelties known as “friggers.” To be exact, friggers are any glass made by a worker in his spare time”

Even if there was probably no metal but molten glass in the pots, Holland describes one important condition. Friggers are made by workers but not during their working hours. The pieces are not made for any other reason than whatever the person making it has in mind.

**PURPOSES OF THE FRIGGER**

There are many examples and subcategories within the “frigger family” and you can find certain objects appearing in different countries and contexts. Objects like the rolling pin, the top hat, the sock darner or the witch ball could be categorized as “standards” or “classics”. Some were made to be used in the household like the sock darner was used when repairing socks or the rudimentary pitchers, jugs, bowls and jars made by glass blowers for their own homes. But there were also some variants made to suit other more “spiritual” needs.

In the article “A finer substance than anything” written by Charles Hajdamach, you can read about how the glass walking stick was supposed to be hung up by the front door and cleaned every day in order to keep bad spirits out of the house. Another example of an object from the frigger family that has a superstitious dimension built into it is the witchball, an object that has a relatively simple and modest appearance, but more complex and almost spiritual qualities. The object consists of a spherical bubble made from glass, maybe the most basic shape in glassblowing. It can be made from clear or colored glass, be monochrome, multicolored or patterned. Apart from being a beautiful object it was also meant to keep bad spirits and witches away as well as protect you from the evil eye. Originally it was used to store salt in the chimney to keep the expensive salt dry and the superstition evolved from the fear of breaking the vessel and ruining the expensive salt to become a guarding object that held spells and would prevent evil forces to enter your home thru the chimney. The witchball is a probable ancestor to todays christmas ornament balls and garden balls. The production of friggers was and is still a benefit for glassmakers in factories. In older times the friggers were sold or brought home to the family. The owner of the factory also benefited from this production through the positive effect the production had on the work force development of skill and technique. There are also examples of frigger objects that were taken up in production. My

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5 C. Hajdamach, A finer substance than anything, Antique dealer and Collectors Guide Nov 1988 p.50
6 R.R. Willey, Witch Balls, Western Collector. June 1957 p.34
guess is that the making of friggers have been important to the aesthetic evolution and production of glass as well.

The first results would not even make a mother happy says Swedish master blower Nils Nilsson in an interview with Dagens nyheter April 26 1985. His story confirms the role of frigger production as both a way to build up craft knowledge to reach a better position in the factory hierarchy as well as for artistic development. “Usually you start with making paperweights. Decorated with air bubbles or odd patterns from colored glass. The goal is to achieve a result that your master cant copy”.

Nilsson put a lot of emphasis on frigger production as about having fun and as an event that is driven by a big amount of lust. Nilsson’s own designed moose figurine was later embraced by the factory where he was employed (Älghult).

“If you visit a glasshouse wait until the workers have their brake, then you will see them work as never before”.

FRIGGER TACTICS AND PROTO CRAFT

As I first looked into the friggers it was to find a comparable phenomenon to my own practice that was outside of the general craft discussion in order to root the discussion of craft and making in the actual act and performance of the practice instead of building theory from a philosophical point of view.

I have found that if you relate the process of making friggers with the practice that I am forming you can find many similarities but also many things that differ.

Maybe the biggest similarity is that both productions are variations of established production processes. I’d like to put it as follows: The workshop, the skills that the maker is holding and the conditions around it(social, ethnographical etc) create a production mechanism that in most cases has an original purpose. The most traditional example would be a wineglass workshop in a glass factory. When a frigger is made the mechanism and the workshop is turned in another direction and used for whatever purpose the maker or makers wish.

The same goes for “modern craft”.

I’d like to look at the traditional frigger production as a proto state of the practice and methods used by myself and many other makers within the “modern craft context”. When talking about punk rock music and it’s roots you often end up talking about artists that were punk before punk was even invented. The Sonics, The Stooges, Patti Smith and Velvet underground where all artists making music “in the spirit of punk” without being part of the specific movement of punk rock that

7 R.B Danielsson, Lärling blir mästare på att söla, Dagens nyheter Fri 26 apr 1985 p 32
8 R.B Danielsson Dagens nyheter Fri 26 apr 1985 p 32
9 R.B Danielsson Dagens nyheter Fri 26 apr 1985 p 32
bloomed out in the late seventies and early eighties. In one way they were outside of time and place and therefore not relating to or playing on the same axis as the later invented movement.

I can relate this discussion to different claims of the birth of studio glass. Of course there have always been people making glass objects that do not belong to a brand or factory, and hold a certain degree of independence, even within the factories. The difference is that the things I make and glass that is made in a studio glass context is part of a studio glass tradition that is self reflecting and relates to a different context and discussion than for example the friggers made by workers in the glass industry.

The common and widespread definition of the studio glass movement is glass as an artistic craft medium outside of a large economical production system. The phenomenon and ideas of studio glass has its roots in the late 1960’s in USA and could be seen as a reaction and counterculture to how the big factory production plants or glassworks operated with the designers and the craftsmen separately. The somewhat “official” version of the studio glass movement holds key figures like Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino as well as European artists as Sybren Valkema and Åsa Brandt and their early small glass studios. What the studio glass movement really did was to establish glass production outside of the factories relocating and reinventing knowledge about glass production*. During the last fifty years or so, there has been a constant development of skill and production technique to the extent where you could say that we are back at square one. Studio glass related artists like Dale Chihuly today runs his own factory in Seattle. Glass outside of the large factories has grown it’s own infrastructure and value system. It is therefore in some cases somewhat contradictory to it’s own roots. I am in that way willing to agree with William Warmus theory of the end of studio glass. “This is why studio glass begins and ends in America, where glassmakers first felt expelled from industry and where many now control their own homemade factories”**.

I think that there has been very little good and critical literature written about the evolution of the studio glass movement and the information that has been written down about it is still been about different claims of who “invented” it and who the first studio glass blowers were. A discussion where a small number of people has been pointed out as key figures with pioneering influence. I think that when approaching a young phenomenon like that, it is important to be critical. It tends to become hastily put together stories that leave very little room for alternative perspectives and I think that the story of studio glass is not ready to be written yet.

What I view as the biggest benefit of the “movement” is of course that it has made glass accessible for artists as well as being a technical, as well as an artistic incubator and developer of new perspectives on glass as artistic medium.

10 http://www.kerstinmolin.se/studioglas/studioglas.html#%C2%A0Studioglasets%20strukturella%20betydelse 2011-03-18

FRIGGERS OUTSIDE OF THE FACTORIES

In my search for parallel activities and phenomena that reflect the frigger in a contemporary studio glass tradition outside of the factories I have chosen to look at a two different approaches to glassmaking. The Burnt Asphalt family are a group of glassblowers who use the process in the hot shop to cook food infront of an audience. The phenomenon that I have chosen to call the cup makers is about the influence of venetian glassblowing techniques on american studio glass. I chose to write about these two, because they have a common ground in making and process while being very different in their product and expression.

THE BURNT ASPHALT FAMILY, REDIRECTING TRADITION

The performative qualities of glassblowing is something that has been used al lot over the years. From commercial movies and pictures to the traditional swedish hyttsill(a “traditional” feast and meal that takes place in a glasshouse while the guests watch glass making). It is hard to point out why but it is probably the craft that has earned the most appreciation for the making itself. The glass industry in Sweden has more or less outspokenly turned from being a production industry to a experience industry.

A clear example on how that built in quality of a communal effort and performative quality of object making is bent into a new practice is the Burnt Asphalt Family, a group of artists based in USA.

They use the situation in the hotshop to cook food, a situation that requires the same skill and teamwork as “ordinary” glassblowing.

During an event that is described as a merge between a glass demonstration, a play, a family dinner and event shared with the audience, food is cooked with the use of hot glass in various ways. A turkey is covered under a freshly blown glass bowl and cooked by its radiant heat. Hot dogs are grilled in front of the glory hole, pots and pans are heated on molten glass. The whole process is performed in the setting of a 1950’s garden party or TV dinner by up to 20 glassblowers dressed up in clothes resembling the same era, all in front of a audience.

The Burnt Asphalt family was formed at the creative glass center of America by Jessica Jane Julius, Erica Rosenfeld, Maret Sarapu, Sara Gilbert, a group of artists that all where involved in glass and had the understanding that glassblowing was a unique communal process of making. “Art making normally has a strong sense of individualism but in glassblowing you normally rely on at least one partner if not more. Collaborating gives us access to greater resources of materials, experience,
knowledge, and skill”. This kind of built in platform of sharing knowledge and process with other practitioners is a critical and important factor within the glass community and is maybe worth its own chapter. Glass has a knowledge infrastructure that is in some ways unique. Intensive learning in glassblowing is both a social and physical understanding of a medium. Glassmaking in general has become a diverse and lively community that is based on technical knowledge and skill just as much as artistic discussion.

The Burnt Asphalt Family uses this structure, but redirects it outwards. The energy of glassmaking, the collective effort and interplay is turned in to a production of itself as well as a meal or a feast. Just like in traditional frigger production the production setup of glass is hijacked and turned around. In this case it is not only the production method but also the social process that is being used as fuel to tell another story or create a different setting for the material and its social domains. “Our audience are people both familiar and non-familiar with the medium and through the ritual of cooking, serving, and eating are brought together”.

THE CUP MAKERS

In the article ”Americas cup” written by Andrew Page published in Glass quarterly in 2006 the subject of cup making is investigated through interviews with some of the most renowned goblet makers from the United States. Cup making is making glass goblets and other decorative stemware with an Italian or Venetian influence. In the late 1970’s Venetian glassblowing started to influence the American studio glass movement. By importing skills and technical know how from Europe the American studio glass community went through a dramatic change concerning skill and approach to the crafting and making of glass.

”There was a whole funky, thing going on in the seventies, a soft loose and goopy style… Glass was like mayonnaise.” This statement is Dante Marionis who recalls his impression of what the studio glass movement felt like when he grew up as the son of the glass artist and sculptor Paul Marioni. Of course this was set up for the sort of technical counter movement that was about to start. ”They almost looked machine made, but they clearly weren’t… I was immediately intrigued by that, the effort of making something by hand that was perfect.”

The making of these cups or goblets have become the way of building skill for many glassblowers in America.

The Venetian tradition and technique of glassblowing has become the way to getting to know the

13 http://theburntasphaltfamily.blogspot.com/ 2011-03-09
14 http://theburntasphaltfamily.blogspot.com/ 2011-03-09
15 Andrew Page,”Americas Cup” in Glass Quarterly, 2006, nr 102, p 35
16 Andrew Page,”Americas Cup” in Glass Quarterly, 2006, nr 102, p 35
material domains of glass in almost every university in USA. Even the most conceptual glass programs base their hot glass classes on this method of skill building by repeating traditional working techniques and models. Something that might be considered as something rather odd since it is a very demanding skill to learn.

The culture around cup and goblet making and the idolized idea of Italian craft skill has been important fuel in the development of American glass craft, of course not only on a craftsmanship level but also conceptually. The new skill has enabled artists to make more technically advanced works by opening the door to a tradition of making and combining it with existing conceptual methods.

Of course the work you make is influenced by your toolbox. American glass craft look the way it does a lot because of the way it is being learnt and taught. This can be seen as something as a downside if you are interested in having a craft scene/movement that is not connected to aesthetic ideals, but it can also be seen as a benefit because the traditional training creates a body of knowledge that enables artists and craftspersons to communicate with each other with a common knowledge that is understandable for a large group of practitioners.

“… I take from the tradition to build on my own ideas”, says Jeff Mack¹⁷. Jeff Mack is another of the famous American goblet makers. This is a way of looking at tradition and craft as something that is in symbiosis. The craftsmanship of glassblowing embodies material culture that is handed down through the process of learning it.

An example of an artist that is using the material culture of glassblowing as a medium is Josiah McElheny. On one hand McElheny is a glassblower possessing a tremendous amount of skill, on the other an artist that has used his skills as a glassblower to explore and tell stories through its material culture and meanings. ”His objects and the stories that he weaves around them each originate from some small kernel of information, a passage from Moby Dick, Renaissance studies in perspective, religious legend or the oral history of glassblowing itself, among other sources that McElheny brings out of anecdote and into his own peculiar, multidimensional reality”¹⁸

McElheny is within the glass world probably the clearest example of how craftsmanship, tradition and skill is used as a narrative tool for an artist. He ties other values and stories to material culture, and uses tradition as a bearer of meaning. I look upon McElhenys methods as him using his skill to create precise and masterly made objects of human nature in order to bend their functions into something that they originally were not meant to be. He uses their material cultural values as fuel to tell his stories, which becomes a way of bending reality.

¹⁷ Andrew Page,”Americas Cup” in Glass Quarterly, 2006, nr 102, p 41
CERTAINITY AND RISK

The English craft practitioner and theorist David Pye talks about craftsmanship as the workmanship of risk. This is to be put in relation to what he calls the workmanship of certainty that stands for the machine made or a predetermined process of making where the same result is expected while craftsmanship is always relying on the maker and the judgements that she or he makes during the process of manufacturing. It is in other words based on risk. Pye also means that workmanship of risk is never seen in a pure form. There are always molds, jigs, rulers and other tools that are used to get certain standards, conditions and frameworks for your making. In glassblowing this could be translated into that the pipe is straight and the blocks are round and kept wet.

On the other hand the workmanship of certainty is just as rare and if you push the arguments you can see that the model of explanation is not there to put things in black and white or polarize. Even in CNC programmed wood milling(a method that was not developed when Pye was active) there is workmanship of risk involved. The programmer of the machine must know what she/he is doing and even if you can read the manual you will probably not know how to do it instantly.

This way of looking at craftsmanship as risk taking and a use of embodied knowledge is rather a way of creating a parameter that can be used to identify the role of craftsmanship within production. Craftsmanship seen as a skill and ultimately non verbal or as embodied knowledge will always play a important role for the production of material objects and material culture.

Within a frigger tactical context the embracing of risk is crucial. If we look at the traditional production of friggers within the industry there is a similar relationship between certainty and risk. In a team of glassblowers producing a certain product there is an economical interest in minimizing the amount of risk involved in the process of manufacturing. The process is still based on craftsmanship but the use of moulds, automatic pipe turners, mould coolers, pre calibrated tools and calipers makes the process pre determined and the risk taking is very low. Making friggers on the other hand is about adding risk, in order to create a context where things are meant to go the “wrong” way. Friggers is about making the unexpected and the maker putting him/herself into a mode of manufacturing where the decisions made during the process are not predetermined. A question that can be raised from this is if the frigger production or the workmanship of risk can exist without its opposite? I think that within an artistic practice, risk taking is crucial and just as in the production of friggers, the strategy can be to increase the level of risk involved, both in the production process itself as well as aesthetically.

Although I see the meaning and logic in the way that Pye constructs a polarized conception of

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workmanship, I am questioning the use of the word “risk”: a word that requires you to put something at risk. Workmanship of risk would in other words, exist in a craft process where the goal is already set out and any blunder would be unaccepted. The negation or opposite of risk would be chance. The embracement of risk means that it is not a risk but a chance. Since frigger production is about using risk as a tool and fuel, the frigger tactical approach would maybe be a workmanship of chance.

THE OBJECT-SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP

A big fundament in this thesis is the understanding of an object/subject relationship within the material world and how it is used to form a narrative method. A relation that is sometimes described as the forming of material culture. Material culture is originally an archeological term that later was used by revisionist design historians and sociologists to explain the social impact and interplay of the material world.

DARK MATTER

The project frigger tactics sprung out of the metaphor Dark Matter that I applied to my ideas of making. Dark matter is an astronomical term that describes material parts of the universe that can’t be seen. It does not reflect light. It was detected because of its gravitational impact on the visible material world. Still today it is a big mystery and no one really knows what it consists of. In a metaphorical way I used dark matter as a possible explanation model on the subject of making. As makers and visual artists we handle visible materials but we also handle something else. Materials are charged with symbols, meaning and values that are constantly being handled through making. Sometimes we know what it is and sometimes it is what some people choose to talk about as tacit knowledge, impressions, knowledge and actions that somehow can’t be explained verbally. Just like dark matter itself is used by astrophysicists I looked at this metaphor as an explanation model. Dark matter in itself is nothing. It is just a word or name to the x-factor in the equation, a name to something too complicated to understand.

The way that I choose to draw this problem out was through the forming of a model that I have drawn out as a object-subject relationship where the object stands for the actual making, the handling of material and its physical abilities, as well as other physically measurable information such as geometry, weight and thickness, and the subject representing the subjective experiences such as social impacts and more tacit experiences. I later discovered that the same kind of descriptive model was used by design historian Judy Attfield when she talks about material culture.
In her book Wild things (2000) she states:

_Thus the central problem of studying material culture - the social meaning of the physical world of things - necessarily revolves around the unresolved relationship between the object and its meaning, a relationship that is most succinctly by the term - the object/subject relationship that focuses on the dynamic interplay between the object and its social meaning, not resting entirely on either one as determining the other._

Attfield's analysis describes the same problematization as the dark matter metaphor. The fact that she states that the object and subject do not rest upon each other is rather interesting. Of course we are always talking about subjective experiences when dealing with personal experiences and the setup of an object/subject relationship is not a black and white, polarized relationship. The experience of an object is always subjective in some way. The event of finding an object that would be resting on only one parameter is in that way highly unlikely.

The Danish design historian and researcher Louise Mazanti has a similar way of explaining the objects subjective surfaces. She talks about craft objects as being semi autonomous. They are as well as material objects relating to a material world and culture or perhaps the world of everyday objects at the same time as they are works of art. The everyday object, a term that I interpret as the utilitarian objects that form the material structure of everyday life, a quite vague and generalizing term but still a term that forms the idea of a domain or aimed destination of the functional object.

Using the term “Everyday Object” suggests that there is something like a general everyday that everyone can relate to. I hope that this is not what Mazanti means. Craft can relate to the everyday but it can also relate to spectacular events, luxury, dreams and desires.

Material culture does not only form the material body of the everyday but is historically also the materialization of almost every social choreography, happening and standpoint. Through the theory of material culture and the presented idea of an object/subject relationship within it is one possible explanation of its infrastructure: that it is formed by external ideas while forming itself. It is not the end product of a closed design process but a self relating and self reflecting process that is started through an act of making and/or designing.

Presumably this is also the reason why it is called an object/subject relationship and not order.

There is no parent or sub ordination within this structure.

Mazanti calls craft practice with a semi-autonomous function “conceptual craft”. A practice that emerged during the nineties that was highly based on a breach with with the traditional, formal aesthetics of craft in favor of a external agenda. “...instead of constructing meaning via formal

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20 Judy Attfield, Wild things, Oxford 2000, p.16
21 Louise Mazanti, Places, think tank 2006
relations based on the aesthetic potential of a specific material, the conceptual layers of meaning are based in a specific relation with material culture.”

This formulation of a conceptual craft discipline is both interesting and contradictory. The idea that externalization and breach with tradition is the same thing as conceptualization is something that I do not agree with. I am convinced that the expansion of the craft field does not necessarily happen through a disconnection of tradition and that the application of external thematic questions does not necessarily mean expansion of the field. Positioning a maker’s role within an object-subject relationship is an interesting but also challenging idea. Material culture as a way of describing social interplay with objects is actually how I would have described the field of craft before even being aware of the existence of the definition of material culture. The way I see it, a craft position within the theory of material culture would be a conductor somewhere right in the meeting between object and subject, constantly handling both objects as well as their social meaning. In other words, object and subject.

MAKING AND THE APPLIED STRATEGIES (HOW?)

As I have written before, the aim of this thesis is to illustrate the event and products of my practice. In the following chapter I will explain the production of the body of work within “Frigger Tactics” that forms the body of this project, a project focused on creating a material landscape and body of work that is made through a crafting of subject.

The artistic work that forms the body of this project is a play with the subject crystal, maybe one of the most precious categories of glass objects. During my first year as a master student I came up with a concept of playing with cut crystal vases and manipulating them into new liquid states. The discovery of the ability to make these precious objects myself was in itself thrilling. To figure out how to manufacture something that looks just like something that might have come from a storefront window causes a very satisfying feeling. Cut crystal is generally conceived as something that is static, frozen and almost eternal. This is something that contradicts with my perspective on glass as something rather amorphous and uncontrollable. The pieces that I am making play with the idea of using this valuable and precious matter as something alterable and non static. Crystal is not a material; it is an idea or a material standard. It is just another word for clear glass. Crystal is glass being marketed as something precious. There are some standards for what can be called crystal that have to do with the amount of lead that is mixed into the batch. The lead gives the glass superb qualities for cutting as well as a very good light breaking index. The lead is of course something that is non friendly for the environment and throughout the years the amount of full lead

22 Louise Mazanti, superobjekter, Copenhagen 2006 p 211
crystal (glass containing 30% lead) used for glass production in Sweden has gone down to a almost zero level. These days most glass producers use a barium soda glass instead and it is marketed as crystal(sometimes environment friendly crystal or green crystal).

But for me as well as for most people, the word crystal is not a technical term but glass created in a certain style or using a certain quality in the glass.

That quality is its clearness and the way it can be used for breaking and transmitting light. This almost mythical material condition is commonly communicated through different styles and design made thru cutting either on a wheel or on a flat mill grinder.

The process that can be slow. The cut surfaces need to be polished in order to let the light pass through. Glass that is just cut and not polished breaks the light and gives a rough and grey surface. The polished surface is polished either mechanically with pumice and cerium oxide or chemically with hydrofluoric acid, two methods that are problematic in different ways. The mechanical is time consuming and the chemical is dangerous, both to the maker and for the environment.

In order to be able to copy these techniques and use the shapes and patterns that are related to the idea of crystal, I therefore had to come up with a way to make it that would not occupy me with mastering the craftsmanship of polishing crystal mechanically or the toxic hazard of acid polishing.

The method that I used is borrowed from the production of pressed glass. When pressing glass in moulds the surface becomes matted from the thermal shock that is caused from the mould being to cold, therefore the glass piece is picked up on a puntie (iron rod) and inserted into the glory hole (a gas fired kiln used to reheat the glass). The heat in the glory hole causes the surface of the object to melt and leaves a polished surface. The method is called fire polishing.

In order to transpose this to cut glass I used a small kiln called “pick up kiln” to bring the cut glass pieces up to a temperature of 530 degrees celsius, a temperature that is above the thermal stresspoint of the glass used (glasma 75A). I could then pick up the pieces in order to fire polish the cut surfaces using the glory hole and an oxygen/propane torch.

This also put the cut glass in a condition where it can be heated up even more and be manipulated. This process somewhat resembles the principles of the graal technique that was developed in the Orrefors factory during the early 1900’s, a method where glass with color layers were manipulated cold to create patterns in color and then heated up, gathered over and blown out.

In other words there is nothing revolutionary in switching between hot and cold states in the production of glass.

When cut crystal is heated up it is in some way transformed into its counter state. What is conceived as frozen or static becomes liquid and rearrangeable. This can be seen as a way of gaining access to a specific part of the material culture of glass production by changing its given condition, being able to alter it in new directions, literally.
NEW EDITS

I first ran into the concept of talking about the creation “new edits” while reading Iain Bordens book Skateboarding, space and the city. The book pays tribute to skateboarding as a critical practice in the field of architecture. In the conclusion of the book, Borden states that skateboarders create new edits thru their run through the city.\(^{23}\)

I think that if you look at glassmaking in a similar way you could transpose this way of thinking in order to look at it as a way of maneuvering in a material cultural landscape. For example the condition that is created through the event of reshaping cut crystal glass can be seen as a way of creating new edits of material culture. Skateboarding relates to architecture and city planning as a parent context. Although the parent context of glassblowing is not as visible it is just as complex as a city. And just like the city it is constantly being renegotiated by its practitioners or users.

The way that I approach reediting on a practical level is by trying to rewrite the order and use of crystal. By mixing different styles of patterns and material states, my work is a play both with the meeting and clash of different components as well as the displacement of expected material states.

The working process is dependent on my skill but still experimental on many levels. The process of bringing a cold worked piece of glass into a hot state and re work it in the way that I do in this project is an unpredictable process that relies on me as gaffer(team conductor in the hot shop) and the people I work with.

The physical and social process in the hot shop combined with a embracement of risk gives results that still surprise me.

The final making of the pieces starts with the team going through what is going to be done, in what order the pieces are going to be put together and what everyone is supposed to do. In this way a direction is being put up. This direction acts as a grid from where the piece then is made and a lot of decisions are made as the making is happening.

If I would talk about reason or driving force within this process, the main reason would be lust and curiosity. I make the pieces because I am interested in a practice based questioning of a material and the manufacturing of its aesthetic and cultural domains. It is a kind of materialized discussion.

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\(^{23}\) Iain Borden, Skateboarding, space and the city, Oxford, 2001, p 263
DISCUSSION

One of the main goals with this thesis is to form a theoretical standpoint from a practice based perspective. A mission that might sound contradictory if you believe that theory and practice are opposite to each other. The main reason for my mission was my experience that the craft field has tended to be theorized instead of theorize. As I see it, a practice is an actively formed action and not a passively constructed role. The need for me as a craft practitioner to define my own arena is therefore important.

Through my research of the frigger phenomenon I have realized that there is complex infrastructure of skill, knowledge and aesthetic development embedded in an activity that traditionally has been described as a romantic parentheses within a strong and proud tradition of craft industry. Glassblowing has (maybe because of its performative qualities) become a target for external romantic projections and expectations. This is something that of course has been important as a advertising tool but has also formed a professional role that can be seen as both one dimensional and unproblematic. I am not saying that glassmaking has to be theorized in order to earn its existence but I believe that the expectations of any discipline can act as a brake pad for further development.

FRIGGER TACTICS AND METHODS

When engaging in the investigation of the subject of friggers I was not sure what to find. All I knew was that I was looking into a subject that just like my own practice was about making starting from a given platform, tradition and context but made into something else.

When you look for friggers you will find an enormous variety of objects, everything from rolling pins and sock darners to kind of ordinary off hand made vessels.

This big variation of motifs and models made me a little bit confused. How can you label so many different things into one category?

The equation does not really make sense. I got to the following explanation model:

Frigger is both a noun and a verb. At the same time as it is used to tell you what it is, it also tells you how it was made. It is found in a production environment but not within the parent context. My reading of this phenomenon is that friggers is just as much about tactics and methods. Frigger tactics is about using a given platform or tradition to form your own stories and reedit old ones, even if it was not a planned idea or intention from the maker in the industrialized craft factory.

When comparing it to myself, I can see interesting similarities to how my work is built on a historic craft and its aesthetic domains but used to question the given material conditions.

For various reasons, mainly the context of production, I can’t call the art that I make friggers but I
can relate to it as a proto practice and strategy that holds some of the same ingredients that I use. The frigger can really only exist as a subordinated category. There are no examples of objects labeled as friggers from pre industrialized glassmakers. I can not claim the position that the glassmakers of Nailsea, Steuben or Orrefors were in. My work takes place in a different context. But can frigger production be a strategy in my case?

In this project I am actually looking at tactics. My biggest question is not why but how?

The product of this thesis is not only the beauty and peculiarities within the pieces of glass made. It is also the formulation of frigger tactics, which is also the title of this project.

While finding out more about the evolution and infrastructure of the frigger has not only been of great help to understanding the relationship between the method, process, tradition and product. I think that the frigger also can point out that a craft practice can be expanded from itself as just as good as through the suggested breach with tradition that Louise Mazanti explains in her definition of conceptual craft.

My conclusion is that material culture is something flexible, amorphous and interactable and by connecting myself to a craft tradition like glassmaking, I put myself in a position where I possess the skills(knowledge) to alter its material culture.

I am not making friggers. I am not in the social or historical position to claim that. What I am doing is using a very old approach to making and transform that approach into something that can be used in a contemporary craft context and discussion.

Frigger tactics is best explained as making related to a parent order or set of conditions, but tweaking them into a new direction. This is best explained as an expansion of a practice and a tradition, not a breach.

**CRAFTING THE SUBJECT**

Frigger Tactics is a tool for crafting objects and subjects. Crafted objects have both objective as well as a subjective layers of information. When making objects with expressions that are accepted and familiar, I am using the expected subjective aesthetic reactions of my audience. In that way I can agree with Louise Mazantis theory of a typological relation to the aesthetic layers of information that can be used as symbols.

Mazantis crucial(according to herself) point that conceptual craft is not based on the aesthetic potential of a specific material but on relations to material culture is on the other hand something that I don´t agree with. All materials have aesthetic domains and material properties that influence the material cultural outcome. A maker´s role in this order is therefore not only related to a

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24 Mazanti superobjekter, p 211
typological system but also to the making and possible altering of the typology. The typology is in that way a relative, non static arena where a maker can create new edits on it, not only by using old ones.

To define a material only by its built-in constructed typology, is a shortcut to understanding a craft process but in the same way that I oppose to the material description of glass by Jean Baudrillard, I oppose myself to the idea of glass being just a set of symbols.

The craft practice of glass making can be perceived as a use of symbolic or archetypical expressions but going deeper into it you can find that it is also about understanding and possibly mastering a whole range of skills, material and social conditions. As I see it there is no way that I could form my practice(or frigger tactics) without basing my work on both the aesthetic potential and the typological alphabet of glass. Just like in Judy Attfields theory of an object-subject relationship there is no relative order between a typological and material based approach to making, because they depend on each other.

Frigger Tactics therefore stands not for a breach with tradition but an expansion of it. The suggested division between material properties and material cultural properties or typology is erased and opens up a space where the material cultural object-subject relationship is practiced and not analyzed.

The way I see it, the way that I approach glassmaking is just as much about approaching a material and craftsmanship based process, as it is to approach a tradition of aesthetics.

If I allow myself to transpose a simplified order with material properties and craftsmanship on one side and aesthetic tradition and typology on the other into a object-subject relationship, you could say that Frigger Tactics allows me to hook myself on to a tradition and re arrange it into new edits that question the given status and place of material conditions. In this way the subject becomes the object being crafted.

As I see it, this is the major difference between a theoretical and a practical approach to material culture. A theoretical approach is to analyze and understand a parent condition. A practice based approach to the subject is to reflect and craft that parent condition. The outcome of these practice based material excursions and investigations are subjective but creates new perspectives and points of view on material culture.

Through my work on the subject of cut crystal I rearrange the parent idea of the material and give it new properties and in this way, I use glassblowing as a critical tool to understand the material culture and values of glass.
**AESTHETIC PRODUCTION AS AN OPEN CIRCUIT**

As described in the case of the Burnt Asphalt Family, glassblowing is in some way a social organism or community. This is not to be mistaken for a big happy family of sharing and caring but there is a crucial communal force within glassblowing, not only through its common academic and professional contexts but as well because it is a joint effort to be practicing glassmaking. In the case of the evolution of the frigger you can see that certain objects and categories of objects live on and reappear in different times and contexts.

Glassblowing performed can be seen as an oral tradition as well as a material or physical tradition. The skills that a glassblower possesses can be traced back to other makers. The chance of finding a maker who has not learnt her/his skills from another human being is probably extremely rare. Within a technique based craft like glassblowing, the learning process is a passing of not only technical but also aesthetic ideas. In this way the making and design process of objects is not only the aesthetic production of a single artist, but also through its relation to a specific tradition a aesthetic production that affects a larger community.

Frigger production is a good example of another way of looking at aesthetic productions on a micro and macro level. You can see similar versions of the same kind of objects but from different times and places by different makers.

The evolution of the witch ball that went all the way from being a salt container to becoming a garden decoration and even a mystical and almost religious symbol is a clear example of how material objects and their cultural meanings can shift over time.

The precious cut crystal can in the same way change or play new roles depending on what material cultural values we add to it and the work I made can bring new meanings and perceptions to the material state and typology of cut crystal.

What I am trying to explain here is that frigger production and the objects produced from it are because of its non verbal and communal structure of knowledge, an open aesthetic circuit.

**TALK ABOUT IT (COMMUNICATION)**

I want to discuss questions relevant to my practice, a practice that is based in the production of glass objects.

As I see it, a project like this can be approached from many different sides depending on the audience I want to communicate with. The craft audience is multi faceted and ranges from readers of glossy interior design magazines to art theorists and my peers within the glass and craft community. They will all read different things from my work. A glass artist or designer might be
interested in the technical details and solutions while the design historian might draw parallels to the Italian design group Memphis in the way I have mixed patterns and expressions into the same piece. The collector of modern design-art sees a golden opportunity to expand her collection at the same time as the trendspotter sighs; so last season... In some people's eyes I am producing knowledge while others think that I am producing entertainment.

In other words the project can communicate many different things and I think that in this case it is important not to be afraid to be misread and instead see the opportunity in craft as a multi-channeled communicative tool.

This is aligned with my idea of craft production as practiced material culture. To take an interventional and reflective approach to making is crucial to my practice.

An issue that I expected to be problematic is that a lot of the work within this project is a formulation of theoretical standpoints while what will be seen by the biggest audience is by far the glass objects. A fear that after being reviewed has been reduced, mainly because the situation of having “many” audiences with different interests makes it more or less important to communicate the full extent of the project, depending on to who, when and where. A typical metaphorical example would be within a restaurant situation. How much do I need to know about the knife that the chef is using in order to appreciate the food or how much do I need to know about the food in order to appreciate the knife?

The chef needs to understand the function of both of them.

On the other hand I think that it is important not only to see the possibility to reformulate the practice itself but also the production of it. Within this project I have chosen to put focus on the formulation of a method and it lies in my interest not to exhibit just privileged precious objects, but to communicate what kind of questions I am working with and how.

**CONCLUSION, WHAT ARE FRIGGER TACTICS?**

Frigger tactics are a formulation of practice and theory based on the idea that making, craftsmanship, skill and lust can be used as tools to formulate new ideas around glass as material culture.

By using the ingredients above and combining them with a critical and reflective approach they can be used to form theoretical statements and become a tool within many different contexts. Frigger tactics can be used within a design process, to formulate questions and possible answers within artistic processes or within artistic research.

Frigger tactics are an awareness of crafting as practicing material culture.

One of my biggest fears while formulating this project was that it would be a project that was a
knowledge progression about and not within a subject. My conclusion is that through this project I have discovered a new perspective. By formulating glassblowing and frigger tactics as a crafting of the subject, I put myself in a position where I am formulating material culture at the same time as I am analyzing it, a reflective process that puts me in a central position of it with the possibility to expand. In this way I am not only using pre-existing symbols but also rewriting them.

SUMMARY

This thesis discusses glassblowing from the perspective of frigger production and its possibilities of taking a tactical approach to material culture, values and tradition. The thesis maps out a possible relational order to the idea of material culture as it is described by Judy Attfield where material objects in their social interplay with human beings exist in a object-subject relationship. From that theory, I formulate the thought of my practice (craft practitioner and glass maker) as something that acts as a conductor somewhere between the object and the subject. It is a reflective practice of making that crafts subjects as well as objects. A conclusion that can be seen as of craft having the possibility to be a tool not only to understand, but also to reformulate and practice material culture and material values. By comparing my practice to Louise Mazantis idea of conceptual craft as a use of a more typological language instead of material properties leads me to the conclusion that in my case it is about using both of them. Within frigger tactics the use of both the physical material as well as the typological and cultural layers are important for the end result. Within this thesis, I formulate the foundations of frigger tactics, a tactical approach to material culture, craft and craft tradition within glassblowing. A practice based theory that tries to explain how making through its direct impact on materiality and its social meaning can be used as a critical tool to investigate and reformulate the given aesthetic domains of glass.

FURTHER WORK, RESEARCH AND QUESTIONS

As I see it, frigger tactics is my answer to the question on how a method for craft based research might be formulated. In other words this project is a door opener to how material culture and craft can be talked about and reedited from the inside. One of the major discoveries for me is that craft’s role is not outside but inside the idea of material culture which opens up new critical investigations of it talks about it as something relational and non static.
A big question lies in finding forms of communication. As I explained earlier the situation with a multi faceted audience with many different relations and expectations of craft creates a lot of questions, questions that might be seen as problems or opportunities. How can a field that holds its own infrastructure not only of aesthetics, knowledge infrastructure and techniques but also of presentation and discussion be “refrigerged” and tweaked into new edits?

I think that opening up traditional craft areas like glassblowing for a critical view is something that holds allot of potential and in my case, it has been important not to remove its traditional domains and its infrastructure. This is because I am interested in how practices can be expanded from the inside and not from the outside but also because I believe that using already existing systems to communicate in many cases is more efficient because of its semi autonomous and interventional qualities. Further research is therefore as always needed to create new knowledge about questions such as tacit knowledge, material culture, aesthetic values and the infrastructure of them.

I believe that if a field such as glassmaking stands without understanding these mechanisms, its practitioners will always have the second pick when it comes to defining their practice.

The strengthening of a fields understanding of its own infrastructure is a development that can make difference for many craft practitioners. Knowledge is power.
Då jag är medveten om att den grupp av svensktalande människor som är intresserade av att läsa denna uppsats är relativt liten så har jag valt att skriva den på engelska. En annan anledning är att Konstfacks masterprogram har en internationell profil med en stor andel icke svensktalande studenter. Det är därför också med en vilja att mitt projekt ska kunna delas med mina medstudenter som jag valt bort mitt första språk.

Jag har dock valt att föra in en sammanfattning på svenska.

Sölning är en aktivitet som glasblåsare har ägnat sig åt under raster och efter arbetstid på glasbruk eller andra produktionsmiljöer för glas i alla tider. Föremålen kunde vara allt ifrån underliga figurer till speciella bruksobjekt och är ett sätt att förvärva och utöva hantverkskællighet.

Denna uppsats diskuterar glasblåsning utifrån sölning som ett möjligt taktiskt närmande av en form och hantverkstradition.

I uppsatsen kartlägger jag en möjlig relation mellan görande och materiell kultur som det beskrivs av designhistorikern Judy Attfield där föremål I mötet och interaktionen med människor existerar inom en så kallad objekt/subjekt relation.

Utifrån den teorin formulerar jag en ståndpunkt där jag menar att utövare inom min praktik (konsthantverkare) kan inta en roll som kan liknas vid en dirigent mellan objekt och subjekt. Detta genom en reflekterande praktik baserad på en fysisk tillverkning inte bara av objekt utan också subjekt.

Genom den teoribildningen påstår jag att konsthantverk och görande kan användas som ett redskap för att förstå men också omformulera och praktisera materiell kultur och dess värden.

Genom att jämföra min praktik med Louise Mazantis idé om conceptuell konsthantverk som användning av ett mer typologisk språk istället för ett användande av materialens specifika egenskaper ledde mig till slutsatsen att i mitt fall handlar det om att använda dem båda. Frigger tactics är ett användande av fysiskt materiella, typologiska och kulturella skikt inom sin praktik.

I den här uppsatsen formulerar jag grunderna till frigger tactics. En strategi för utövande av materiell kultur, hantverk och hantverkstradition inom glasblåsning. Men också en praktikbaserad teori som föreslår hur görande genom sin direkta inverkan på materialitet och dess sociala betydelser kan användas som ett kritiskt verktyg för att omformulera och undersöka de givna materiella domäner och föreställningar som materialet glas bär på.
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PENNY BANKS SHOW MAKERS’ ODD FANCIES

Collector Tells of Rarities in Many Materials and Forms.

By ARTHUR E. COBY.

Penny bank collectors are apt to give first consideration to their mechanical banks, which, as a general rule, are of iron, tin or other metal construction. But from the point of view of connoisseurs, historical significance and rarity is the most interesting aspect, with few exceptions, in the non-mechanical class.

Although every collection of any importance contains an ample number of both categories, the greatest range of material (porcelain, pottery, glass, wood, leather and many other substances) in addition to metals available to designers of the simple types of penny-in-the-slot bank effects at the same time meant increased opportunities for a display of originality and activity. It is among these non-mechanical banks that one hopes to discover that most varied collection of novelty, a unique piece.

Such examples known as “odd” pieces were generally made by an artist to the same time for the families in which they came from the studio.

JOYCE E. BLAKE
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