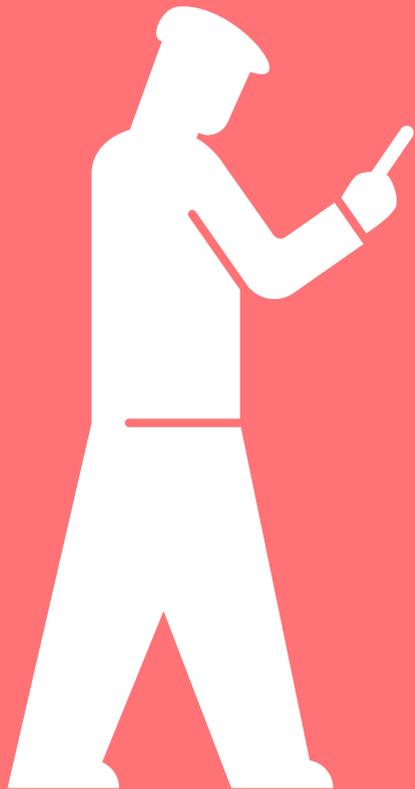




THE
BEST
OF
THE
C



Ding

A magazine about the Internet and things

Contents

04	Viewpoint	John Thackara
10	Briefing	Decentralization
12	Dispatches	ThingsCon
14	Interview	Gillian Crampton Smith
20	Life & Death	Vladan Joler
32	Typographic Craft	Pete Thomas & Sean Dooley
43	The Internet as a Lota	Jayne Wallace
48	A Medieval Crash	Andrew Prescott
54	A Gandhian Dream	Babitha George & Romit Raj
61	Evolutionary Craft	Justin Marshall

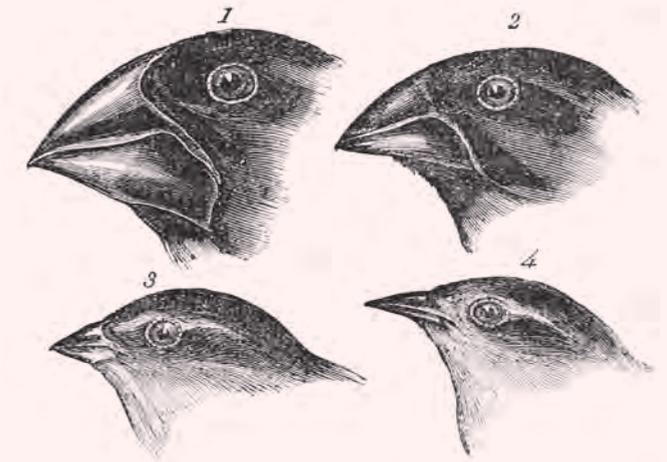


Workmen at Clonbrock Estate, Ahascragh, County Galway, Ireland 1870s.

Evolutionary Craft Justin Marshall

During a recent event with Mozilla's Open IoT Studio, we focused on the topic of decentralization. It got me thinking about the manifestation, and consequence, of pre-centralization. In particular, what did the 18th and 19th century pre-industrial landscape in the United Kingdom look like in terms of production, making, and craft? Obviously agriculture and its associated activities played a far larger role in the UK economy at the time, and it employed a larger labor force than it does in today. But agriculture is still significant in many countries' economies, and therefore I thought it is an appropriate place from which to start. Don't despair: this piece doesn't eulogize a pre-mechanized world of rural idylls, undivided labour and the happy artisan. Instead, I am interested in how decentralized production enabled an object's common form to proliferate into numerous varieties, each one responding to local contexts.

The billhook is a seemingly simple one-handed cutting tool used for a range of pruning, hedging and coppicing activities. Its history can be traced as far back as 1000 BCE, and it has close relatives all around the globe such as the Indian akkurival. Like the lota discussed by Wallace in "The Internet as a Lota", the billhook is an artifact that found various forms over the course of thousands of iterations. These forms were not so much designed but rather evolved. Similar to Darwin's finches in the Galapagos, this evolution resulted in species of billhooks with a huge variety of specialist adaptations across geographical regions in the UK.



Darwin's finches by John Gould.

In conclusion, is this model of decentralized vernacular making of any relevance when considering the challenges of the 21st century internet and burgeoning field of IoT? Echoing Wallace's call to recognize the complexities of individual lived experience, we are seeing how centralized Internet platforms are restricting and limiting the individual's power to control and change the shape of their online lives. Major internet companies dominate our imagination for how we might interact online. What if, instead, there were more nuanced and poetic approaches?

I would promote similar aspirations for local communities being able to control their online lives. The billhook story provides a useful example of local production being independent of centralized systems. It is truly grounded in the needs of a local community and therefore facilitates the crafted evolution of artifacts and technologies that fit the specific needs of the context out of which they were born. There are significant challenges in developing this craft approach and grounding its ethos in real-world IoT projects, such as:

Skills: like the blacksmith, the skills of the technologist are not quickly acquired or easily won. Nurturing local competency and skill capacity is a long term mission, as is its continual development and sustenance.

People & Roles: if the ethos of this approach is grounded in local community knowledge and skills, what roles do external people, such as designers, technologists and researchers, play in facilitating and supporting the instigation of such activities?

Materials & Logistics: the nature of digital hardware, in its material composition and micro-scale complexity, makes it impossible to produce locally from scratch. But, like the raw materials imported into local blacksmith shops, the components should be efficiently sourced and delivered.

Time: the craft approach is slow, iterative and incremental, not rapid and disruptive. How can testing be carried out in a funding environment that wants and expects rapid results, and may promote impact, but rarely funds projects over a long enough period to support it?

I argue that there is value in a craft approach for the Internet of Things. Especially given their physical embodiment, Internet connected devices should be adapted to their local contexts. Local digital craft, that draws on local knowledge and needs, could create a healthier, more inclusive, more resilient way of working and connecting today.

Colophon

Editors

Jon Rogers
Pete Thomas
Michelle Thorne

Design & Art Direction

Pete Thomas

Illustration

Eleni Kalorkoti
Pete Thomas
Thomas Mayo
Giulia Garbin

Photography

Sean Dooley
Alun Callender
Romit Raj
SHARE Lab & NID

Typeface

Antonio by Vernon Adams
Open Sans by Ascender Corporation
Zilla by Typotheque

Print

Cambrian Printers

Thanks

We couldn't have made this without the help and goodwill of our contributors and supporters, thanks.

Front Cover

Thomas Mayo's Studio
Photography Sean Dooley

Viewpoint

From Gut to Gaia
Illustrated by Eleni Kalorkoti

Briefing

Browser Market Share
Illustrated by Pete Thomas

Interview

Gillian Crampton Smith
Photography Alun Callender

Life & Death

Alang Shipbreakers
Documentation by SHARE Lab & NID
Early types of Electric lighting
Wellcome Library, London
Household fan
Ernesto Oroza
Outline of a Pentalobe screw
commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pentalobular.svg

Zilla

Typeface development images
Typotheque / Mozilla
Illustration
Thomas Mayo
Photography
Sean Dooley

The Internet as a Lota

North Indian Brass Lota
Image © Victoria and Albert Museum

A Medieval Crash

Illustrated by Giulia Garbin

A Gandhian Dream

Photography Romit Raj

Evolutionary Craft

Workmen at Clonbrock Estate, Ahascragh, County Galway, Ireland 1870s
National Library of Ireland on The Commons. No restrictions, via Wikimedia Commons.
Darwin's finches or Galapagos finches.
John Gould. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.
The range of English billhooks.
Jack Wilson. Originally published in The Countryman 1982.
Spear and Jackson Catalogue, 1955
by permission, www.timelesstools.co.uk

Every effort has been made to trace and contact the copyright holders of the images reproduced in this magazine. Unless otherwise noted, the text of the magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported license: creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

Ding

Issue 1
Published September 2017 by
Visual Research Centre,
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art,
University of Dundee.

ISBN: 1-899837-77-9

[moz://a](#)