

Unwritten: The Implicit Luxury



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Abstract Can materials make us communicate better and deeper, without words? Ancestral textiles held such a power, but many of these have vanished despite the attempts of some tribes to keep those secrets alive. Our task is to help bring back that knowledge and a haptic way of thinking in order to fight the culture of prohibiting touch which has evolved in many places. Touch is the sense that holds the most memories, opening new worlds of communication connecting hand, eyes and brain. This paper will analyse how artisans and craft can help to make this happen via three ancestral textile languages—the Andean Quipu system, Bogolanfini mud cloth from Mali, and Mongolian felt. Taking these unwritten languages as metaphors for human development and interaction, and understanding that humans have found different ways to express themselves when the possibility to translate everything into words does not exist, we see that workmanship is a central concept for all of them. For those societies, these languages were a means to create their own worlds, keep memories, develop their identities, and make their thoughts and cultures last. These textiles, being holistic, can go beyond boundaries and achieve better interactions because they do not rely on intellectual knowledge, instead engaging feelings and senses, producing internal wellbeing which can be later passed on to the external world. Recovering these languages and the way of thinking they inspire helps us to reach a state where we create our own identity beyond the culture around us, and closer to life experiences, places, and knowledge. These environments would be designed with natural materials and encourage users to be part of that space using their hands to adapt everything to their needs, to be part of the journey of their senses. In a world where we often communicate in a very impersonal way, using technology, and sometimes feeling isolated even when surrounded by people and things, being consciously present in the moment is now the new luxury. Can natural materials and craft overcome this and offer humans a better way of interacting with others and the world them? They probably can, but this is not a luxury that can be bought; it requires people to put brain, hands, and soul together to make it work.

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© Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2020
M. Á. Gardetti and I. Coste-Manière (eds.), *Sustainable Luxury and Craftsmanship*,
Environmental Footprints and Eco-design of Products and Processes,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3769-1_3

1 Introduction

Brené Brown, in her TED talk discussing vulnerability, said that over 10 years of researching human behaviour, she has found that everybody needs connections, so much so that feeling connected is a basic human need; connections of belonging, human connections, and connections with the environment. Good connections are directly linked to communication, but is it possible to improve them, and find a way to make them deeper and more meaningful? When we talk about communication we immediately think about spoken and written languages, but these languages have limits. Not everybody speaks the same tongue, and even if they did, there are aspects of human experience that spoken and written languages cannot reach. So what about unwritten languages? Something that could engage not just our intellect but also our senses and even more that could make us feel present in the world and interact with one another beyond boundaries? Looking for different ways of communicating that can go deeper that can let people interact in a more sensitive way, and we cannot ignore the importance that textiles have had throughout history in achieving this. This paper is going to analyse how ancestral communities developed unwritten languages through textiles and how understanding, engaging with, and preserving the dynamic they used can help us connect with others in the deepest way. This type of connection can be considered a new form of luxury, one that is no longer about buying things but about understanding and reacting to the needs of both people and the environment in a holistic way.

To understand how people in the past used textiles to create their own worlds, keep memories alive, develop identities, and make thoughts and cultures last, we will break down the characteristics of three unwritten ancestral textile languages: The Andean Khipu system, Bogolanfini Mudcloth from Mali, and Mongolian felt. These three different cultures can show us how they had to reach a more complex language when words were deemed insufficient to communicate with others and understand the world and its complexity.

Recovering these languages and the way of thinking they inspire helps us to reach a state where we create our own identity beyond the culture around us, and closer to life experiences, places, and knowledge. In a world, where we often communicate in a very impersonal way, using technology, and sometimes feel isolated even when surrounded by people and things, being consciously present in the moment is now so infrequent that it can be considered one characteristic of the new luxury. Heidegger [6] said that what makes us human is “being in the world”, which we can do by interacting not just with one another, but with the environment and the objects around us. Objects and our connection to them make us present, much as Steiner has described: “To be human is to be fixed, embedded and immersed in the physical, literal, tangible day to day world” [10]. Knowing the response of our bodies, senses and minds to different stimuli lets us understand how we connect with others, the world, and the vast and complex map of human interactions.

The new luxury is also based on what is happening in our surroundings. The way to experience it now is through our bodies, using the senses, going to feel, to touch;

but how can we get there if in many places a “do not touch” culture has evolved, prohibiting touch and thus limiting our body’s perceptions? Touch is the sense that holds the most memories, and when we make it react we open a whole new world of communication. Lesley Millar says in *Surface as Practice* [8] that we go to touch to make others “feel reassured, cared for and closer to us. Expression on a physical level can bring two identities together and generate extremely powerful responses”. Making with our hands, uniting touch with materials, generates levels of well-being and satisfaction in much the same way.

When discussing the connections humans need, we cannot avoid our relationship with nature, because part of the feeling of well-being is related to our engagement with nature. Even if we consider humans to be the most developed species, we are part of a greater whole; “we are all made of each other” [7]. The link between exposure to nature and well-being is so well established that growing trends such as Biophilic Design have started to place more emphasis on including elements of nature in architecture and interior design. The possibility that natural materials can help this dynamic of improving happiness and well-being in a silent but effective way, feeds into the increased importance being placed on protecting the environment. Acting to safeguard the future of the world is not something that we can continue to delay, which is why a culture that cares about sustainability is on the rise. This sustainability is starting in simple and individual acts but is rapidly being passed on to broader production systems and larger corporations. Being engaged with the preservation of nature at all levels is part of a new mindset, it is a change, whereby we are looking to improve ourselves not just as individuals, but to reach wider parts of society and the environment.

This is just one of a series of major changes that we are currently going through. As Daniel H. Pink mentions in his book *A Whole New Mind*, we are leaving the era of intellectual and logical thinking behind, and entering an age built on creativity and empathy. This new era is about the “capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to create artistic and emotional beauty, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new”. Through this, he argues, we will improve our ability to “understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one’s self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning”.

This change in mindset means it will be crucial to engage with what is happening around us and take the right actions to incorporate the wisdom that ancestral communities have preserved for us through their techniques. The era of intellectual and logical thinking that Pink mentions helped create a culture that is based on instant technology and consumerism, but at the cost of detaching us from slower ways of engaging with the world, and by extension nature, through our senses. Preserving or resurrecting techniques of craftsmanship can help to find that lost connection with our senses, and offer us a new perspective about how we can use it as an advantage in today’s society.

Thus, natural materials, sustainable production, and craftsmanship help us to find purpose and meaning and offer a pathway to reach this new luxury. However, this luxury cannot simply be bought; it requires people to absorb this new mindset to

develop the ability to be present in the world, and garner the well-being that comes from it. If this is something that we cannot buy, how can we know what we need? Firstly, we need to understand how we can engage with the world.

This is the moment to stop putting everything into words, stop touching only screens, and start experiencing the world in a haptic way, because today we can access luxury not just with money but with our own senses and mind. The question is, is it possible to learn how to do so? This is where it becomes necessary to look into the role of ancestral textiles as communicators and the holistic world of connections that they hold.

2 Khipu

The Khipu system, a knotting language created by the Incas in Latin America, was a form of both recording data and storytelling, preserving their culture through these knots. This system is so complex that it has never been fully translated, but Khipu expresses its own form of beauty once one becomes familiar with it, and that beauty is in its tactility. The scope of this language is vast, having been used to record universal matters like cities, constellations, time, planets, and so on; all the knowledge of the universe embodied in knots. Khipu is a visual language that speaks of its own process, to name things that cannot be named.

Nowadays, these Khipus take a form of art to tell stories. Time wears out these fragile spaces and does not succeed in keeping alive the memory of everything that has happened in these places. There might exist a preconception in the mind of the user according to which it is impossible to know precisely the stories told by Khipus because of the multiple possible variables. This way of telling stories in fact presents many physical similarities between different pieces, and one could even think that the knots are all “identical”, but the difference lies in the vision that each one gives to it. Also, another important fact is that in the Inca Empire only the Quipucamayocs, a class of trained specialists in Khipu, had the knowledge of how to read them, which means that even for many people of its own society this language was a mystery. This is sometimes the main obstacle for unwritten languages: because the meanings they hold are not implicit in any society, they always need someone willing to learn about them and others willing to be taught. It is a knowledge that needs engagement from both parties to be passed on. For the Incas, it was only available for a certain part of society.

Two of the most relevant Khipu artists are Jorge Eielson and Cecilia Vicuña, both visual artists and poets, finding in poetry the closest language to emotions. Eielson made Khipu the main resource for his exhibition *On the Other Side of Languages* [12] where he takes this system to another level showing the limits of conventional languages, putting in Khipus made of fabric those unspeakable matters. He uses these knots as a mechanism of emotional expression. Tarragon and Restany analyse Eielson’s work as based on different codes that merge into a single language: “The integration of this continuous event that is the universe; the extreme fluidity of the

realm of language translates into a vital nomadism, multiform from the standpoint of expression, planetary from of standpoint of existence” [16]. This knot is for Eielson his form of expression and being in the world, reflecting his own experience in this unique way to present his vision of his realm and life as different to many others.

In contrast, Vicuña uses Khipu to show the emptiness experienced when a whole language and culture is lost, together with our capacity to understand different, more tactile, languages. For her, the line (cord) is a trail of communication. She is constantly weaving words and Khipu together to show the loss of meanings when translating into another language. She links Khipu with nature to show the deep connection that this culture had with natural matters like constellations, stones, mountains or rivers; thus, explaining that our limitations in understanding these languages come perhaps from our lack of connection with the natural world. Vicuña believes that textiles can be read as active texts that play out the on-going intercultural dialogue of self-determination.

The research into Khipu has been taken further by Quilter and Urton [9] explaining not just the use and meaning of these knots, but also the different interpretations through the years. They figured out that black strings signified time and three-ply fibre of a mixture of yellow, blue, and white symbolised gods. With this information, it becomes clear that the purpose of this language was not to record things or have a symbol for every word but to capture things and their whole meaning. Khipu was a language not based on an alphabet but on narratives, thus having a strong link with memory and identity.

Sheila Hicks, another artist inspired by Andean cultures, mentioned that these people mastered the three dimensions and the material creation, and highlighted that they understood the importance of interacting with fibres and structuring thoughts with threads and lines. “What does touching the material add? It connects hand, eye and brain, thus building a triangulation that comes from passion, heart and intellect inseparably cemented to your times and to your own emotional experiences” [14].

3 Bogolanfini

Bogolanfini, from Mali, Africa, is a compound word comprised of three words of the Bambara language: bogo means “earth”, lan means “with”, and fini means “cloth”; Mudcloth. The making of this particular textile is time-consuming as it is entirely handmade. It is a very long process that can take up to four weeks depending on the weather. This language is based on local knowledge about natural materials and symbols, and the way in which varying natural factors could lead to an uncertain result. Men weaved the cloth and women printed the designs. Women printed them with symbols that only they could understand, thus providing a form of internal gender communication that gave them power and strength over men.

Sarah C. Brett Smith, in her text *Mudcloth: A women’s art in Mali* [3], mentions that in the past none of the symbols used in this cloth were put into words; textiles and gestures were sophisticated languages that allowed men and women to come

together and stay apart without compromising each other's sources of power. This language was a reaction to a culture where direct speech was traditionally frowned upon; they developed symbols to conceal knowledge.

Many of the symbols talk about simple everyday things that are important for this society. Also, understanding nature—the dying properties of mud, the effects of inclement weather on the various stages of the process, the time needed for processes that are beyond human control—is vital in this language, thus becoming a strong memory holder and identity developer. For many, these pieces of cloth have also the ability to heal, and by mixing certain symbols and colours they developed a way of deep connection between the user, the maker, their beliefs, and nature, thus making a formula with magical and therapeutic properties.

When a language has so many layers of meaning it can enhance people's well-being in a very discreet, everyday manner that is more effective than a more ostentatious equivalent. It is also interesting to observe that in the making of the dye the primary resource is soil, the Latin word for which is “humus” which is also the root for “human” and “humility”. The connection with the soil makes us both humble and human.

Satish Kumar, an Indian activist and ecologist, concluded in his book *Soil, Soul and Society, a New Trinity for our Time* [7] that soil (mud) represents life on earth. For a digital society like ours, it is very important to re-connect with the soil and to touch it. It is a way to be part of a healthy web of life. If we recover this interaction with nature, slowing down and using our senses, this will improve self-realisation, and taking care of ourselves is how we can take care of the world.

4 Felt

The third non-verbal language, Mongolian felt, is one of the oldest forms of textiles, dating back 8500 years, and its particularity resides in its process. In places like Mongolia, the making of felt was a communal activity, whereby people congregated in a sacred ceremony where they not only exchanged their skills but also shared the moment of creation, building a strong tradition which helped to keep their culture alive. Felt is one of the simplest textiles, for which the fibre does not need to be spun or woven; it is made from fibres in their natural state only adding heat, pressure, and agitation. It is a textile that can be made in the most remote areas and with few resources, which is why felt has always been important for nomadic peoples. The advantages of felt in terms of protection for basic needs, shelter, warmth, and insulation made life easier for many people.

Mongolians created their own felt houses called yurts. Having made felt the chosen material to surround their lives with, these people believed that felt was what made life possible. This community put a lot of effort into making the yurts because for them, most of whom were nomads, it was the only place to feel at home and protected from the changing surroundings, and for this reason, they have countless hidden meanings. In the middle, a crown made of wood formed the top structure from which the yurt

was hung, symbolising the sun that comes through it and the centre of the world. They also have a square piece of felt which works as the main door, signifying home and safety.

The importance of felt resides not just in its simplicity and the high level of nature embodied in it, but also in its anatomical associations. Felts has a natural touch, it can be re-shaped, and has been used for shoes and hats. It is a material that has always been very close to the human body, not just to protect it but to exchange deep emotional qualities; humans added friction and heat to the fibre in order to create the felt in the first place, and, in return, the felt protected human bodies and offered them a sense of belonging and comfort.

One artist who has worked with felt is Joseph Beuys who tired of art forms that were disconnected from everyday life and decided to make art using so-called poor materials from everyday life. Using a material that can be found in almost any household was a way for Beuys to talk to everyone, and thus to develop his own universal language. For Beuys, art needed to engage with “elementary forgotten knowledge” [13]. He wanted to show this basic but irreplaceable elemental material which has protected humans throughout history and so bring back those forgotten connections to simple and common things. He also believed that raw materials provide matter for thought [13]. According to Borer, when asked “who is qualified to create?” Beuys would answer: “those who know the language of the world, that is to say, you and I...” (1996). This is the hidden treasure, improving our knowledge of “sensual languages”, those with no need for words, the most universal. When the ineffable is attained, we become challenged, but we need to learn to explore that challenge via emotions instead of our normal, but in this case futile, method of exploring only in words.

5 Why Non-verbal Textile Languages?

These languages were able to engage hands, body, and mind together. Modern observers require a new way of expression and of imprinting their own stamp of their perception of the world. According to the Aristotelian model, “memory is of the past, perception is of the present and conception is of the future” [1, pp.47–48]. As Quilter and Urton said in their book *Narrative Threads*, when analysing the Khipu system and considering the knowledge of ancestral cultures in the past, we can analyse and give sense to the present, and in so doing be better able to project towards the future. Bringing this knowledge back and adapting it to present needs is how we can smooth the way to the future. Being aware of the knowledge that our ancestors acquired, and using it in a more developed way, adapted to today’s society, is a form of evolution. It is always good to be innovative, but if we do so considering what has gone before, the achievement of improvements is going to be greater, and more useful for us. Offering new spaces of reflection for observers in the search for active roles are a way of facing the future.

By way of example, these three cultures put their knowledge and heritage into the making, feeling the language through senses. As Maria G. Cattell and Jacob J. Climo mention in their book *Social Memory and History* [4], “Memory is the foundation of self and society”. Textiles, like humans, have memories; they tell us about what they went through. We can see examples of this in the dying during the Mudcloth process, which at first is invisible and then starts to slowly reveal the design that holds the meaning of the trace left by the mud, or in the felt that can be re-shaped according to need.

Felt also engages memory as it is a tactile material that impacts on our body, consciousness, and environment. During felting, everything that was in the air at that moment (like dust or hair) gets absorbed into the final piece, making every felted cloth unique. When a fabric impacts memory it engages the social life of things, thus transforming material items into objects that have an active life as people engage with them in multiple meaningful ways [11, p. 163].

When we experience surfaces through our senses we perform a “memory backup” because bodily memories, which leave marks on our skin, can guide us when conscious memory fails. Those memories are kept through the story and culture that the skin already carries. That means that the same haptic experience will not have the same impact on two different individuals.

Memory is not just an intellectual action, it is also shaped by imagination. Through time, we are transmuting our memories following our imagination and perceptions. That is why engaging our whole body in what we do is a more effective way to preserve meanings and to imprint a long-lasting perception. The richer the engagement, the more holistic and faithful the memory.

However, textile languages do not need to be fixed in order to generate such powerful memories; they can be movable, “unknotted”, re-shaped or re-signified. It is specifically their tactility which produces the deep engagement between the “author” of the piece and the end user, and using this sense to “read” creates a personal engagement with the material. The felting process also brings an understanding of versatility and malleability. Using the fibres in their natural state generates a good channel of interaction with nature, and there resides the simplicity of this language. It is an almost magical process to see the fibres coming together to create a new, strong, unwoven surface that can be re-shaped and adapted.

With the right stimuli, humans reveal their identities and allow themselves to be re-signified as well. The materials that act as the conduit for these languages engage human senses, producing internal well-being, which can later be passed on to the external world. As Neil Harbisson has said, “Knowledge comes from our senses, so if we extend our senses, we will consequently extend our knowledge” [18]. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is not necessarily intellectual knowledge that is being developed and later engaged.

Ernesto Neto, who develops interactive installations, has given us an example of how this can work practically. He said that his work is an experience of smell, colour, emotion, and sensory language, and that we “Receive information, but I want to stop thinking (...) I think that not thinking is healthy; it’s like breathing life itself” [15]. As humans, we often have this need to stop thinking because our

thoughts are an assortment of words, without leaving any space to feelings. Making drives us to that moment of abstraction and lets all those languages without words gain expression. The Fourthland project, whose work explores forgotten practices of social and environmental consciousness, says on their website about making: “it is the intangible heritage of humanity. Art practice and making with the hands can inform and initiate a healing of ourselves, the community and beyond” [17].

Taking the unwritten languages analysed as metaphors of human development and interaction, and understanding that humans have found different ways to express themselves when the possibility to translate everything into words does not exist, we can see that craftsmanship is a central concept for all of them. When David Brett talks about this topic in his book *Rethinking Decoration* [2], he defines the poetic of craftsmanship:

This aspect is concerned with the making of it, with the fashioning of materials, and with the pleasure to be got from our encounter with the stuff of the world; and how all these come together to form a realm of meaning of its own kind that owes little or nothing to other domains.

Craftsmanship is based on making. During the making process, we embody the connection with materials, the acquired knowledge, and narratives. This action is what leads the maker to get engaged with basic human needs and become a medium between society and the products they make; by doing so, the maker is shaping the self but also having an impact on society. That is why making is always a social activity, because even unconsciously, it is always connecting embodied memories, materials, and culture. Everything that becomes social is deeply related to empathy, as empathy is what allows humans to get those longed for connections. Daniel Goleman [5, pp. 95–96] in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can Matter more than IQ* highlights the importance of emotions to develop empathy and so be able to understand others better: “people’s emotions are rarely put into words; just as the mode of rational minds is words, the mode of the emotions are not verbal”.

6 How Can Ancestral Cultures and Unwritten Languages Inspire the New Concept of Luxury?

Not that long ago luxury was reserved only for people who could afford to buy very expensive items just for the pleasure of having something, rather than because they actually needed it. Only the rich and famous had access to the world of luxuries. Nowadays, the game has changed and what luxury means has shifted. We cannot talk about luxury anymore without considering words like health, happiness, creativity, and well-being as a part of it. Stylus, a trend researcher focused on consumers, published in 2018 a book about the macro trend of “*The New Rules of Luxury*” that if we talk about luxury we now need to focus on personal optimisation, mindfulness, development of wisdom, and individualism, because those are the things shaping what luxury means nowadays.

Analysing what we consider “beautiful” is a way to better understand this new concept of luxury. Luxury is no longer connected so strongly to aesthetics, and is much more bound up with the quality of experiences, what Kant calls “subjective sensation” or “feeling” [2, p. 21] leading to a more holistic meaning. How we analyse aesthetics comes first from what society has told us about beauty, and secondly from our own experience, from what has a positive impact on us and what gives us pleasure. That society often viewed beauty as being linked to (if not synonymous with) aesthetics was an unfair measure for something so important. Refocusing on the quality of experiences, as we are now, was a necessary corrective, because that is the beauty that engages our senses and makes us feel happier. The advantage of this is that everybody in the whole world is always going in search of pleasure and fulfilment, and it is something that we do not need to encourage people to go for, because that drive resides already inside every human being.

All these points make us look back to ancestral cultures and realise that even though luxury in the past was not even a concept for those societies, certain objects, ceremonies, and making processes were a space of joy, a source of happiness, and a sense maker of belonging, which overlaps to an extent with what we nowadays consider luxury. They found it not by looking for luxury but in the search of self-improvement, while at the same time strengthening their bonds to the cultures from which they came. When Socrates talks about the creation of a “Luxury state” he points out that in all probability a city where everyone is satisfied in terms of food, clothing, and shelter could be fairly balanced, but such a city does not fully cover human necessities. Human desires and feelings of fulfilment go beyond such bare necessities. The new concept of luxury tries to incorporate these deeper needs in our search for what makes us human, encouraging us to define ourselves by trying to reach a spiritual and personal evolution. Despite the differences in the communities analysed here, we can see that the development of unwritten languages and craft techniques made them sense a feeling of time and community, and offered them a knowledge that they could carry everywhere, that they could pass to anyone and where they could “write” the most interesting narratives about who they were, what they felt, what they made, and how this defined their way of being in the world.

Although these cultural values were mostly open to the whole community, many did not have access for different reasons, mostly because of their social status. This limited access is something that our society is suffering from as well. Not many people are aware of the importance of these values for our evolution as a society, and not many of them understand that by reaching higher levels of well-being we are not just improving ourselves but also positively influencing our surroundings. Likewise, not many people are willing to spend the required time to go beyond basic needs and understand, learn and consciously engage with alternative languages beyond the written and spoken. For the people that are already aiming for this new luxury, it is hard to understand that many others do not want to face changes consciously that they do not want to adapt to or do something about big social and environmental issues, and this is perhaps one of the saddest parts of luxury: even if this new concept of luxury is opened up to more people than before, it is still available only to those

that are willing to look for it. The new concept of luxury, as with the way luxury was understood in the past, has the characteristic of being available just for the few.

Beyond this, what we cannot avoid in order to make this new luxury something attainable for more people is the need to recognise the immense connection that people in the past had with universal matters. These ancestral communities understood nature and the human body in a way that we are not capable of anymore. Now, the concept of luxury has changed, moving beyond the mere acquisition of goods and towards holistic experiences, via means that are responsible, sustainable, knowledgeable, and connected more with our internal needs.

There are three main aspects in luxury nowadays:

- Elevation to luxury status through time-invested craftsmanship
- Self-exploration about human needs in a world more focused on sustainability
- Personal experiences transformed into luxuries.

Craftsmanship is one of the key points in the new concept of luxury. As Joseph Beuys did with felt, craftspeople are doing with almost any material nowadays. All those forgotten old items or everyday materials are the main resources for craftsmanship, provided they are in the hands of experts in working with those materials. Old items and natural materials already hold a story, telling us something about the past, about where they came from. Innovators use these objects and materials as a blank canvas, putting body and mind to work together to give them a contemporary purpose or meaning. They also believe that a small number of crafted objects are more precious than many mass-produced ones. In craft it is not just the final result that matters, but the making process in and of itself that transforms the object into a “luxury”.

This gives materials broader possibilities in the hands of craftspeople. As the documentary “The Future is Handmade” advocates, if we consciously access this new knowledge structure built by environmental, social, and cultural awareness, it can generate the same sense of belonging that ancestral techniques offered to their societies in a world that is increasingly making a lot of us placeless. That is one of the most interesting aspects of the new concept of luxury. The memories that materials and experiences leave in our bodies are things that cannot be removed from us. An expensive item can just be stolen, but knowledge and experiences have the value that cannot be lost or taken.

If craftsmanship is one of the keys to luxury, knowledge is the key to craftsmanship. It requires mastery of technique, and mastering a technique requires both time and a desire to fight back against a society that demands instant solutions to problems and instant gratification for desires. This is the space that craftsmanship gives, a place where we familiarise ourselves with techniques, materials, stories, where it is possible to consider knowledge as something that can be engaged by all the senses and where the only thing that matters is to be able to perform a task beautiful and consciously. This act is what produces the effect of being present in the world, offering well-being through this feeling of being connected.

Craftsmanship is one of the strongest challenges to capitalism, which used to be the main driver of the old concept of luxury. Those who could afford these goods would

buy them, but without much conscious thought. Mass production developed as a way of spreading this beyond the richest elites, but the lack of consideration among buyers remained. Craftsmanship goes against this, while at the same creating products that are often considered more valuable, albeit now in a lasting and more sustainable sense. Craftsmanship also offers its value to anyone; anybody can become a craftsperson and make their own luxury or learn about it to appreciate and experience it in the right way. There is a recognition in craftsmanship of the importance of educating people, and this motivates them to add to their knowledge, take their skills to another level, and go beyond the predictable, by emphasising that these creators are human, with individual minds behind every piece. That is one of the best reactions to a world where everything looks like it has already been made, and where everything looks like a copy of something else. This leads us to the second concept about self-exploration and the consciousness that underpins luxury.

This self-exploration goes mostly to the new luxury user. Knowledge is not about what to buy anymore, it is about what is beautiful to me, where do I want to go, what do I want to do, and who am I? That is something that money cannot buy, which is why now knowledge has become the new currency, a very personal one that leads to many different paths. This makes us understand that luxury has to be personalised. This personalisation is derived from educating the consumer, showing them what is good for them, for their lives and for their surroundings, how they can leave a beneficial footprint on the world, and how they can create their own identity through the items they use and the experiences they have. Currently, we have the advantage of having a new generation with strong self-confidence, open to understanding how the world is changing towards preserving what we have and doing the most with it. We no longer need new things, we need to re-signify and update what we already have. This evolution is also a form of devolution; devolution not only means to “return”, but it is also a form of administrative decentralisation, granting a level of autonomy, autonomy to learn, to develop, to encourage minorities and small but significant means of production.

When we look for trends nowadays, we can find many different ways to be on trend and to express ourselves, which means that even though we can always find a very strong leading trend, we can always build up our own conception of it. We can make choices based on our own values, and this is where self-exploration starts. This self-exploration is not always related to just our desires and our own pursuit, sometimes we are driven to develop it by being forced to react to certain things that are occurring around us and drawing our attention.

For example, one of these things that we can no longer ignore is that the world is going sustainable; why? Because it is a need that has a direct impact on us, but goes beyond humans and has an impact on the world around us. Resources are being wasted, the climate emergency is finally being described as such, and anxiety is spreading, all signs that that the consumer-driven way of living is obsolete. As makers, we have the power to offer good quality and sustainable products but we also have the challenge to educate consumers to select what is going to be good in the long term for them, their community and the environment. Craftsmanship, helped by natural material and human engagement, is helping to set up the mentality we

need for the future: offering values of durability, excellence, and the benefits of the circular economy, but also offering a space where it is possible to slow down and find joy. This is a whole package, brands nowadays need to offer not just a product but an experience, not just be sure about their identity but also reach out to and connect with their customers' priorities and necessities.

As we mentioned before, the new concept of luxury involves experiences in many ways. How can experiences be translated into luxury items? Luxury brands cannot avoid the impact of young people opening new topics of discussion about matters that were irrelevant not long ago, nor can they avoid the importance of generating stimuli in the consumer beyond the pleasure of just buying, and finally they have to understand that we cannot have luxury if it has to be made at someone else's expense. All this leads to the creation of new luxuries in the most social, ethical, and sustainable way possible. This new way of analysing luxury highlights the status of master craftspeople: we now care much more about what they are doing, we recognise their mastery, and we are ready to hear stories through their hands. Some of them talk about their techniques, others about forgotten communities, and others still might be scientists or engineers experimenting with new materials in an innovative and sustainable way. Now as never before we are interested in narratives, and that is a plus for people who have things to say. Considering narratives are not in terms of facts or convictions but about a disclosure of the true meaning of life experiences.

From the perspective of the consumer, they also have a role to play because their voice manifests through their actions and behaviours. In the crazy political and economic times, we are going through, we understand that nothing can be taken for granted, and even if we cannot change the world, we need to collaborate to give voice to the things that matter to us. We are going to invest our money supporting fair causes, like encouraging local shops, making environmentally conscious choices, or helping individuals or communities to improve their situations. We are no longer in the "throwaway" era, we care about the things we are consuming, and we are heading towards an age of repair. The world is too small for the amount of waste that we are producing every day, and this matter is not just a question of space, but about damage to the environment, which will ultimately have the effect of damaging humans' health. Why do we need new things if we have plenty of materials that have already been used but are still around? We can use them as raw materials, giving a second life to them. We already went through a time where almost everything was (and some still are) disposable, but now thanks to craftsmanship we can access long-lasting products and have the chance to repair them in future if needed. This new mindset, and the new priorities it engenders, helps us to realise that the more accessible something is, the greater the chance that there is an associated cost in future either to us, to the environment, or both.

To conclude, I want to tell a story that from my point of view encapsulates all the concepts discussed above. In June 2019, a group of students from a school in Alta Gracia, Argentina did a research project to understand how clothes were made. They came across a specific loom that was used by the people who have lived in the area long ago to weave their own garments. They recreated this loom and started to weave with it. Looking to share their knowledge with the community, they organised

an expo day in the main square of the town where the children not only demonstrated how to weave, but they also taught the community how to do so by themselves. Suddenly, an older man started to weave without any problem, and the woman next to him started to cry. No one understood the situation until she explained that the man, her husband, was suffering from Alzheimer's that he barely remembered anything at all, and this was the first time in a very long time that he had managed to retain something, namely the steps to do the weaving.

Experiences like this one are priceless. No one can put a price on the happiness of this wife seeing her husband acquiring and retaining new knowledge. No one could explain in words how this man understood the weaving process, but what we can do is to analyse the factors around this situation: we have the knowledge of the children that they obtained by getting engaged with the culture that was already present in the area but to a large extent forgotten. This knowledge was about mastering a manual technique that engages many of the senses. To take the technique and the knowledge to the next level, they decided to share it with the community, generating an awareness of the past of their own identity. After all these steps, the knowledge about the use of this loom has now been spread across the whole community. This made people interact and generate connections and these two factors generated well-being not just for the students or the elderly couple in question, but also for the people who witnessed the emotion of this scene.

Now, we are driven to feel emotions, to be more conscious about what is happening around us, and we cannot be blind about the role that we have to play. Bringing back the wisdom of ancestral languages and techniques and adapting them to our needs, we can now redefine the concept of luxury. It now is about capturing things and their whole meaning, like the Khipu system did. It is about offering pleasure and unforgettable memories through the engagement of the body in its entirety, considering humans as a whole entity with the need for connections in order to ensure well-being.

As Martien Van Zuilen says in the research *Through the Eye of a Needle*, textiles (but in this case, we could say craft products in general) can now be read like "a narrative text that chronicles and translates personal experience, cultural identification, and socio-cultural life embedded in multiple layers of meanings". The most meaningful narrative is no longer at the end, but in the process of making and discovery.

It is our task to encourage makers and craftspeople to keep going, to keep ancestral knowledge alive, to engage our senses more deeply, and to make us react to a turbulent world that needs people who can appreciate the value of staying connected in the most conscious way possible.

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