

Synthèse de documents type CENTRALE proposée par Christophe Repplinger, Lycée Marcelin-Berthelot, Saint-Maur-des-Fossés

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Document 1

The repairman is called in when the smooth operations of our world have been disrupted, and at such moments our dependence on things normally taken for granted (for example, a toilet that flushes) is brought to vivid awareness. The repairman's presence may make the narcissist uncomfortable, then. The problem isn't so much that he is dirty, or uncouth. Rather, he seems to pose a challenge to our self-understanding that is somehow fundamental. We're not as free and independent as we thought. Street-level work that disrupts the infrastructure (the sewer system below or the electrical grid above) brings out shared dependence into view. People may inhabit very different worlds even in the same city, according to their wealth or poverty. Yet we all live in the same physical reality, ultimately, and owe a common debt to the world.

Because craftsmanship refers to objective standards that do not issue from the self and its desires, it poses a challenge to the ethic of consumerism, as the sociologist Richard Sennett argued in *The Culture of the New Capitalism*. The craftsman is proud of what he has made, and cherishes it, while the consumer discards things that are perfectly serviceable in his restless pursuit of the new. The craftsman is then more possessive, more tied to what is present, the dead incarnation of past labor; the consumer is more free, more imaginative, and so more valorous according to those who would sell us things. Being able to think materially about material goods, hence critically, gives one some independence from the manipulations of marketing, which as Sennett points out typically divert attention from what a thing is to a backstory intimated through associations, the point of which is to exaggerate minor differences between brands. Knowing the production narrative, or at least being able to plausibly imagine it, renders the social narrative of the advertisement less potent. The craftsman has an impoverished fantasy life compared to the ideal consumer; he is more utilitarian and less given to soaring hopes. But he is also more independent.

This would seem to be significant for any political typology. Political theorists from Aristotle to Thomas Jefferson have questioned the republican virtue of the artisan, finding him too narrow in his concerns to be moved by the public good. Yet this assessment was made before the full flowering of mass communication and mass conformity, which pose a different set of problems for the republican character: enervation of judgment and erosion of the independent spirit. If the modern personality is being reorganized on a predicate of passive consumption, this is bound to affect our political culture.

Since the standards of craftsmanship issue from the logic of things rather than the art of persuasion, practiced submission to them perhaps gives the craftsman some psychic ground to stand on against fantastic hopes aroused by demagogues, whether commercial or political. Plato makes a distinction between technical skill and rhetoric on the grounds that rhetoric "has no account to give of the real nature of things, and so cannot tell the cause of any of them." The craftsman's habitual deference is not toward the New, but toward the objective standards of his craft. However narrow in its application, this is a rare appearance in contemporary life - a disinterested, articulable, and publicly affirmable idea of the good. Such a strong ontology is somewhat at odds with the cutting-edge institutions of the new capitalism, and with the educational regime that aims to supply those institutions with suitable workers - pliable generalists unfettered by any single set of skills.

Today, in our schools, the manual trades are given little honor. The egalitarian worry that has always attended tracking students into "college prep" and "vocational ed" is overlaid with another: the fear that acquiring a specific skill set means that one's life is determined. In college, by contrast, many students don't learn anything

of particular application; college is the ticket to an open future. Craftsmanship entails learning to do one thing really well, while the ideal of the new economy is to be able to learn new things, celebrating potential rather than achievement. Somehow, every worker in the cutting-edge workplace is now supposed to act like an "intrapreneur," that is, to be actively involved in the continuous redefinition of his own job. Shop class presents an image of stasis that runs directly counter to what Sennett identifies as "a key element in the new economy's idealized self: the capacity to surrender, to give up possession of an established reality." This stance toward "established reality" which can only be called psychedelic, is best not indulged around a table saw. It is dissatisfied with what Arendt calls the "reality and reliability" of the world. It is a strange sort of ideal, attractive only to a peculiar sort of self □ insecurity about the basic character of the world is no fun for most people.

As Sennett argues, most people take pride in being good at something specific, which happens through the accumulation of experience. Yet the flitting disposition is pressed upon workers from above by the current generation of management revolutionaries, for whom the ethic of craftsmanship is actually something to be rooted out from the workforce. Craftsmanship means dwelling on a task for a long time and going deeply into it, because you want to get it right. In managementspeak, this is called being "ingrown." The preferred role model is the management consultant, who swoops in and out and whose very pride lies in his lack of particular expertise. Like the ideal consumer, the management consultant presents an image of soaring freedom, in light of which the manual trades appear cramped and paltry: the plumber with his bum crack, peering under the sink.

With such images in their heads, parents don't want their children to become plumbers. Yet that filthy plumber under the sink might be charging somebody eighty dollars an hour. This fact ought, at least, to induce an experience of cognitive dissonance in the parent who regards his child as smart and wants him to become a knowledge worker. If he accepts the basic premise of a knowledge economy that someone being paid a lot of money must *know* something, he may begin to wonder what is really going on under that sink, and entertain a suspicion against the widely accepted dichotomy of knowledge work versus manual work. In fact, that dichotomy rests on some fundamental misconceptions. I'd like to offer an alternative account, one that will give due credit to the cognitive richness of the skilled trades. In pursuing these questions, we arrive at insights that help to explain why work that is straightforwardly useful can also be intellectually absorbing.

Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class As Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into The Value Of Work*, New York, Penguin, 2009, pp.17-21

Document 2

The dignity of labour

The value of manual work is being lost, leaving us dislocated from the material world and the joy of making things

Libby Brooks, www.guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 2 March 2010

The walls of my flat bear the scars of my chronic incapacity as regards the affixing of picture hooks. Fortunately, the frames I have hung are broad enough to mask the incriminating evidence. And so, in the interests of perfect execution, I know that I ought to greet gladly the news that the AA is launching its new Handy Squad, a fleet of specially trained operatives who will be on call to carry out those minor, but often seemingly major, domestic duties such as changing the washer on a dripping tap or, indeed, hanging that prized Athena print straight and solid. Instead, I find it thoroughly depressing that people are now being encouraged to outsource the wiring of a plug.

In the knowledge economy that values above-the-neck abilities above all others, an increasing lack of manual competence renders us passive and dependent. It also significantly alters our relationship with the material world. So that chair, once woodworm stippled, now sanded smooth and varnished, no longer holds the narrative of our own efforts and nascent skill, but the mediated story of a stranger's capability.

And, while manufacturing may have moved east, there is still a demand for manual competence in east London. Last year, the Crafts Council published an audit highlighting the desperate skills shortage in this country, while Country Living

magazine launched a campaign to preserve traditional craftsmanship. Jobs in manual trades such as carpentry and masonry are proving hardest to fill during a recession when millions are facing unemployment.

Despite this, "vocational" training remains the Cinderella stream of education, with the implicit assumption that it narrows and restricts students' potential. Which is ironic at a time when the open-skies opportunity of the much-lauded university degree offers little more than a free pass to the dole queue. The value we give to particular kinds of learning will only become more pertinent as the recession continues.

In a knowledge economy, it can feel embarrassingly retro to talk about the dignity of labour. But Richard Sennett talks compellingly about the value of lasting work to workers, and the way that the economic downturn is forcing a reassessment of the quality of life offered by cog-in-the-wheel office life, where employees see neither daylight, their families, nor the end product of their labours.

And this is an ethic that challenges directly the disposability of the consumer age. An item can be made, mended and re-fettled again. The ability to think critically about material goods, to comprehend their structure and durability, offers a certain freedom from the imprecations of the advertisers, who would rather we concerned ourselves with the cultural associations of an object, rather than its inherent quality or capacity to serve a purpose.

Beyond the knowledge economy, a creative economy could re-foster an appreciation of those artisan skills. This needn't be powered by romanticism, or technophobia, or mark a return to the Fabian paternalism of Ruskin's arts and crafts movement. In honouring all skills equally, we open the discussion to how we as people define ourselves through our abilities. Most importantly, we recognise the virtue of ability that is developed and honed over time, rather than only recognising the life-changing potential of a born talent, or mourning its lack, as the Billy Elliot school of meritocracy would have it.

Document 3

Poorest pupils face segregation in technical schools, teachers warn

• **NUT raises 'deep concerns' over vocational schools**

• **Fears of new class divide in education**

Jessica Shepherd, education correspondent, www.guardian.co.uk, Sunday 4 April 2010

The poorest pupils will be segregated from their wealthier peers under Labour and Tory plans for scores of 1950s-style vocational schools to train the next generation of plumbers and engineers, teachers warned today.

Both parties want to recreate technical schools, which vanished in the 1950s when their popularity dwindled, offering pupils aged 14 to 19 training and apprenticeships to become skilled tradespeople.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) passed a motion today at its annual conference in Liverpool expressing "deep concern" that the most disadvantaged young people would be coerced into technical schools, triggering another class divide in the education system. Poor pupils and those who spoke little English or had special needs would be steered into such schools because they typically performed less well in exams and lowered state schools' league table rankings.

Teachers said pupils would be given an "empty promise" that once trained in a trade they would be able to secure a job. They added that the schools would widen the divide between academic and vocational qualifications.

Baljeet Ghale, a former NUT president, told the conference: "We know which students will be the losers – students with special educational needs, challenging students, and all those students who may not attain the all-important five GCSEs including English and maths which a school currently needs to achieve to get high up in the league table. Pupils from some backgrounds could be "stereotyped" and pushed into taking courses that which might not meet their needs or aspirations, she argued.

"We need to be extremely concerned about this. Going back to an already discredited policy which we had decades ago can only lead to a difference in value between different types of institution."

John Bangs, the union's assistant secretary, said pupils were not ready to decide whether to take a vocational or academic route at 14. "This is selection by direction and selection by assumption," he said.

Technical schools will only offer academic GCSEs and A-levels in "core subjects", but will be twinned with universities.

Last week, the government said the first technical school would open in 2012 in the West Midlands, specialising in engineering and manufacturing. Pupils will take GCSEs in English, maths and science along with a practical subject. Six similar schools, to be run as academies, are planned.

The Conservatives promise technical schools in 12 cities in England if elected.

Michael Gove, the shadow schools secretary, said he had "heard from teachers what's wrong in their view with state education" and would allow them to set up their own schools.

A spokesman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families said: "This is about giving young people a far greater choice in what to study."

Document 4

Going Liberal on Wall Street

Jojo Mukherjee, *Business Today*, Spring 2009

The liberal arts in America were originally thought to be highly appropriate for preparing young people to engage all aspects of a democratic society. It is we who in later generations have lost this acute appreciation--much to our country's disadvantage. Our founding fathers thought that a liberal education was the most useful source of knowledge and skill for engaging occupations in law, commerce, military, theology, teaching, and the arts. This is still the case despite those who wish to distort history and provide us with but narrow learning for fleeting occupations."

This is what Dr. William Durden, president of Dickinson College, a small liberal arts institution in the heart of Pennsylvania, had to say when asked about the relevance of a liberal arts education in the complex world of quantitative finance. While the issue is not likely to be resolved in the near future, I think it fair to say that, like most scenarios, a liberal arts education has its advantages and disadvantages.

One of the major pluses of a non-technical education is the emphasis on inter-personal skills. Students in liberal arts take courses in diverse fields like History, Political Science, and English. It enables them to engage in meaningful conversation on a variety of social, economic, and political issues. In a world defined increasingly by its 'flattening' landscape, these are skills that can be invaluable in any setting.

In an April 2005 *BusinessWeek* article, Jonathan Jones, co-head of U.S. Campus Recruiting at the global investment bank Goldman Sachs, commented that "interpersonal and communications

skills, as well as a hunger for knowledge, are enormously important. None of these things necessarily have to do with a course that the student is studying." Patti Harley, who oversees training for analysts and associates at Citigroup, agreed. "The way we train people takes everybody's skills and gets them to an even playing field." The initial training program at Citigroup consists of all the basic accounting and finance concepts that are required to do the job.

Numerous top executives in major financial institutions hold liberal arts degrees. Hank Paulson, former Chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs, is a perfect example. Paulson, an English major in college, was also the United States Treasury Secretary under the Bush administration.

Another great advantage of a liberal arts education is the emphasis on a broader perspective. David Creelman, in his article 'The Liberal Arts and Business,' says, "The liberal arts teaches people to deal with ambiguity, emotion, complexity, and interpretation. These are critical issues in business, particularly as you move higher up in the organization." He goes on to quote Northorpe Frye: "the kind of problem literature raises is not the kind that you ever solve." It is precisely the kind of skill that one requires in an upper management position.

Leo I. Higdon Jr., former president of the College of Charleston, believes that "a good liberal arts education teaches a student how to deal with enormous amounts of data, how to consider the sources of information and the inaccuracies, biases,

perspectives, and blind spots those sources might harbor.” This is particularly relevant in light of the present economic crisis. He also believes that liberal arts students not only learn to analyze data but also present it in a manner that is logical and facilitates easy comprehension. These are invaluable and extremely marketable skills.

However, not everyone agrees that liberal arts is the best way to break into quantitative finance. Jeff Leech, International HR Manager at Raytheon in Saudi Arabia points out that “most employers want more than ‘well read’ candidates. They want specific skill sets.” Places like Wharton and Sloan have career centers focused specifically on finance, where students are encouraged to start their job search at a very early stage. In fact, many students look for relevant internships right after freshman year. When compared to most liberal arts colleges’ philosophy of exploring various fields before picking a major, students in technical schools have a distinct advantage.

Business focused colleges also tend to have more alumni in the field. It therefore helps students network with a significant number of professionals in their chosen area. Alumni can not only help students understand various developments in the business world but also answer any questions or doubts that they may have. They can also keep students updated on any internship or job positions that open up in their department.

Another advantage that technical colleges have over their liberal arts peers is campus recruitment. Major finance companies tend to hire most of their candidates from places like Wharton and Stern as opposed to some of their lesser known liberal arts counterparts. Many companies don’t even visit liberal arts colleges, barring a few top ones. Consequently, it becomes extremely difficult for most liberal arts students to get an opportunity to market their skills.

Timothy Dann, Director of Interest Rate Derivatives Trading at the global financial services firm Société Générale, believes that “a liberal arts education enables one to know a little bit about a lot as opposed to a lot about a little.” When asked if liberal arts students were at a disadvantage while vying for quantitative finance positions, Dann said, “absolutely positively yes.” He went on to add that “while this broad base of knowledge is excellent preparation for a role in senior management on Wall Street, new hires obviously lack the appropriate experience credentials for such roles. Instead the inexperienced new hire is usually deemed attractive for his specific technical skills, such as facility with contemporary software or mathematical finance excellence.” Such skills are obviously not the prerogative of a liberal arts education. In these tough times when everyone is looking to cut costs, it would make sense for employers to hire candidates who would require minimal training and could be on the job as soon as possible.

Dr Steven Erfle, Associate Professor of International Business and Management at Dickinson College, offers a slightly different perspective. Dr Erfle, who got his PhD in economics from Harvard University, asserts that “liberal arts students are only at a disadvantage in applying for quantitative positions if they have not undertaken quantitative coursework during their college careers. There are plenty of ways to show quantitative literacy beyond simply taking a finance class at a business school.”

Irrespective of their educational background, students can do a lot by themselves to distinguish them from their peers. Whether it is taking a Finance class for a liberal arts student or an English or Political Science class for a quant, I believe the onus is on students to go beyond the prescribed learning material and widen their horizons. That, more than anything else, will help them succeed in Wall Street and indeed in life.

Analyse des documents

Document 1

- observation : dependence on the physical world

- author's views on the qualities of the craftsman :

- craftsman is more informed of the real nature of objects and less submitted to the deceptive images of publicity
- on the political level, technical skills are more valuable than the rhetoric of the demagogue
- the fact that manual work pays well should suggest that it does require some genuine knowledge

- today's society views and expectations :

- craftsman considered more narrow-minded and intellectually poorer than the consumer
- the scope limitation of the craftsman's skills is at odds with the current capitalist society praising flexibility and versatility
- that's why today's parents want their children to have a broad college education that will guarantee adaptability rather than a specific technical training considered as a dead end but this view of education reflects a bias against the limited specialisation of craftsmanship and in favour of the all-purpose figure of the manager

- conclusion : one should not oppose different types of knowledge, for manual work is indeed intellectually challenging

Document 2

- personal anecdote + observation :

- unable to hang frames in her flat, the author needs professional assistance but doesn't feel comfortable about it
- a major issue in today's knowledge economy - the lack of manual skills fosters dependence and alienates individuals

- generally held view of manual work :

- vocational education is rejected as narrow-minded and future-blocking

- advantages of manual work :

- technical skills are urgently needed

- more lucrative than college education
- manual work is not only rewarding in financial but also in personal terms as it offers a higher quality of life and gives workers more dignity
- a way of freeing oneself from the utilitarianism of today's world
- promoting a more creative society

Document 3

- the Government's plan :

- opening new technical schools in the coming
- thus reviving a long-forgotten institution
- aim : give youngsters a greater choice

- teachers' criticisms :

- social discrimination : pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and poorly-performing pupils
- inequalities between schools will be reinforced
- selection comes too early

Document 4

- the advantages of a liberal arts education :

- developing inter-personal skills (= ability to hold a conversation about any kind of subject)
- developing analytical and synthetical skills

- the case for a technical education :

- employers are looking for specific skills rather than general knowledge
- job search starts at an early stage (on campus)
- technical schools have a more efficient alumni network
- in times of crisis, employers prefer hiring staff that don't need any particular training

- third point of view :

- liberal arts and technical education should not necessarily be opposed and can be complementary

Proposition de corrigé

General knowledge vs technical skills

In today's highly competitive economy, having a university degree seems to be the best way to secure one's future on the job market. Yet, this path is increasingly questioned and in the light of the four documents – an excerpt from Matthew B. Crawford's essay *Shop Class As Soulcraft*, two articles from *The Guardian*, one by Libby Brooks, the other by Jessica Shepherd, and an article from *Business Today* – one may wonder whether manual work and technical skills are not more rewarding than general knowledge.

In the current societies, Matthew B. Crawford says, the craftsman is considered more narrow-minded and intellectually poorer than the figure of the consumer, who is more detached from the material world. The scope of his skills is indeed at odds with the current capitalist economy, which praises flexibility and versatility, two qualities, the *Business Today* article suggests, that a liberal arts education enables one to develop, together with analytical and synthetical skills as well as the ability to hold a conversation about any kind of subject, a very useful and highly valued skill for companies.. That's why parents want their children to go to college, both Matthew Crawford and Libby Brooks explain, rather than getting a specific technical training they regard as leading nowhere. As the British Government decides to open new technical schools in the coming years, Jessica Shepherd explains, in order to open youngsters' perspectives and widen their career choices, thus reviving a long forgotten tradition in the British educational system, teachers' unions stand up in arms against such a policy, on the grounds that it will foster social discrimination for poorly-performing pupils who often come from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, they claim it is a form of selection that comes at too early an age and that it will reinforce inequalities between schools.

The problem, for Matthew Crawford, is that such a view may reflect a bias against the limited specialisation of craftsmanship and in favour of the all-purpose figure of the manager, whereas our society is in urgent need of technical skills, which, for that reason, are more lucrative than college education, as the article by Libby Brooks makes it clear. Technical schools, *Business Today* argues, have a more efficient alumni network than liberal arts colleges, as employers are increasingly looking for specific skills rather than general knowledge, and in a time of crisis, they prefer hiring staff that don't need any particular training and can start working straightaway. But technical skills and manual work are also rewarding on the personal, social and political levels. According to Libby Brooks, they offer a higher quality of life and give workers more dignity, as they are a way of freeing oneself from the utilitarianism of the world. They enable one to promote a more creative society. As for Matthew Crawford, he underlines that the craftsman's technical skills are more precious than the rhetoric of the demagogue because the former is more informed of the real nature of objects and less submitted to the deceptive images of advertising.

Manual work is indeed intellectually challenging, and ultimately, liberal arts, technical skills and manual work should not be opposed, *Business Today* contends, but rather be seen as complementary.

536 words