a house for craft.
This reflection provides a brief, substantiated account of my graduation research and design. I reflect on the initial goals of the project and the methods and positions adopted during the process. I conclude with an evaluation of my outcomes thus far and respond with new goals for the final phases of design.

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I
IN SUPPORT OF CRAFT

My motivation for researching craft began with a respect for the beauty of materials and for the skill and artistry of those who work with them. My research intentions were to assess at a general level the meaning and role of craft in contemporary culture, and to explore via programme and materiality craft’s relationship to architecture and the city. These goals were anchored by wider social views, namely that I believe that supporting crafts and advocating for craftsmanship is an important task for the present and the future, and that by promoting craft we are inherently supporting multi-dimensional learning; material skills; local jobs; inter-disciplinary collaboration; personal development and creativity.
II
UNDERSTANDING CRAFT

Through Literature
My preliminary research on craft was conducted in several mediums and at varying scales of investigation. The first segment of my research focused on a general literature review of craft discourse. The intention of this phase was to probe the meaning and role of craftsmanship in order to establish a broad but critical foundation for further research by design. This research culminated in a paper titled ‘Understanding Craft,’ which sought to identify important issues and trends in contemporary craft, beginning with a brief overview of historical craft debate and moving to a broadened definition of craft and workmanship today.

My research found that the craft industries are diverse and hard to define. Situated between art, design, and production, contemporary craft seeks to carve out a focus distinct from the others. For craft, this primary focus is materiality, which defines the core of craft skill and practice, and is a key tenet of contemporary craft identity.

Beyond the complexity of definitions, the literature review brought forward several themes for consideration. These themes included the meaning of craftsmanship and its role today; craft as a material discourse; craft in education; craft interventions in industry; and craft in the city. These findings were in keeping with the architectural themes of the studio.

Through Film
Early in the semester I travelled to London to film for three days in a stained glass workshop. Film proved an ideal medium to record and share the multi-dimensional, subtle and often overt logics of the craft process. The film captured actions and reactions; minutes and hours of work. Skill and time — two primary ingredients of craftsmanship. The film also required reflection on my part: what to show, how to show it, and why. In doing so I reflected on what I had witnessed, and attempted to organize my findings into a cogent narrative. This process was both a challenge and a responsibility, as I felt I had a responsibility to the craftsman to translate his words and actions honestly and effectively into a new medium for a new audience.

Through Interviews
While in London I conducted interviews with three different stained glass artists about their working methods, their views on the stained glass as a craft versus an art, and their opinions on the state of craft in the 21st century. These interviews helped me to articulate and position my on views on these subjects, by discussing them with people in the field.
Through the Web
In addition to literary sources, my early research relied heavily on websites of existing institutes and organizations for the applied arts and design. By reading their mission statements, events, and publications, I was able to form a more complete picture of how the crafts are represented and disseminated to the public and within the field.

Through Material
An on-going theme in my research and design is the use of stained glass. I began this research with the film, and expanded it to include an overview of the craft’s history and contemporary usage. I also looked at the specific qualities of the material in the overall context of architectural projects. The most significant observation I made during this phase was that stained glass is best understood from the interior, and that the interior room and the glass must work together towards an overall unity of expression.

Moreover, working with glass directly underscored for me the importance and difficulties of craftsmanship. By endeavoring to work with glass myself, I learned that my aspirations in design far exceeded my current capabilities in craft skills, tools, time and resources. It became abundently clear by working with the material myself that gaining craft skills is not easy, nor is it common in architectural education.

This material research was and continues to be an invaluable link between my abstract research into craftsmanship and the more concrete task of developing a building design. Working with glass by hand has necessitated engaging with the material at multiple levels and scales. Although it has been difficult, my architectural ideas have gained direction and character from the direct input of the material.

Through Site
Another important research method I used to explore craft was to test scenarios within an existing context. Prior to my P1 I found a site in central Amsterdam which I felt was strongly suited to hosting a cultural function related to craft. As my research developed, I tested programmes on the site and studied possible building areas. What could craft bring to the city, and visa versa?
III
THE CASE FOR A COUNCIL

The organizing theme for the studio was ‘Cultures of Craft.’ This theme suggested several general categories of building and functions for research:

- places of production
- places of education
- places of representation and/or dissemination

From the outset of the studio, I was interested in the broader implications of craft education and policy in society. How do we teach and promote crafts today, and what architectural programmes or building types could help further this agenda?

My personal research focus turned to craft knowledge and discourse at the level of representation and agency. I became particularly interested in the disciplinary ties that bring disparate organizations and individuals together: the umbrella organizations supporting craftspeople. This lead me to examine the role of guilds, and their contemporary model: the craft council. Generally speaking, craft councils are organizations that represent the interests of the entire industry to the public, to professionals and to the government. They are representational bodies whose purpose is to educate, promote and support the crafts.

In researching the company structure and architecture of three established craft councils world-wide (the UK Craft Council, the American Craft Council and the German Handwerkskammer), two problem statements emerged:

1. Generally, craft councils do not have a public face within the city. They are therefore only partial participants in the public realm.

2. The Netherlands lacks a single authoritative craft partner for craft development and agency.

My design goals followed from these conclusions, responding with the following design question: How might a Dutch craft council extend its presence beyond the web to become a representative civic institution in its own right?
IV
BETWEEN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

My design seeks to responding to the problems and questions raised by my research, namely that craft councils in general are not public venues, despite their public agenda. My building is therefore focused on providing a public-private interface for the council organization. The goal of the project is to provide the craft council with a physical platform to promote craft products and craft discourse. Viewed in this way, my program choice is a direct outcome of my research into representation in the industry.

In general, the programme and spatial hierarchy of the craft council has required a lot of personal reflection as to the role and needs of representation within the craft industry. Combined with the selection of the Weteringschans site in Amsterdam and the consequent introduction of the villa typology, several inherent tensions emerged during the development of the design proposal.

First, a craft council is a representational body and building for craftsmanship — both old and new. The idea of a craft council was attractive programmatically and architecturally. However, designing a craft council meant that my building would not house production functions, but rather would represent the crafts in other ways: via the architecture itself, and via the events hosted within the building. As such, I was aware early on that the architectural design must in itself embody the spirit of craft in some way. Without becoming parody, how could my design represent and embody the ethos of craft? My intention was to use specific building materials, and in particular stained glass, to create an architecture of and for craft.

Second, I wanted the building to be a laison between private office and public research centre. My scheme has fluctuated in tone between the two, and it has been a central challenge of my process to strike an appropriate balance. I have felt this tension most keenly in the evolution of the building plan. The building is both domestic and public in character, and the ground floor especially has been vital to the tone of the project. The conclusions of my research were that the craft council as an entity should be publicly accessible. Translating this into design, the ground floor should feel approachable, not monumental. In essence, it should offer a low-barrier threshold to the public, in order to increase entry and use of the building. It should feel welcoming, not exclusive.
V
THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Following my P2 I re-visited my site during the day and the evening in order to experience the different light conditions and observe the levels of pedestrian and vehicle traffic. During these site visits, I also walked the length of the canal along the facing pedestrian promenade and observed the importance of the canal bends to the visibility of the building site. These walks were vital to my understanding of the site conditions and my subsequent development of urban and massing strategies.

I studied the context further via photographs, satellite images, maps, and archival drawings. It is important to me that the building fits in to its surroundings. This position has brought forward several challenges for design, particularly as pertains to the facade and landscape design. At this stage, I feel more testing is needed to strengthen the relationship between the building and its site, and the building and its neighbours. So far I have employed digital and physical models to test the site conditions. Going forwards, I would like to expand my methods to include collage and drawing in order to gain a greater understanding of how the building works in situ from the street and from the canal.
VI
THE IMPORTANCE OF MATERIALITY

More than a means of understanding craft, my stained glass research has become a means of approaching the building design from multiples angles and at varying scales. In this way, the material choice is not just a surface treatment but is instead both inspiration and motivation for architectonic expression. However, having worked with glass and studied its potential, I have come to equally appreciate the importance of the surrounding materials and the concept of the frame. Stained glass can easily dominate a room or become monumental, so my ongoing design decisions are predicated on a need for balance in the interior in order to create a harmonious environment.

Both the film and my glass trials shaped my design goals for the project. My intentions to use stained glass in the craft council were strengthened by the hands-on knowledge I gained from handling the material in different contexts and in different light conditions. It is my intention that my design proposal will continue to take these observations into account, so that the glass and the building can complement and strengthen each other. Although this is the goal, I do feel, however, as though my building design has unfolded without a specific glass strategy in mind. I now feel it is a challenge to reconcile the design in its schematic form with my pre-conceived goals for materiality and atmosphere. My primary task in design going forward is therefore to ensure that the materials and spatial organization work together as a unified experience and aesthetic composition.