



Craft and Beauty. Craft and Beauty.

They say all things began as nothing. I should believe this, but it is difficult to conceive of nothing in the middle of a world that is so full. I close my eyes and try to picture a darkness, but even that is something. We are told that there was a big bang at the beginning of time that created the universe, but this turns creation into a spectacle. I'm skeptical of showmanship. The romantic in me wants to imagine there was no flash, no bang. Perhaps instead there was a quiet dignity to the spurring of matter from nothingness. I tell myself a story to draw back the darkness and fill the void.

I hold a token of the second bang in my hands. No bang, no show – most would say what I'm holding is just a rock. Walk into any proper house of curiosities and ask to see their hand axes. They will show you something similar to what I hold: a stone resembling an arrowhead with a tip that is honed and sharp. It will be close to the size of a deck of cards and fit comfortably into the hand. Hand axes are frequently cited as the first human-made objects; the oldest specimens, discovered in Ethiopia, are estimated to be about two-and-a-half million years old. We have been molding this world for a very long time.

The hand axes record the first moment that we understood that the world was malleable – that things can change and move, and we can initiate those transformations ourselves. To be human is to tinker, to envision a better condition, and decide to work toward it by shaping the world around us.

In this way, design is a field of transformations concerned with the steps we take to mold our situations. The maker of this hand axe transformed a rock into a tool which allowed him to turn a sealed nut into an open platter; it allowed him to turn beasts on the plain into dinner. The same making instinct was at play when the