

PhD Confirmation Report

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Research Title: Craftivism and the Political Moment

Research Question: Can craftivism create Political Moments?

Sub Questions:

- How is craftivism different from other forms of activism?
- Can a material, craft based practice such as craftivism be understood as a socially engaged art?
- In light of a post-political critique of participation is it possible to initiate political moments through socially engaged artistic practices?
- How do feminist new materialist and posthumanist conceptions of agency and matter reshape our understanding of power and the potential of art to enact social change?

Abstract: This practice-led research project is shaped by an artistic practice that plays in the spaces between craft, socially engaged art, activism, community development and autoethnography. It looks to explore how a particular style of figurative appliqué quilting might be used to initiate what philosopher Jacques Rancière describes as 'political moments' in a post-political environment. Through a series of creative case studies delivered in and with different community groups and organisations, this project will test the material-discursive potential of appliqué quilting to act as a socially engaged strategy for activism.

Importantly, this project doesn't aim to develop a set of tools for leading revolutions or even to create a methodology where outcomes can be reliably repeated. Instead it looks to develop a practice based methodology for becoming more mindful of the patterns of consequential differences and of the overlapping ideas between: art, craft, activism, socially engaged practice, feminist new materialisms, post-political critique, posthumanism and community development theory.

Project Outline:

The practical outcomes of this project will be a body of creative artwork in the medium of appliqué quilted wall hangings made either directly or in-directly in collaboration with different artists, community groups or community organisations, or as part of the artists individual practice. The artwork created will be accompanied by a written exegesis, which in concert with the artwork itself will explore the philosophical and methodological elements of this practice-led research project.



Definition of Key Terms:

- Agency:** Agency, as understood in the context of new materialist philosophy and Karen Barad's concept of Agential Realism is an enactment of the ongoing dynamic material-discursive practice through which boundaries are constituted and through which 'part' of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another 'part' of the world.¹ "Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of "subjects" or "objects" (since they do not preexist as such)... Agency is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity."²
- Cloth art:** A term coined by Australian artist Dawn Fitzpatrick in 1975 to describe a style of figurative textile wall hanging made using the techniques of quilting, patchwork, appliqué, painting and drawing.³
- Craftivism:** A term coined by writer/maker/researcher Betsy Greer in 2003 to describe the use of craft as a strategy for activism.⁴
- Dissensus:** Consists of disruptions that are "not simply a reordering of the relations of power between existing groups; dissensus is not an institutional overturning. It is an activity that cuts across forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception."⁵
- Intra-action:** Is "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies"⁶ – a recognition that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. This is in contrast to *interaction* where it is assumed that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction. *Intra-action* is an acknowledgment that agencies are distinct only in relation to their mutual entanglement – they do not exist as individual elements.⁷
- Political Moment:** "...the incalculable leap of those who decide to demonstrate their equality and organize their refusal against the injustices that promote the status quo."⁸ A political moment occurs "when the temporality of consensus is disrupted... when a force is capable of exposing the imagination of the relevant community and of contrasting it with a different configuration of the relationship of each individual to everyone else."⁹

¹ Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity" in *Material Feminisms*, Alaimo, Stacy and Hekman, Susan eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 144.

² Ibid

³ "1975, English, Poster, chart, other edition: Cloth art [slide] / by Dawn Fitzpatrick and Lee McGorman." *Trove: National Libraries of Australia*, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/14331172?selectedversion=NBD28182902> (accessed 15 December 2014).

⁴ Parker, Rozsika. *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the making of the Feminine* (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), xvii.

⁵ Corcoran, *Editor's Introduction*, 2.

⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.

⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.

⁸ Corcoran, *Editor's Introduction*, 9, 10.

⁹ Rancière, Jaques. *Moments Politiques: Interventions 1977-2009* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009), viii.

Posthumanist: “A refusal to take the distinction between “human” and “nonhuman” for granted”¹⁰ in “... the crucial recognition that nonhumans play an important role in naturalcultural practices, including everyday social practices, scientific practices, and practices that do not include humans.”¹¹

Post-political: “... part of a left critique of global capitalism and (neo) liberal thought. One of the central premises of post-political discourse is that politics proper - politics as a process of opening-out issues to conflict, disagreement, and alternative framings of socio-political relations - is increasingly foreclosed by managerial, technocratic, expert-led, and consensus-seeking approaches and procedures.”¹²

New Materialism: “A theory of the world asserting that: all entities and processes, including human beings, are composed of – or are reducible to – matter, material forces or physical processes.”¹³ New materialism “aims to return to matter, the vivacity denied by social constructivist theories that posit all social processes and, indeed reality itself, as socially and ideologically constituted.”¹⁴

The Political: “A break with the sensory self-evidence of the ‘natural’ order that destines specific groups and individuals to rule, to public or private life, and that delineates between friend and enemy, by pinning bodies down to a certain time and space, that is, by pinning individuals to specific bodies. It invents ways of being, seeing and saying, engenders new subjects, new forms of collective enunciation. And as the principle of this innovative break is the paradoxical presupposition of equality, it is simultaneously an activity in which all can partake, irrespective of the characteristics defining one’s being *in* the situation in question.”¹⁵



INTRODUCTION:

This practice-led research project sits at the intersection of three seemingly distinct disciplines: craft, socially engaged art and activism. Each has their own distinct history and forward trajectories, however they share areas of overlap and have points of generative intra-action between them. Intra-action being “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies”¹⁶, a recognition that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. This is in contrast to *interaction* where it is assumed that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction. Intra-action is an acknowledgment that agencies are distinct only in relation to their mutual

¹⁰ Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 32.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Tsouvalis, Judith and Waterton, Claire. *Connected Communities: Public Participation as a Process of Depoliticization*, Arts and Humanities Research Council UK (Lancaster: Lancaster University, 2012) <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Connected-Communities/Scoping-studies-and-reviews/Documents/Public%20participation%20as%20a%20process%20of%20de-politicization.pdf> (accessed on 6 March 2015).

¹³ Barrett, Estelle, and Bolt, Barbara. *Carnal Knowledge Towards a ‘New Materialism’ Through the Arts* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ Corcoran, Steven. “Editor’s Introduction” in *Dissensus: On Political and Aesthetics*, Jaques Rancière (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) 7.

¹⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.

entanglement, they do not exist as individual elements.¹⁷ Craftivism is one such practice that exists in entangled areas of overlap between disciplines and this practice-led research project looks to explore Craftivism's efficacy across these difference disciplines.

Craftivism is a term first coined by writer/maker/researcher Betsy Greer in 2003 to describe a growing international movement of artists, craftspeople and hobbyists alike who are using craft as a strategy for activism.¹⁸ Greer writes that craftivism is a "quiet" form of activism, where individual artists, craft collectives or larger community groups of 'amateur' craftspeople work to create something that gets people to "ask questions about the social and political intentions of that creation".¹⁹ Greer goes on to explain that generally speaking craftivism's goal is "to question, disrupt or replace the dominant models of mass culture and consumerism"²⁰, as well as to empower others and to activate communities, so that they too might "make boldly, make with the greater good in mind, and make in order to nourish".²¹ This aim is grounded in the belief that "the creation of things by hand leads to a better understanding of democracy because it reminds us that we have power."²² Yet the question remains: Does craftivism create political moments, and if so how?

Craftivism as a practice of making involves both a direct engagement with matter and some sort of social participation or dialogic exchange with other people. In this way craftivism is a "material-discursive"²³ practice that is a practice concerned with both discursive practices and material phenomena in an attempt to take account of both human and non-human forms of agency as well as the entanglement of these agencies.²⁴ Its efficacy lies in its ability to create "tension between the message and the medium"²⁵. While the subject of craftivist work can be highly political the medium of craft (whether it's knitting, mosaics, cross stitching or appliqué) is familiar, sensual and often humorous. Some examples of artists and art collectives whose work I feel exemplifies this play between message and medium include: The Guerilla Girls, The Craftivist Collective, Knit your Revolt, feminist artists Suzanne Lacy, Judy Chicago, Tracey Emin, Miriam Schapiro and more contemporary textile artists such as Lauren O'Farrell and Melbourne's own Kate Just and Sayraphim (Sarah) Lothian.

While 'craftivism' is relatively new term, it's grounded in a long tradition within the feminists movement of using craft as a part of activist and advocacy activities. Feminist activists going as far back as the suffragette movement in the late 19th and early 20th century right up until today's craftivist movement have used craft to help communicate their messages. Feminists have often chosen to working in those craft practices that were traditionally considered 'women's work', such as: needlework, appliqué and knitting, as a way of challenging the very notion of 'femininity' and women's place and power within society. Another important way that craft has enabled the feminist movement is by providing women with a socially acceptable reason for gathering in groups where they might speak freely. Rozsika Parker gives an example of this in her book *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminie* which was first published in 1984, describing how in the 19th century: "sewing allowed women to sit

¹⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.

¹⁸ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, xvii.

¹⁹ Greer, Betsy ed., *Craftivism*. (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014) 8

²⁰ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, xvii.

²¹ Greer, *Craftivism*, 8.

²² Ibid.

²³ Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988) 575-99.

²⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 66.

²⁵ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, xv.

together without feeling they were neglecting their families, wasting time or betraying their husbands by maintaining independent social bonds.”²⁶ While it may seem the need for such an excuse for women to get together is no longer needed in contemporary western society, unrestricted spaces where women come together and feel safe to make and talk are still very important. A fact that is perhaps best evidenced by the worldwide phenomena best known as the ‘Stitch’n Bitch’²⁷, which goes back as far as World War II and is still going strong today.

As a textile artist and a feminist my work is strongly influenced by this long history of craft as a feminist strategy for activism. However, the practice is perhaps more significantly influenced by the history of my own family, especially the life and artistic practice of my paternal grandmother Australian textile artist Dawn Fitzpatrick. It was Dawn who first coined the term ‘cloth art’ to describe her unique style of figurative textile wall hangings made using quilting, patchwork, machine embroidery, appliqué, drawing and painting techniques.²⁸ She worked in this style since the early 70’s and in 1975 she held one of her first major exhibitions in the medium titled “Cloth Art” at the West Street Gallery, Sydney. This intergenerational grounding for my practice informs the autoethnographic thread of this research, and feeds into one of my main case studies: a collaborative project with Dawn herself, who is now 93 years old. This collaboration will form part of a series of different small craftivist projects, or ‘case studies’, which I plan to conduct as part of this practice-led research. These case studies are designed to test if and how craftivism can bring about political moments by exploring different approaches to making craftivist work. These case studies will be broken into three different categories:

- 1) INDIVIDUAL - Experiments within my own practice, which will involve making craftivist artworks in cloth art about the social/political/environmental issues that I am concerned about.
- 2) COLLABORATIVE - Experiments in collaboration with other artists, where artwork is created about issues we are relevant to us both.
- 3) SOCIALLY ENGAGED - Experiments in using a socially engaged approach, where I will either make work or facilitate the making of work about issues that community members, community partners and workshop participants are concerned about.

As an emerging practitioner I will be developing my methods and methodology in an iterative and heuristic manner as this research project unfolds. The following report aims to provide a picture of what these case studies will look like, including examples of some case studies that I have already completed. These initial experiments and case studies will be discussed in the context of the conceptual frameworks informing my practice. As my project is practice led and I am still at the early stages of my studio experimentation the following report will feel more like a collection of patches than a finished quilt top, the ideas are there but the picture has not yet fully emerged.



Part 1 - Individual Practice

²⁶ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 15.

²⁷ Stitch ‘n Bitch <http://stitchnbitch.org/> (accessed 6 April 2015).

²⁸ “1975, English, Poster, chart, other edition: Cloth art [slide] / by Dawn Fitzpatrick and Lee McGorman.” *Trove: National Libraries of Australia*, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/14331172?selectedversion=NBD28182902> (accessed 15 December 2014).

During the first year of this PhD I have focused on locating my research within the field of socially engaged art, craft and contemporary arts practices as well as on starting to experiment in the studio. I began my practice-led inquiry through experimenting in creating craftivist works around the issues and current events which concern me personally. Following these initial experiments I began to develop and create work through my collaborative and socially engaged practices also, these will be discussed in the following sections. This section of the report will describe my initial experiments and introduce some of the conceptual issues that have begun to emerge as a result of my practice. (Images of the work described in this section can be found in the appendix section 1.0)

It was important to begin my enquiry by experimenting with techniques, developing an aesthetic and exploring methods for creating more detailed figurative work using in cloth. This process involved testing out different patchwork and appliqué patterns using my grandmother's artworks and using her book *Folk Art Appliqué Quilts (1990)* as a guide. Out of these experiments I created several artworks, which I then proceeded to test in different environments and with different audiences in order to begin to understand how people relate and respond to these works. These artworks include two 'protest banners' that I carried at a public protest in Melbourne's CBD against the forced closure of Aboriginal communities in WA (rally held: 13/03/2015). I also made two artworks for specific events I was involved in, the first being Kate Just's 'one word protest' badge making project at the 'Craftivism Day' held at the Atrium in Fed Square on Monday 4 August. The second was for a film screening hosted by the Wilin Centre held as part of the 2014 Reconciliation Week at VCA. The artwork I made was an Aboriginal flag with the word 'sorry' quilted into many times, during the event people were asked to sign as a show of solidarity. The VCA student union used the piece at a few event and we then gifted to the artwork to the Wilin Centre. These initial experiments have enabled me to design the collaborative and socially engaged case studies that I have started to deliver as part of this research. However, I remain critical of how successful these works were so far as being able to create political moments.

The question of whether craftivism can actually create political moments seems to be most poignant at the level of my individual practice, as according to French philosopher and political theorist Jacques Rancière "activism is defined in relation to its reconfiguration of the forms of community."²⁹ That is how actions are able to change the way the ways that power is distributed in relation to the principles of social justice. Rancière goes on to say that "...the political exists only through the action of collective subjects who concretely change situations by asserting their creativity and reconstructing the world..."³⁰ Implying that the individual action of an artist who creates work and then shows it in the context of a gallery cannot bring about a concrete political change, regardless of the works intent, as there was no collective action involved. However, this question is just as important to consider in the context of my collaborative and socially engaged practices, because as Claire Bishop in her book *Artificial Hells (2012)* explains:

"Participatory art is not an privileged political medium, nor a ready-made solution to a society of the spectacle, but is as uncertain and precarious as democracy itself; neither are legitimated in advance but need to continually be performed and tested in every specific context."³¹

²⁹ Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, 159.

³⁰ Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, ix.

³¹ Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London, New York: Verso, 2012), 284.

At this point it is relevant to elaborate on what I mean when I use the term 'political moment'. According to writer and translator Steven Corcoran, who has translated several works by Rancière and Alain Badiou, a political moment is: "...the incalculable leap of those who decide to demonstrate their equality and organize their refusal against the injustices that promote the status quo."³² As Rancière himself explained, a political moment occurs:

"...when the temporality of consensus is disrupted... when a force is capable of exposing the imagination of the relevant community and of contrasting it with a different configuration of the relationship of each individual to everyone else."³³

For Rancière the type of force that can bring about 'political moments' is one that can open up spaces for dissensus.³⁴ Where dissensus is understood as any "activity that cuts across forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception."³⁵ This understanding of a political moment forms part of a 'post-political' left wing critique of global capitalism and (neo)liberal thought as put forward by political theorists such as Rancière and Slavoj Žižek who work in the traditions of Hegelianism, Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis.³⁶ My research project looks to explore the implications of a post-political critique for socially engaged art, as:

"One of the central premises of post-political discourse is that politics proper - politics as a process of opening-out issues to conflict, disagreement, and alternative framings of socio-political relations is increasingly foreclosed by managerial, technocratic, expert-led, and consensus-seeking approaches and procedures."³⁷

This statement directly challenges the work of many socially engaged practitioners who according to Grant Kester, author of *Conversation Pieces (2013)*, are seeking to activate art's emancipatory potential "through processes of dialogue and collaborative production."³⁸ This is because according to a post-political critique public participation can be understood as a "consensus building strategy that forecloses the political and is interpreted as a strategy of de-politicization."³⁹ This problematises the use of participatory and consensus building practices within socially engaged art and presents socially engaged practitioners with an important challenge: can socially engaged art create political moments? Or, does it actually work to diminish people's political agency? This is something I will explore in my practice-led research by testing the possibilities of making craftivist work that opens up spaces for dissensus and acts as way of disrupting, questioning and/or revealing power structures. To do so I seek to explore how through practice how dissensus is performed and presented, how it might be made visible, and how in turn one can become mindful of the patterns of difference and sameness that dissensus reveals.

In order to do so I will be engaging philosophically in an exploration of the overlaps and generative tensions between Rancière's concept of dissensus and Donna Haraway and

³² Corcoran, *Editor's Introduction*, 9, 10.

³³ Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, viii.

³⁴ Corcoran, *Editor's Introduction*, 2.

³⁵ Corcoran, *Editor's Introduction*, 2.

³⁶ Tsouvalis, et al. *Connected Communities*, 5.

³⁷ Tsouvalis, et al. *Connected Communities*, 5.

³⁸ Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces: community and communication in modern art*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2013) 153

³⁹ Tsouvalis, et al. *Connected Communities*, 5.

Karen Barad's conception of diffraction. Diffraction is a form of physical optics that informs new materialist methodologies. Diffraction methodologies, in contrast to geometric optics such as reflection and reflexivity, allow for "the processing of small but consequential differences"⁴⁰ in a way that is "respectful of the entanglement of ideas and other materials"⁴¹. A simple way to visualise what a diffraction pattern looks like is to imagine dropping a stone into a still lake, followed by another – where the ripples overlap as the waves move through each other what we see on the surface of the water is a diffraction pattern. I suggest that similarly to diffraction dissensus can also be understood as a pattern of small but consequential differences, of interference and intra-action, of people's beliefs, opinions and actions. To explain this visually I ask you to try and imagine for a moment that you are looking down at a groups of people in a park. You see them as dots in the landscape, congregating in different sized groups, moving about at their own pace. Now imagine drawing concentric circles that ripple out from each of these dots – like the ripples around the stone dropped in the still lake – these ripples are the thoughts, ideas, beliefs, behaviours and actions of the people they emanate from. As these waves move through each other the peaks and troughs interact and create a bigger and more complex pattern – a diffraction pattern. Seeing these patterns you can now see how they are influencing the movements of the dots as well as the waves that emanate from them as they shape and are shaped by the turbulence around them. If we were to find ways to make visible these patterns within society and if we were then able to read this pattern for meaning, what would they reveal? How would they reshape the way we imagine society and the ways we go about trying to govern or improve it?

Pushing this idea even further is the post-humanist position of new materialist philosophy that refuses to "take the distinction between "human" and "nonhuman" for granted".⁴² And in so doing opens up a space for understanding how the agency enacted by non-human or natural phenomena impacts our lives. Using the example of the people in the park described above, the implications of this is that diffraction pattern we can observe is not merely a result of the 'waves' emanating from the people in the park but also from the ways these 'waves' intra-act with the park itself – in other words the way in which the trees, rocks, bodies of water, quality of the air, the elevation of the land etc. are inspiring and influencing the thoughts, ideas, beliefs, behaviours and actions of the people. This post-humanist approach is crucial for enabling the "recognition that nonhumans play an important role in "natural-cultural"⁴³ practices, including everyday social practices, scientific practices, and practices that do not include humans."⁴⁴ A recognition that has both practical and ethical implications for how we understand the world around us and our place within it. Coming back to my own practice, taking a post-humanist philosophical position also enable me to explore how my art making is shaped and influenced by the material I work with and the environments I work in. Throughout my research I will endeavour to remain mindful of both the human and non-human agents with which I am intra-acting and attempt to articulate the ways in which these agents are co-responsible for the creation of this artwork.

This potential connection/relationship between dissensus and diffraction is something that I need to further explore through practice in order to unpack its implications and its potential methodological applications.

Part 2 – Methodology/ Collaborative Practice

⁴⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 29.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 32.

⁴³ Haraway,

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The following section will explore my collaborative practice, which for this research project will primarily involve a collaborative case study with my grandmother Dawn Fitzpatrick. However, before I describe how our collaboration will unfold I wanted to share a case study from a socially engaged cloth art project Dawn attempted in the early 90's. (Images of the work described in this section can be found in the appendix section 2.0)

Throughout her years as a practicing cloth artist Dawn ran workshops and classes for people interested in learning about her practice and collaborated with artists and quilters alike to create her large-scale hangings. Upon commencing this research project and after having started practising in the medium of cloth art, Dawn gave me an unpublished manuscript about her most ambitious socially engaged cloth art project – the Jerusalem project. In it she describes her experience, includes images of her work in progress and the completed artworks and reflects on her experience retrospectively. The following description of Dawn's project is sourced from this manuscript.

In 1992 Dawn left Sydney for Jerusalem with a plan to deliver a project aimed at facilitating collaboration between women from Jewish, Muslim and Christian/Catholic faiths through a collaborative cloth art-making project. Retrospectively, this project can be seen as an early predecessor of current attempts to facilitate peace through creative and intercultural exchanges. However at the time, according to Dawn's unpublished manuscript, she faced many challenges in implementing her big idea.

Dawn tried to gain support for the project in the way of funding from several different sources within Australia including: the Australian Council for the Arts, the NSW government Arts grants for women and the Prime Minister's department and Foreign Affairs amongst others. Throughout the process of applying for these grants it became clear that there was little interest or understanding of this type of project – a project that we would now describe as socially engaged. Apparently, one of the women to interview her sarcastically asked if she was trying to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Despite the lack of financial support Dawn left for Israel anyway, determined to see the project through. She spent a totally of four and a half months working on this project in Jerusalem and while she was there she lived with her son Ben, who is my father. I was about 5 years old at the time and remember seeing her working on her hangings day and night during that time, however I didn't speak English until I moved to Australia nearly four years later so Dawn remained an enigma to me.

Dawn, having seen her community workshops in Australia dissolves barriers between disparate groups of women wanted to see if she could replicate this effect in Jerusalem. In her manuscript she wrote that when facilitating workshops in Australia with diverse groups of women from difference socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds that "by the end of the week they were exchanging materials, ideas, techniques and addresses. That is all I wished to achieve in Jerusalem." Unfortunately, after approaching many different women from different faith groups and organisations she found that the political and cultural barriers to facilitating such a collaborative project were almost too great. Dawn concluded by writing "...I knew then that my concept of working with this multifarious group of women was possible for someone but absolutely impossible for me. One day perhaps!" Despite this Dawn did find support to complete what is now referred to as her Jerusalem series. Through this support she become the first artist-in-residence at the New Jerusalem Foundation building. Dawn made a total of seven hangings and five smaller works on keffiyehs (Arab head scarves) as well as one additional hanging in collaboration with my older sister Sofia (who is also an artist) and who worked with Dawn as her assistant during her residency.

This 'Jerusalem Project' sets an interesting precedent for my own socially engaged cloth art practice and I will continue to use Dawn's unpublished manuscript as a touchstone throughout this project, incorporating it into both my creative and written work. As part of our collaboration for this research project I am going to attempt to begin archiving and cataloguing Dawn's work. As well as conduct some on-camera interviews with her in order to find out more about her practice and the politics behind it.

Dawn who as I mentioned is now 93, lives in the Blue Mountains has been unable to make cloth art for almost 15 years as a result of arthritis and other health issues. However, she continues to practice drawing everyday. Since I began practicing in cloth art through this research project Dawn and I have been in conversation via mail and phone and she is very interested in collaborating with me on the creation of cloth art and in holding a joint exhibition. Our idea for a collaborative art making project is that I will remake, reinterpreted and reimaging Dawns artwork through my own practice. This intra-generational collaboration will form the basis of my autoethnographic exploration and be used as a key case study in this research. The way we are planning to collaborate is a little different to how many artists collaborate, where artists either work together or have a back and forth dialog about the work they are making. Instead, Dawn will be sending me her drawings, and using these drawings as stimulus I will then make cloth artworks. Meaning that in essence I will be collaborating more with the material art object then with Dawn as a human collaborator. It is here – in an attempt to understand, unpack and explain what is happening during this collaborative process that theoretically the work of New Materialists starts to become very useful. Specifically their ideas on vibrant matters, intra-action⁴⁵ as opposed to interaction, and their reshaping of agency in light of posthumanist philosophy. Feminist theory and history will so be an important lens through which I will look to develop an understanding of the outcomes of this collaboration. Particularly how the past, present and future are entangled.

Part 3 – Socially Engaged Practice

There is an interesting point of contention in my work that comes about as a result of the obvious clash between the material based practice of craft and the dialogically driven practice of socially engaged. In a way craftivism forces these two seemingly disparate approaches to art making together. My research looks to understand the implications of this by exploring through practice whether a material, object centred practice can operate within the realm of socially engaged art.

In January of this year I successfully got ethics approval at the start delivering socially engaged case studies as part of my research process. In order to discuss my socially engaged practice I'm going to describe one case study that I have already completed and another which I will start later in the year. The first project I'm going to describe was delivered between January and April of this year at Emerald, Victoria. (Images of the work described in this section can be found in the appendix section 3.0)

Socially Engaged Case Study #1 - Emerald Community House

Background: This project came about as a result of my work as the facilitator for Volunteering Qld's Natural Disaster Resilience Leadership Project. In 2014 I delivered the project in Atherton in the Tablelands Region of north Queensland and the coordinator of Marry Farrow Emerald Community House (in emerald, Victoria) asked to attend the workshop. After learning more about the work that Emerald Community House do in the area of

⁴⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.

community resilience building I invited Mary to attend my workshop as a guest speaker. Mary and I share a passion for delivering innovative grassroots resilience building projects and after the workshop we continued to stay in touch. Towards the end of last year, when I was ready to start experimenting with delivering socially engaged projects as part of my PhD research project I got in touch with Mary and her colleague Noelene and together we came up with the following project.

About ECH: Emerald, Victoria is a peri-urban community situated in the Dandenong Ranges about 50km southeast of Melbourne with a population of around 6,813 (as of the 2011 census). Emerald along with the surrounding regions is at high risk of experiencing natural disasters, particularly extreme storms and bushfires. Emerald Community House, the local neighbourhood centre, is keenly aware of this risk and have been both innovative and proactive in their approach to building community disaster resilience in their region. The most relevant example of this is the annual 'PAVE Arts Festival' which they run in the view that "Any community that can run its own arts festival can get itself organised in times of emergency" – Marry Farrow⁴⁶.

The Project: Mary and Noelene were interested in hosting an art project developed around the theme of resilience that would provide community members with an opportunity to engage in conversations about what resilience means. As well as to contribute/participate in creative process of art making. The project we came up with was particularly targeted at engaging women between the ages of 18-35 and women without children as it was identified that Emerald Community House needed to do more to engage this particular demographic.

Based on these parameters I proposed a two-stage project that involved a two-week on-site residency during which I would make a large cloth art hanging. The theme of the hanging was to be resilience but other than that I had no preconceived ideas of what I would make. The point was to respond to both the site itself and the conversations I had with people from the community. This residency was then followed by an eight-week workshop series where I work with a small group of women to help them make their own cloth art pieces around the theme of resilience. This two-part project culminated in an exhibition of the work made during both the residency and the workshops at Emerald Community House during Emerald's annual PAVE Arts Festival.

Project Timeline:

1. Two week artist in residence at the Emerald Community House hall - January 12th – 24th 2015
2. Eight week workshop series on every Thursday at Emerald Community House from February 5th to 26 March 2015
3. Exhibition of work during PAVE art festival during the 9th -17th April 2015

Project Outcomes

⁴⁶ Emerald Community House <http://www.emeraldcommunityhouse.org.au/> (accessed 6 April 2015)

The residency: On the first day of the residency two different people brought in a book for me to look at. The book, called *Baked Apples on the Tree*⁴⁷, is a collection of first hand accounts, stories, photos, poems and artworks from the local community put together following the Ash Wednesday fires (1983). Mary from Emerald Community House also brought in a folder for me to look through which contained the application they put forward to the state government to have the Cockatoo Kindergarten listed as a site of significance. Cockatoo is the next town over from Emerald, where 6 ppl died and 307 buildings were destroyed during the Ash Wed fires. The kindergarten building saved the lives of 300 people who sheltered in it during the Ash Wednesday fires but had since fallen into disrepair. The council had been planning to demolish the building but instead as a result of community protests the building is now the first Victorian historical fire heritage site and a near \$1million restoration is now underway to have it turned into a memorial/museum commemorating the Ash Wednesday fires. This news was only announced shortly before I started the residency and the tenure to repair the building went out while I was still working in Emerald. The story of the Cockatoo Kindergarten and the way the local community fought to save a physical piece of their local history struck me as an important story of activism and grassroots resistance to explore in cloth.

During the residency, which is not something that Emerald Community House had hosted previously, I was invited to discuss the project on the local community radio station 3MDR. This was as part of a live radio broadcast during a 'community pirate radio' held on Saturday 17th of January. This event involved 3MDR 'annexing' the old police station for community use on behalf of the Emerald and wider Mountain District and Cardinia communities.⁴⁸ This event was another great example of this community exercising their political agency and advocating for the changes that they want to see happen in their community. I was also interviewed about the project for the local newspaper, the Ranges Trader, the article was published on the 27th of January 2015.

The primary artistic outcome of the two-week residency project was the creation of a 2m x 2m cloth artwork titled "Resilience, Resistance and Responsibility". This piece was made in response to the site and to the people who came in and shared their stories with me. I asked people to talk with me about what resilience means for them and how they felt about living in a high-risk area. I also invited people from the community to donate any pieces of fabric they have been holding on to but had no use for. Those who brought in fabric for me to up-cycle also gave me a history of that fabric, sharing who it belonged to, why they were saving it and what it represents to them. Despite the fact I was a stranger from out of town, people shared very individual stories with me during the residency. Including one man who was the sole carer of his disabled adult son, who described how he has had to buy a car he and his son can both sleep in

⁴⁷ Molloy, Icia. (ed) *Baked apples on the tree: Ash Wednesday reflections*, (Cockatoo: Cockatoo Neighbourhood House, 2011)

⁴⁸ 3MDR 97.1FM Radio On Demand, *Stories Of Resilience: Cloth Art Project* - interview (17 January 2015)

http://www.3mdr.com/audio-player.html?title=On%20Demand&restream=true&type=audio%2Fm4a&src=http%3A%2F%2Fmedia.emit.com%2F3mdr%2Fcommunity-outlook%2F201501171300%2Faac_mid.m4a (accessed 15 March 2015)

because on high-risk days they have no-where else to go. For Emerald Community House these stories I was privileged to hear are really important and provide the information they need to accurately represent and advocate on behalf of their community to local council and to emergency services.

The finished hanging hints at the story of how Emerald Community House helped drive the campaign to save the Cockatoo Kindergarten from demolition and have it turned into a memorial/museum for the Ash Wednesday bushfires. It also features three local species of flora and fauna that local environmental groups are working to save from extinction, including the Helmeted Honey Eater, The Orange Bellied parrot and the Emerald Star Bush. There are many other layers of memory and meaning embedded in the quilt which came about as a result of people donating fabric for the project and telling me about the history of that piece of cloth. This cloth artwork is the biggest hanging I've made to date and through the process of making it I learnt a lot about working with material at that scale. It is far from perfect but aesthetically that is partially what I am looking for: evidence of the material enacting its own agency – creasing and stretching according to its own will. The reason I feel this hanging is successful is because people are able to engage with it on multiple levels simultaneously. People engage with it at a material level, touching the work and feeling the contrast in texture of the fabric and the lines made by the stitches of the sewing machine. They also observe it at an optical level, taking in the effects created through the contrast of texture, pattern and colour and appreciating the form of the pictorial and figurative element in the composition. People also read the work for meaning by drawing on their own memories, experiences and associations; Formulating their own stories and interpretations of the work in response to its material presence in a particular place at a particular time. Finally, they discuss the work with one another, observing the similarities and differences between their reading, noting important memories triggered either by the form, content or materiality of the work.

The exhibition was officially opened by Bruce Esplin who is Victoria's first and longest serving emergency services commissioner and an artist in his own right on Sunday the 12th of April. Importantly for Emerald Community House this even provided an opportunity for them to invite community members as well as local officials and emergency management personnel to reflect on the importance of the arts as part of community resilience. During the opening of the exhibition as part of the PAVE art festival the hanging was officially gifted to Emerald Community House. It is hoped that the artwork will eventually hang in the Cockatoo Kindergarten memorial/museum.

The Workshop: The eight-week workshop series was an important experiment for the development of my socially engaged practice. Being the first workshop series I have facilitated in this medium I took guidance from Emerald Community House regarding the way they usually structure their community training. I designed the workshops so that anyone would be able to attend, whether they were experienced quilters or had never made anything in cloth before. I was hoping to get about five participants however, partly because many women who showed interest had to work

during the time of the workshop, only two women participated. One had some experience making quilts and the other had never made any quilts or worked in cloth before. So far as Emerald Community House was concerned these two participants fit their target demographic perfectly, a sign that we had at least promoted the project using the right language.

The two participants were asked to make a cloth art piece on the theme of resilience - whatever that meant for them. Both women ended up creating work about what helps them to be resilient despite living in a high-risk area. They both identified the natural environment as an important factor for their wellbeing and the reason they choose to live where they do. They also talked about the importance of having strong relationships with other people as well as with their pets and other animals and both chose to symbolize this by including figures and animals in their work. One of the women made it her challenge to make the entire hanging out of fabric she had in the cupboard and which she had been holding on to for sentimental reasons. The other, who was new to sewing, purchased a new sewing machine using some money that was recently left to her by her grandmother who had recently passed away and was a quilter herself. She felt that her grandmother would have been very happy and supportive of what she was doing and saw this as an opportunity to honour her memory.

I assumed participants would want to work on their artworks during the workshop but I learnt that they preferred to work from home, on their own sewing machines. Instead we used the workshop time to troubleshoot and learn new skills, approaches and techniques. Over the final two weeks we used the workshop time to finish off the hangings all staying back at the hall until late in the afternoon. Both women proudly exhibited their quilts at the exhibition and expressed a strong sense of pride and accomplishment in their work. They were also very grateful for the way I facilitated the workshops and gave me important feedback on the project that will inform my work going forwards.

Emerald Community House considers this project a success and have invited me back to deliver another project in the second half of 2015. This time the theme for the project is craftivism and it will involve running a one-day mater-class and a ten-week workshop series where people will be invited to create their own cloth art protest banners. Having learnt from this first case study I will change my approach to organizing the workshops and only run them if the minimum of 5 people sign up. This time they will be run a Saturday morning for only an hour and a half. During the workshops we will focus on sharing skills, techniques, fabric, and showing fellow participants the progress from the week while talking politics and activism. This way I hope to engage with more participants and allow participants to focus on making the work at home in their own time without completely missing out on the opportunity to engage in a material based exchange as a group by focusing on pure dialog.

Documentation: I used several different strategies for documenting this case study including taking lots of photos and putting up regular reflections on an online blog which I am using as a 'digital working journal' for this PhD research. Using the blog I was able to document in detail some of my exchanges with people during the residency and put up progress shots of

the making process. The blog also allowed me to interact with some of the community members I had made a connection with online. I had several people write responses to my work on the blog as well as through my facebook page through which I am 'friends' with some Emerald Community members.

As well as the blog I also had participants of the workshops and the community partners provide short, voluntary written reflection about their experience of the project. I plan to continue collecting these written reflections from people involved in this research project and analyze this data in the hope that they provide some insight into how people experience their involvement in such a socially engaged art project. The blog can be accessed online at: www.praxialpractice.wordpress.com

Socially Engaged Case Study #2 - Igniting Change

Project Proposal: The second socially engaged case study I have planned is with a Melbourne based organisation called Igniting Change. Igniting Change is a small charity that works with philanthropists to fund important community projects that don't get funding from other sources, largely because of political reasons. Some of the programs and organisations they fund include: the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, a rehabilitation programs for young men in a high security Victorian prison, support services for victims of domestic violence and young addicted mothers as well as a basketball/afterschool care program for young asylum seekers in south Melbourne. The project they have invited me to work on is one of their ongoing campaign called *See the Person not the Label*. This project will involve a part time 'residency' in their new office space in Balaclava over a period of 6 weeks in late 2015.

The artwork created during this residency will be a response to the organisation, the people involved with this organisation and the stories shared with me during my time there. As with the Emerald Community House residency I try to go into such project without preconceived ideas of what I want to make artwork about. The appliqué-quilted hangings I create will once again be gifted to my host organisation. We are hoping to exhibit them as part of an end of year celebration in the office, open to all those involved with the organisation and the community groups they support.

Brief reflection on socially engaged case studies

What is already becoming clear as a result of the first set of experiments and case studies I have done is the centrality of stories to my practice. It appears that inherent to the logic of cloth art is a process that involves making and layering meaning by patching together cloth in order to create symbols and metaphors to suggest at narrative structures. Even after their completion, these material artworks continue to act as story telling devices, as each time the work is viewed it requires its audience to make meaning of the work by attempting to interpret the story it tells. However, the significant thing about cloth artwork as a form of 'story telling' (if we are to see it as such) is that it is non-prescriptive and non-representational. Instead the work acts as an open-ended invitation for readers to makes their own meaning by drawing on their personal history, experiences, beliefs and expectations. In this way the work is performative and reveals more about the 'reader' and the society they live in than it does about the artist or their intensions.

The importance of the narrative in my practice can perhaps be seen as conflicting with the posthumanist, new materialist position I have taken theoretically. This is because the narrative is bound up a worldview that positions language and words as superior ways of knowing in contrast to physical and material ways of knowing⁴⁹. However, this practice uses physical, material and sensory experiences to trigger memories, ideas, thoughts and conversations. Meaning that it is the very materiality of my methodology is what affects people and what shapes the stories that emerge through an engagement with this practice. Stories that without this interaction with these material processes or object would not have come up. What emerges in this tension between the discursive nature of stories and the material nature of my practice is a question about agency and how it operates within my work. Once again I look to new materialism in order to unpack how a posthumanist understanding of agency might help to articulate how this work enacts agency, and to build a case for how this practice can be understood as both material and discursive.

While it is clear that my work draws on methods and ideas from sensory ethnography as well as autoethnography I do not consider this research project to be an ethnographic. This is because I'm more concerned with developing an understanding of the artwork – its logic, its materiality, how it enacts agency, how it works aesthetically and how it works to create political moments – than developing an understanding of a particular group of people.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Since the emergence of global capitalism and the rise of what Guy Debord describes as the 'Society of the Spectacle'⁵⁰, art's efficacy for making political gestures has become significantly undermined. Bishop identifies that since the 1990's, in a growing movement to reassert the efficacy of art as a political tool, there has been a significant increase in the number of artists interested in participation and collaboration.⁵¹ These artists work largely in post-studio practices that focus on community and collective actions/experience as the site for art making.⁵² The global phenomenon that is the 'social turn' appears to be an attempt to overturn traditional relationships between the art object, the artists and audiences. It is driving a repositioning of the (visual) artist from a sole-creator to a collaborator or facilitator of situations, and is transforming the role of audiences into that of the co-producer or participant.⁵³ Artists working in this diverse field of practice share the common aim of placing "pressure on conventional modes of artistic production and consumption under capitalism."⁵⁴ However Bishop warns that this 'social turn' is not the first movement of its kind and that:

"Each phase has been accompanied by a utopian rethinking of art's relationship to the social and of its political potential – manifested in reconsideration of the ways in which art is produced, consumed and debated."⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 136.

⁵⁰ Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1970).

⁵¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 1, 11, 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

In fact, Bishop goes so far as to question whether this most recent shift of the audience to that of a co-producer is indicative of our “ever increasing voluntary subordination... and of the commoditization of human bodies in a service economy (since voluntary participation is also unpaid labour)”⁵⁶

Kester on the other hand, places more emphasis on the positive and transformative outcomes of ‘dialogic art’, and insists that these projects need to be designed around the values of social justice and reciprocity. He summarizes that while many of the socially engaged artists he interviewed “...maintain a healthy skepticism about the compromised position of art in modern society: its reduction to a fashionable commodity, its role in legitimating corporate wealth”⁵⁷ They also remain “deeply committed to its [art] emancipatory potential...”⁵⁸ Going on to explain that the artists he spoke to:

“...viewed the intensive monetisation of contemporary art as symptomatic of increasing global divisions of class, wealth, and privilege and sought to develop alternative modes of distribution and production for their work, less depended on the legitimating infrastructure of commercial galleries, museums, biennials, magazines, and auction houses.”⁵⁹

However Bishop notes that while the ideas and strategies put forward in participatory practices, including the shift from artist to collaborator and from audience to co-producer “share a common aim to place pressure on conventional modes of artistic production and consumption under capitalism”⁶⁰ they “are often more powerful as ideals than as actualised realities”⁶¹. The issues of the production and consumption of art is an important one for my research project as craft as a field of productions is:

“...still unswervingly devoted to the creation of ‘objects.’ It is defined by the master and enactment of a set of readily identified ‘actions’ (throwing a pot, making a basket, etc.); And, as its very name suggests, it has not yet begun to grapple with the realities of the “post-studio” environment.”⁶²

However, if craftivism is to bring about ‘political moments’ then it must be able to address the challenges posed by post-political critique and the Society of the Spectacle regarding the way that consumption of art objects makes impotent their political intensions. To date, in my own practice, the way I have started to explore the issue of consumption is by taking up ‘gifting’ the work I make during a residency to my community partners. This is done as both a strategy to challenge capitalist habits of production and consumption and as a strategy for building stronger community connections. The notion of the gift as an alternate strategy for engaging in the exchange of goods within a community is discussed in the book *The Gift (1925)* by Anthropologist Marcel Mauss. In his book Mauss describes a mode of exchange that stands independently of the economic models of barter and market economies that we are all familiar with. Instead, in the model he describes goods and services are not bought/sold or exchanged but rather given as gifts. These gifts are given without any explicit agreement for immediate or future compensation however they operate within the context of social norms and customs that oblige people to give, to receive and to

⁵⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 277.

⁵⁷ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 153.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., xix.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Adamson, Glenn. *Thinking Through Craft*, (London and New York Bloomsbury, 2007) 166

reciprocate⁶³. In this way giving gifts, particularly gifts that are handmade and are therefore invested in through the labour of the artist/craftsperson, is a way to develop more meaningful, longer lasting connections with people/communities. For me, it is also a strategy for attempting to avoid the complex ethical implications of asking people to share their stories with you as a socially engaged practitioner so that you might make work out of it that you own and which you can sell. This is a strategy that needs further testing and exploring through practice.

In contrast to craft, socially engaged art is primarily focused on post-studio practices, leaving the object behind in favor of dialogic and performative actions. There are many different definitions of social practice including those of Pablo Helguera, author of *Education for Socially Engaged Art (2011)*, Grant Kester, author of *Conversation Pieces (2013)* and Claire Bishop is the author of *Artificial Hells (2012)*. All of which bring into question the possibility of an object based artistic practice to act as a socially engaged art form. Helguera describes socially engaged art practice as: "...a hybrid multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art, and... depends on actual – not imagined or hypothetical – social action."⁶⁴ Kester is more specific with his definition for what he refers to as 'dialogical art'. Writing that dialogical projects "Share a concern with the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange"⁶⁵ and "unfold through a process of performative interaction"⁶⁶. For Kester dialogical art shift the emphasis away from art objects towards an understanding of "the work of art as a process of communicative exchange"⁶⁷. Explaining that artists who work in this performative, process-based approach become "context providers" rather than "content providers"⁶⁸. Bishop, who is a vocal critic of Kester, of 'dialogical aesthetics' and of Nicolas Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics'⁶⁹ prefers the term 'participatory practice'. Defining it as a practice where "people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance."⁷⁰ Where the artist is "conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*... while the audience is... repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*."⁷¹ Like Kester, Bishop limits the scope of what she considers to be participatory practice, excluding artwork based around "one-on-one relationships of interactivity" or on other forms of 'social engagement' such as "interventionist actions in mass media".⁷²

These definitions of social practice do challenge the very possibility of a material based practice, such as cloth art or craftivism, can be seen as a socially engaged art form. This can itself be challenged using feminist new materialist frameworks, which question their inherent privileging of the language. While Kester remains highly critical of what he sees as a conventional style of art where artists "deposit an expressive content into a physical object, to be withdrawn later by the viewer..."⁷³ Putting forward a critique of object based practices are based on his view that:

"...object-based artwork (with some exceptions) is produced entirely by the artist and only subsequently offered to the viewer. As a result, the

⁶³ Mauss, Marcel, *The Gift: The form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York, W.W. Norton 1990), 39.

⁶⁴ Helguera, Pablo. *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, (New York: George Pinto Books, 2011), 8.

⁶⁵ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1

⁷³ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 10.

viewer's response has no immediate reciprocal effect on the constitution of the work. Further, the physical object remains essentially static."⁷⁴

This viewpoint is debunked by the work of new materialist physicists, philosophers and artists who in their posthumanist understanding of agency and entanglement discredit the idea that matter is 'dead'.⁷⁵ This supposed mutual exclusivity of social practice and the art object is also challenged by Bishop herself, who concludes *Artificial hells* (2012) by writing that:

"In using people as a medium, participatory art has always had a double ontological status: it is both an event in the world, and at one remove from it. As such, it has the capacity to communicate on two levels – to participants and to spectators – the paradoxes that are repressed in every discourse, and to elicit perverse, disturbing and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew. But to reach the second level requires a mediating third term – an object, image, story, film, even a spectacle – that permits this experience to have purchase on the public imaginary."

Using both a feminist new materialist argument and Bishop's insistence on the importance of a 'third term' this practice-led research project looks to argue that a material based practice can operate as a socially engaged practice. Suggesting that it is the very materiality of the practice of cloth art and craftivism that make them effective for crafting safe and creative spaces for dissensus be explored/made visible and therefore for bringing about 'political moments'.



CONCLUSION

In a post political environment where the Political is increasingly being foreclosed, where democracy has become coerced by a (neo) liberalism and global capitalism, and where power continues to be concentrated into oligarchies, activism is a challenging pursuit. Activists around the world are struggling to make an impact, torn between seemingly useless strategies like 'clicktivism', or 'slacktivism' as it is otherwise know, and other more confrontational and often violent forms of activism. Rancière sees as the goal of the activist as being "to open a space for inquiry where anyone can speak, on the condition that one's speech and one's capacity to make resonant the power of an action may be interrogated."⁷⁶ He goes on to explain that:

"The space where this resonance takes place is usually called 'opinion' which since Plato has been passed off as the opposite of thought. But opinion is actually the space in which the possibilities of thought and the mode of community these possibilities define are determined. Opinion is not a homogenous space for the lowest form of thought, but rather a space in which to debate what can be thought under particular circumstances and what the consequences of this thought might be."⁷⁷

My interest in craftivism as a form of activism lies in my suspicion is that the unique logic of craftivism sets it apart from many other forms of activist interventions. While

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Barrett, Estelle. and Bolt, Barbara. *Carnal Knowledge Towards a 'New Materialism' Through the Arts* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 2.

⁷⁶ Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, ix

⁷⁷ Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, ix

more familiar forms of activism such as protests, strikes, boycotts, sit-ins, etc. seek to disrupt society in order to communicate very specific messages, make specific demands and achieve specific political or social outcomes. Craftivism is more concerned with opening up spaces where opinions can be expressed, stories told and dissensus explored. In this way it is more of about the process than the outcome, about the exchange of ideas mediated through the materiality of the practice, about the performance of political agency. Over the time it takes to complete a craftivist project or to create a craftivist artwork, which can take many weeks, I believe it is possible to hold open safe spaces where we might engage in meaningful dialog. Spaces where we can contemplate the views of others while our senses are busy with the shared experience of making. Spaces where alternate configurations of the world can be imagined and debated. Spaces that hold open the potential for living with difference and provide us with strategies for better negotiating conflict. Spaces where it is necessary to become more mindful of each other and of our entanglement in a material agential universe. To conclude, like Dawn, I too believe that engaging multifarious groups of people using cloth art can bring about positive social change. Perhaps now, 23 years after Dawn's troubled Jerusalem project and in light of the emergency of the craftivism movement and of new materialism, it is finally the right time to test this potential once more.



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