

Craft(ing) The Body

22nd May 2019

University for the Creative Arts

Farnham

Surrey, UK

All that Glitters *is* Gold: Queer Worldmaking Practices and Trashy Textiles.

Daniel Fountain

As Howard Risatti (2007) notes in his influential *A Theory of Craft*, 'in one important way or another, by containing, covering, and supporting, craft objects help in our struggle for survival in an otherwise indifferent, if not hostile, world'. For queer subjects who have felt cast aside or 'refused' in society, they have often had to craft one into being. From recent research into the art of the so-called 'queer underground' culture of the 1960s and 1970s it has become apparent that the practice of crafting from salvaged or 'trashy' materials has been a key strategy in asserting queer identity. This is particularly evident in films of Jack Smith (and in the costumes by queer drag troupe the Cockettes, both of whom created extravagant constructions from any cultural detritus and textiles that could be found on the street or in the thrift store to parody Hollywood's notions of glamour. Following this research, recent art practice experiments have explored this concept; such as collecting waste threads creating nests from, or weaving with pipe cleaners and scraps of wire found on the street through a sequin 'waste sheet'; the by-product of a consumerist production process As such waste materials carry with them the aura, or indexical trace, of the physical queer body, I argue that this strategy has affinity enough with queer identity without relying on the physical representation of sexual bodies.

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“Understandings Hinted at in the Re-Construction of Negative Space.”

Dr David Jones

This paper takes as its starting point the observation that: “The body is our medium for having a world.” (Merleau-Ponty: 146). It will propose a phenomenological critique of new modes of manufacture. It will seek to explore one of the fundamental philosophical positions that can help in an understanding of objects, framed by a craft sensibility. In this, the idea of hylomorphism (the Aristotelian concept of matter/form) will play a central role. I shall analyse recent work that I have made at a residency at the European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands in spring 2019. During this twelve week period I have examined the nature of the hand (made). I commenced by creating prints of the inside of my hand and also prints in clay of meeting with others. These encounters were scanned and then fed into a 3D programme and the outputs enlarged and used to cut polystyrene moulds on a CNC Router. Through this translation of the hand and making the audience confront the familiar (yet not really recognizable) negative space of the inside of the hand (of the individual and the encounter with others) I hope to establish a disruption in the normal modes of perception. The work is theoretically underpinned by Martin Heidegger’s concept of the “ready-to-hand” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ..). through its translation in the work of Hannah Arendt (in her development of the concept of *homo faber*, whose special quality is recognized by her student Richard Sennett, in his book *The Craftsman* as asking the question “Why?” (Sennett, p6). The paper will conclude by meditating on the observation by Merleau-Ponty who stated: “Because we are in the world, we are *condemned to meaning*” (Merleau Ponty: xix).

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Wondering About Craft: From Imagined Bodies to Bodies of Imagination.

Fiona Curran

This paper - the title of which borrows from Isabelle Stengers' 'Wondering about materialism' (2011) - will consider the textile-material craft practices of artists Francis Upritchard and Caroline Achaintre. It will reflect on their crafting of imaginary bodies as a means to poetically speculate on the crafting of the posthuman body and will consider how hybrid bodies provoke a shift in thinking about the body *per se*. From Donna Haraway's cyborg bodies to Rosi Bradotti's post-anthropocentric bodies feminist theory has located itself at the shifting boundaries of the human, arguing that the crafted body is an imaginative resource for re-thinking politics and the social contract. In this paper I focus on craft as a form of discovery and curiosity, of performative and haptic sensitivity, and as a relational nexus between body, material and environment that produces wonder in the twofold sense of both surprise and speculation in the face of the unknown. Feminist materialist discourse has identified the significance of the speculative as a *material* process. This move to resituate the speculative in relation to the material world reintroduces the body back into the politics of knowledge production. It calls for a critical and creative re-worlding to take place that foregrounds knowledge as both embodied and embedded. This re-worlding is both a necessary response *to* and a product *of* the entanglements of the natural and the technological that now define our species present. As humans 'we' are now in the process of becoming (or have already become) more-than human. This shift calls for new forms of creativity and new (or reconfigured) bodies of knowledge that might help us to navigate our way in an uncertain and rapidly changing techno-ecological present. I argue that craft practices and craft thinking have a significant role to play in this process.

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Making Sense.

Gareth Mason

We are intrinsically embodied beings who routinely perform extraordinary sensory feats. We extend our bodies into the world through our tools, artefacts and creations. The sensorial reciprocity we experience between our bodies and their surroundings is our lifelong anchor and compass, though we take it for granted. Our 'kinaesthetic instincts' quietly work away, shepherding all our interactions whilst profoundly influencing our appetites, preferences and the meanings we ascribe to the entities around us. The body is the living membrane through which we comprehend all that we behold.

This presentation considers Craft from the standpoint of our inherent 'sense-empathy'. Guided by my first hand experience as a potter, I argue that the body and its imprint upon material is more often than not the unspoken common denominator of both the Craft practitioner's ingenuity and the viewer's relationship with the finished object. Accordingly, the appreciation of Craft becomes a tacit collaboration, dependent upon the engagement of the senses. The resultant interplay is the very essence of communication, and Craft skills resound with it.

I am a self-proclaimed sensualist, exploring the unfolding field of direct experience that we all share, but in clay. Illustrating the talk with my own images, I will discuss clay's ability to record bodily physicality and the interconnection between the visceral and the rational. Our senses are integral to our capacity for aesthetic arousal. This proposition is the bedrock of my practice but also speaks broadly of humanity's enduring fascination with craftsmanship, with its rich interplay between physicality and intellect, art and utility. Contemporary Craft competes with a dizzying array of distracting phenomena and I contend that by appreciating its origins in—and its impact upon—the body we help ensure its unique appeal and ongoing relevance.

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S-O-T Body Repairs: Personal Geographies.

Gayle Matthias

'S-O-T Body Repairs' was the title of a solo exhibition; an homage to my father's car body repair garage housed in a former miners' baths serving the nearby Mossfield Colliery in Stoke-on-Trent. In this paper, I wish to document the autobiographical narrative that informed the development of a series of mixed media sculptures, from the perspective of practice-led research that resulted in this exhibition. Creation and repair of damage, waste materials, and industrial objects have strong associations in this work and are inherent in the geography of my birthplace, the Potteries, its industrial heritage and deterioration in status and landscape. I have abstracted and explored this relationship of personal geographies of landscapes to inform my prevailing concepts of corporeal vulnerabilities. Exploring waste/abjection from a variety of standpoints: as the unseen, unrecognized material/found object exemplified by the aging body; as a by-product of my artistic practice (referencing Mary Douglas's concept of dirt, as 'matter out of place'); and evident in the loss of the pottery and coal mining industries that provided an identity and value for a community, evident as geographical waste. The resulting work makes ambiguous references to anatomical features such as the spine, lungs and sacrum. Changes in scale, deformity and worn or dirty components suggest disease or dysfunction and question the notion of beauty and value. The paper also explores a shift in creative methodology from a craft based practice with roots in kiln-formed glass to the production of concept driven sculpture.

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Sign Your Name Across my Heart: Biometric Embroidery as a Metaphor.

Karina Thompson

I am in love with a woman. Twenty years ago I gave her my heart.

She spends her days in a darkened room looking into people's hearts using ultrasound.

The technology allows her to slip under their skin, through their muscle, between ribs and see into their chest.

In a darkened room watching a grainy black image she leans over them, holding a probe onto their naked chests. Its intimate; she is really close to them; she can smell their skin.

In a darkened room she captures the 24 standard views of an echocardiogram, visually slicing across, down and through the moving heart and she understands the images. She can see the defective valves and the back wash of blood as they fail, the constricted walls that no longer expand as they should, the sinister shadow of things that shouldn't be there.

I look at those grainy triangles and see nothing; only monochrome splodges. I am a visual artist. I have been trained to look at things. It's my job. I look at them and see nothing.

I know its science but to me it's magic

Non-invasive imaging has become a routine tool in the diagnosis of illness. Digital technologies allow us to see inside our bodies but unless we can understand the coding of this information its worthless.

This paper seeks to explore how the parallel techniques of echocardiography and digital embroidery were used to create a metaphor for a relationship. Its origin is a series of stitched objects using my own biometric data. Here I attempt to unravel some of the contradictions between the reality of the heart as a raw lump of muscle and the representation of it as a repository for one's identity. And like the interpretation of diagnostic tests the meaning of the imagery is worthless if you can't read the code.

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Professor Catherine Harper

Abstract

Chasing the Impossible: Crafting the Intimate Body

I want to dedicate this paper to Professor Elaine Thomas CBE, previous Vice-Chancellor of University of the Creative Arts. As a kind, clever, brave and talented woman – a crafty artist, a gendered body, an academic leader, and a personal role model – Elaine led the range of institutions that became this University between 2000 to 2011. Elaine died early this year. So I have created this paper boldly, for Elaine, using my own crafty ‘cunning lingua’.

Frail humans – me, you, us – are soft, responsive, tactile. We feel, we love, we die. Our body’s vaginal, labial, clitoral, phallic presence is chased impossibly by crafty practices. So Elaine Thomas, this one’s for you.

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'I Was Like a Human 3D Printer, Until I Broke, and There Were No Spare Parts'

Disability, Disconnection and Dissociation in Contemporary

Communities of Crocheters and Knitters.

Tom Jerram-West

'Designer-maker' serves, primarily, to identify a professional category of artisans and crafters. However, it is representative of a set of functional abilities to conceive and produce an item – the ability to link thought and action in a holistic – monistic – activity. One must be sound of both mind and body in order to give an idea of one's own a physical form and in a precise way.

This ongoing research makes use of oral histories and ethnographic research gathered at events facilitated by participatory art and craft practice *Croshare* to explore the effect on an crocheter or knitter's identity as a designer-maker of a change in their conceptual or productive abilities due to changes in either their mental or physical health, as well as how communities of both creative contemporaries and clinicians work to bridge a practitioner's 'gaps' in order to enable a continued practice.

Monism is employed as a theoretical framework to explore the relationship between the mind and body in artisans and crafters who both design and make an item, where the totality and unity of these is seen as essential to produce original works of creative merit in a skilled manner; the effect of a sudden dualism – a schism of inequality between these – signifies a break in experienced and anticipated abilities and outputs; one in which a designer-maker may not be able to design and/or make as they would typically. Social, societal and cultural ideas of enablement and inclusivity are challenged, as are the value judgements placed on instances of temporary and permanent disablement within creative communities. Issues relating to visibility and representation of disabled crafters are discussed as phenomena discouraging access to medical or other support services for fear of exclusion or loss of identity.