Nicola Perren

Activating the Amateur in a Crafts Practice.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the autonomous actions of amateurs through communal making activities, with a particular focus on quilting as a form of textile craft. As a participant observer in a longitudinal case study, I was able to be in part, assimilated into the communal voice and practice of the *Meltham Quilting Bee*. As a result, this research considers the actions and choices we make when we have opportunities of individual autonomy through creative practice and an understanding of how this adapts when the making of work is a shared and social experience.

Patchwork has not only been used to piece together the quilts and numerous bodies of research in this study it has also acted as a concept to bring together a multitude of voices for communal and group making. Two key practices make up this thesis. Firstly, a longitudinal case study started in the early months of this work and six years later, is still running as a small quilting bee. Secondly, my personal creative practice has played a dual role as a tool to analyse and understand the nature and experience of the quilting bee but also as a marker of visual change that occurs when a professional practice listens and observes amateur making practices.

This study shows that maker identities shift, the home can be reconfigured as a temporal site for making with others, voices can be consensually adapted in order that a new communal voice may emerge and in return, allows us to develop personal and empowering approaches to creativity as individuals.

If there is a bingo card of low hanging fruit in the arts tree; amateur, craft, textiles, women and group making would surely be on the list and this thesis would indeed be a prize winner. However, through the lens of a feminist perspective this research firstly presents a review of literature that has created the framework through which this investigation can be understood, followed by an introduction to the methodologies that have been applied. Quilting is then contextualised in this research within both an historical and contemporary understanding and analysis in two parts, initially of the case study and then with a reflection of my own practice used, as a tool to reveal the experience of communal making.

This thesis argues that the amateur is not simply someone who lacks skill or is detached from cultural engagement. When the individual becomes a part of a collective or communal amateur group, given time, they move beyond an understanding that their only option is to learn and make friends. While this is certainly an initial driving force for engagement, the amateur, through communal craft making, toys with autonomy and positively add to the great machine that is a nations culture. Organically, they develop an empowered singular voice and vision and, highlight the importance of care and companionship.

Table of Contents

Figures

Tables

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1

Introduction

A *little* Context

I remember vividly as a child making 3D or raised cards with the Styrofoam of an old egg carton box and the illustrations of Holly Hobbie and, entering flower arranging competitions [successfully], that's if I was not outside playing my part in some Blake Seven storyline with friends. Like so many other people, from early childhood I was engaged in the craft of making and storytelling.

Fast forward three decades and I find myself professionally recognised as an Artist, Maker and Lecturer in Textiles. This means that I am privileged to be paid to explore and play as part of my job, but I find that this freedom to do as you wish to be rather too mythical, as unsurprisingly, when making work it is always to fit in with a particular research directive, guided by the needs of teaching or to accommodate your client's needs. I became more and more drawn to the show pieces found in the craft competition tent at local village fetes, where examples of work demonstrated excellent levels of skill sat next to the poorly made but highly creative entries. Wondering what it was like to make work that was genuinely free of commercial application, was not time efficient or deemed appropriate by current arts standards and demands pulled me towards this body of research to encompasses the amateur, communal making of textile crafts and in particular, quilting.

An understanding of the amateur craft maker, particularly in communal scenarios has not been widely reported beyond an observation of learning and well-being as a benefit to the individual.

The aim of this thesis was to gain further insight into the nature and freedoms of the amateur in a communal making practice and broaden our understanding of the impact this new knowledge may have.

The objectives of this thesis are to explore:

1. The autonomous learning experiences of a group.
2. The social exchanges in a group.
3. The changing identity of the amateur through the communal making of craft.
4. The history and context of quilting as a communal act.
5. The making of quilts communally through a personal practice as a form of investigation.

The Amateur

The term *amateur* is most often considered in opposition to its binary counterpart *professional*, which, in turn usually refers to our status as being paid for our labour within a society motivated towards capitalism (Adamson, 2007; Knott, 2011; Merrifield, 2017; Stebbins, 1992). Some research chooses to use different terms such as the hobbyist or hobby craft (Kouhia, 2016) as these terms have less of a complex and automatically assumed connection to the professional or the expert (Beegan & Atkinson, 2008). Other terms include handicrafts (Chartrand, 1989; Gelber, 1999), home-based craft (Mason, 2005), informal arts (Wali et al., 2001), serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992) and we often see domestic arts and folk arts drawn into the general narrative of the amateur. Alongside a number of researchers, I choose to use the term *amateur* specifically because it is slippery (Knott,

2015), it has a sense of fighting against the dictates of commerce (Ratto & Boler, 2014), historically it has been used for political commentary (Greer, 2014; Newmeyer, 2008; Parker, 2010), it can be about doing something well (Jackson, 2015) or equally, striving to make it badly (Kessels, 2016). It is a tricky term to grapple with and as this thesis shows, is one that not all people choose to use as a descriptor for aspects of their creative practice.

There has been an exponential rise in engagements with amateur based activities, particularly for textile-based crafts such as knitting, crochet, quilting and cross stitch (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Minahan & Cox, 2007; von Busch, 2010). These are utilised for garment construction, the making of accessories or as items for the home. The rise in popularity of amateur craft runs parallel with the exposure in the 1990s of global sweatshops. With an emphasis on slow production, personal expression, a drive to mend or upcycle items to avoid fast production cycles and a switch from mass production to gift exchange (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Myzelev, 2009), consumers are choosing to return to the handmaking skills that became unfashionable as a particular response to women no longer wanting to be *tied to the home* (Newmeyer, 2008; Sheppard, 2013).

The market for craft and amateur craft is extensive, and although there are no figures available for independent amateur craft makers, we do know that there were over 10 million people participating in amateur craft groups [UK] in 2014 (Milling et al., 2014). For the UK economy, including the work of professional craft practitioners, the value of craft in 2019 was worth £3 billion (Council, 2020). The growth of the internet has provided a more democratic and open access to resources for learning, access to materials and tools and provided

avenues for people to sell their craft. For example, in 2018, Etsy reported that there were 220,000 active sellers and 9,000 on Folksy in the UK alone (Council, 2020). If I were to Google 'quilting' today, I would have the option of looking at 775,000,000 links.

The early 2000s saw the emergence of people coming together to make in public spaces such as café's, parks and pubs with movements such as Stitch'n Bitch (Minahan & Cox, 2007; Stoller, 2004) and Craftivism (Corbett, 2013; Greer, 2014; Newmeyer, 2008). People started to engage with craft making in a way that was not linked to its former associations of female oppression and unpaid labour (Kelly, 2014; Lippard, 2010; Turney, 2004) and pushing back against the exploitative aspects of capitalism 'the collaborative aspects of craft culture reappropriate the collective qualities of sweatshop labour, but without the exploitative discipline and hierarchical forms' (Bratich & Brush, 2011, p. 235).

It is important that we do not insulate our understanding of the amateur by simply looking at what the amateur does but rather consider it in its wider relationship with everyday activities, paid labour, its historical context, and for this research, particularly the experiences of women.

During this study, it became clear that there are multiple shades of amateur. It can be recognised as a skill based activity that has an arc of achievement (Stebbins, 1992), as something that is temporal (Knott, 2011), as *DIY citizenship* which is a tool for both the individual and a community (Ratto & Boler, 2014), or, with a specific connection to textiles as *fabriculture* (Bratich & Brush, 2011). There is, however, a common thread that permeates through this area of study which is

that the amateur is someone who tends to counter the mechanical expertise and technical conformity of modern day living (Merrifield, 2017).

I recognise the value in understanding the tie that binds the amateur to the professional and its slippery nature but given that I was particularly intrigued by the freedom that autonomous making offers, I narrowed down a criterion for the amateur upon which I could build a foundation for this project. Within this research, I define the intentions of the amateur as:

- Experience of making over the outcome
- Not for financial gain
- Personal timeframes
- Escapes scrutiny of professionals
- Self-determined structures of labour

While I recognise the ability for the amateur to move towards turning what they make into an income, particularly through online sources such as Etsy and Folksy, I have made a particular choice to not include this understanding of the amateur as it removes it too far from the opportunity to recognise autonomous actions through the amateur. I recognise that selling the items you make opens up opportunities for people to become financially more independent and creates options for people, it enables people to be compensated for doing the 'thing they love', but such sites are also entrenched in a neo-liberal ethos of self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship and this often means extracting labour at rates that are far below the minimum wage (Tokumitsu, 2014). The majority of sellers on these sites are female and as a lot of the work is also done at home, the consequences can be significant;

long working hours which usually absorb any potential leisure time [turn what you love doing into work], with no pension, benefits or security (Tokumitsu, 2014). *Do what you love* [DWYL] as a mantra for today's worker also shows privilege of options towards labour, masking those who have no choice in the use of their labour. Those who are working on factory lines, low wages and poor working conditions of fashion manufacture, the idea of turning your love of making into a neat side-line is problematic (Tokumitsu, 2014).

The amateur dabbles in a wide field of activities from sports to astronomy, cooking to poetry. This research is firmly embedded in the world of textile craft and more specifically quilting. Craft as accessed by the amateur is not embedded in a particular culture, it is open to all genders, it can draw inspiration historically, reflect current creative directions or, create narratives of its own, 'poised between the new and trendy and the traditional, contemporary amateur crafting maintains popularity across lines of age, income and political affiliation [though gender divisions remain]' (Robertson, 2012, p. 348). If we consider craft that focuses on textile as a medium however, there is a gender divide towards women, or within other groups that have tended to be affected by oppression (Kelly, 2014; Luckman, 2015; Parker, 2010).

For women, the making of textiles has long been associated with oppression through unpaid domestic labour [and still is in mass-production scenarios through low paid labour]. Yet it has also been an activity that has functioned to empower women by bringing them together and as a means to develop skills under one's own rules of engagement as theorist Roszika Parker points out in the book *The Subversive Stitch* [2010]:

On the whole women no longer embroider as a gesture of wifely or domestic duty. But the aspect of embroidery as a bond between women has lived on. Books, exhibitions, magazines and societies devoted to embroidery and dominated by women constitute a curiously autonomous female area. It is largely ignored by men (Parker, 2010, p. 215).

Textile Crafts

Textile craft offers opportunities to engage with creativity through a personal aesthetic rather than relying on predictable, mass-produced products 'for some, crafting is indeed a meaningful way to not only express their creativity, style and individuality but also do so through means other than bland, standardised mass-produced fashion and the ever-expanding consumerism of everyday life' (Newmeyer, 2008, p. 454). By engaging with making items oneself, you are able to create greater connections with your clothes or decorative items as you develop a greater awareness of the labour, skill and knowledge that goes into products that are so readily available in shops. The slowness of making is also seen as an attractive element of craft for the amateur, particularly as the majority of people who engage with craft, do so as an escape from the banality of working lives 'crafting creates slow space, a speed at odds with the imperative towards hyperproduction' (Bratich & Brush, 2011, p. 236).

It has been well documented that engaging with crafts as an amateur have a multitude of benefits for individual well-being and mental health (Burt & Atkinson, 2011; Collier, 2011; Huotilainen et al., 2018; Monbiot, 2014; Stalp, 2006). These benefits include increased

confidence, to feel grounded, rejuvenated and to improve one's mood (Fish, 2019; Stannard & Sanders, 2015; Wali et al., 2001). Furthermore, when the craft includes the use of textiles, these scenarios are heightened (Collier, 2011). Needlecraft, specifically as an aid for depression, also has extensive literature (Burt & Atkinson, 2011; Reynolds, 2000; Valentine et al., 2010). When carried out as part of a craft group; social connection, belonging and ongoing learning developments also helped with the wellbeing of individuals (Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009). This research acknowledges these benefits and can see them in action; however, it does not focus on this aspect of engaging with craft as an amateur.

The rise of the internet, while recognised by some as a tool to break social bonds and create disconnections with friends and family (Putnam, 2000; Turkle, 2011), has also acted as a tool to build new connections, particularly amongst maker communities. For people who engage in craft, the internet has provided opportunities that support and build on the supply of books and magazines (Chidgey, 2014; Kester, 2013; Ratto & Boler, 2014). Video sites have opened learning to those who are on the whole visual learners and no longer need to pay or go behind the closed doors of educational institutions to access vital information of making techniques. Further to this, social media provides opportunities for armies of people to discuss and debate on a similar subject, i.e., crochet with cotton, quilting using a specific designers fabric, upcycling denim. These communities of people with like-minded interests not only drive demand but also create a strong sense of belonging and camaraderie.[1]

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[1] For example, from personal experience, I observed in real time a video release online from quilt and fabric designer Tula Pink. Each week on a Tuesday, Tula releases an informal video on social media through which her brother records her having a chat about what she has been making, doing in her studio. On one

Making Communally

So, what starts to happen when communities come together in person to make? When such events happen, including craft making, this can often be considered as a political act as it feels empowering, it can represent the voices of communities that are not dominant within media, social and cultural platforms [gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation] and be motivational (Felcey et al., 2013; Parker, 2010; Ratto & Boler, 2014; Robertson, 2016; Stauch, 2018). It can also be for learning, friendship, connection and personal growth (Hackney et al., 2016; Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009; Minahan & Cox, 2007). When making occurs as a community of people being creative together, it can be a powerful experience and one that can make a difference. Making together is about 'providing a safe space for disagreement, reflection, resolution, collaboration, active listening, questioning and critical thinking, and offer quiet, tenacious and life-enhancing forms of resistance and revision to hegemonic versions of culture and subjectivity' (Hackney et al., 2016, p. 34).

The making of quilts is one specific aspect of textile craft that has a long history of making communally. *Quilting bees* have pulled together communities of quilters, often out of economic necessity but they also provide support and friendship, 'bees provided a space for conversation and community formation. They brought people together, breaking social and cultural forms of isolation, and fostering

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occasion, she declared that she was going to present a new fabric collection that was not going to be released for at least another 6 – 8 months. She decided to share with her audience, the 1st sample prints that had been returned, based on her initial drawings. As demand for this collection grew over the next 24 hours, quilt shops and retailers responded by including the unconfirmed range in their pre-sales. Within a week of the initial video release, the whole pre-sale collection was sold out globally.

dialogue, mutual support, and collaboration' (Robertson & Vinebaum, 2016, p. 8). A more modern approach to the bee is a quilting group, and while they provide similar opportunities to form bonds and develop skills, they tend to focus on individual making. For example, at a quilting group, each member works on their own quilt while they are all together in the same space. Historically, particularly in the USA and Canada, bees would operate more like a co-operative initiative where one quilt would be made at a time with every member contributing to that making, each member would then receive a quilt in return for their contribution (Stalp, 2006).

Quilting

Quilting's rich history is varied and while its story is global, the narrative of quilting in this research focuses on British and North American narratives of quilting. As a purposeful item, quilts have been valued for their comfort and warmth and are generally used as blankets but also can be used in clothing. Often made by hand and with the use of a sewing machine, because of the lengthy process of making, they are often gifted and handed down through generations. But it also has a perhaps less familiar history, that is one of activism. In the text 'Quilts for the Twenty-first Century: Activism in the Expanded Field of Culture' [2016] writer and professor Kirsty Robertson reminds us of this history:

> Quilts, quilting and quilting scholarship have long been tied to activism, ranging from abolitionist causes in the nineteenth century to feminist reclamation of an undervalued pastime in the twentieth, and incorporating economic, pacifist,

environmental, labour and numerous other issues. Activist quilts are found across the globe, and their making crosses lines of age, race and class [though less often of gender] (Robertson, 2016, p. 197)

The making of quilts is often connected to the home, as a site to use the quilts but also the space in which quilts are made. As intimated previously, this research recognises the home as having been a site of often forced, unpaid domestic labour for women. One of the many roles assigned to women as mothers and wives was that of making clothing and household items, and as a result, the making of a quilt, whether it was for pleasure, made out of necessity or appropriated as a technique for an artwork, would be dismissed: 'they evaporated under the strain of women's daily routine' (Bovenschen, 1976, p. 304).

In more recent times, with greater equality and more people undertaking paid work from home, we start to see domestic places as a site for pleasure, fun, relaxation and as somewhere in which we are able to develop, learn and build upon our aspirations. Writer Betsy Greer, who is known for bringing the term Craftivism into popular culture, notes in her blog:

> The domestic is where not only are we allowed the space to take back our kitchens and sewing machines, but where we are also given the room to experiment and play with conventional thought and make it our own… I learned that a home is more than just a sanctuary and a soft place to land, it's also a laboratory, studio and playground [written by Betsy Greer on her craftivism.com website - not available any more] (Newmeyer, 2008, p. 456)

Today's understanding of textiles and crafts has undoubtedly emerged into the public realm through a number of feminist artists and activists of the 1970's and 1980's who stepped away from solely using the common and accepted art forms of painting and sculpture. Using "domestic" craft and textiles, artists such as Joyce Wieland, Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Eva Hesse and Su Richardson critiqued the patriarchal system and the traditional artworld. Alongside these artists, theorists of the time such as Roszika Parker, Lucy Lippard and Griselda Pollock, sought to bring into the public sphere other forms of creating art which had been relegated to the domestic realm. More recently, artists such as Tracey Emin, Louise Bourgeois, Ghada Amer, Sarah-Joy Ford and Polly Apfelbaum continue to bring textiles, and at times its decorative form, into public spaces as artworks.

This thesis is presented in seven chapters; an introduction presents a rationale; the core aims and objectives and introduces the reader to a framework of references and a context for this research. The second chapter, *A Context for Thinking* discusses and signposts key literature and practice within this field of study. The third chapter identifies a range of methodologies that have been applied including a longitudinal case study called the *Meltham Quilting Bee* [MQB]. There then follows an intersecting chapter in which quilting is considered historically, socially and as a mode of empowerment, particularly for women. The fifth chapter focuses on an analysis of the MQB followed by a chapter that reviews the authors own personal practice as a method of responding to and learning from the MQB. The thesis ends with a conclusion and summary of what has been understood from this study, an insight into new knowledge and recommendations for further development beyond the completion of this thesis.

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2

A Context for

Thinking

Amateur craft activities are not only broad in their scope of practices but are also part of a booming industry, which has seen an even greater rise during times of Covid-19 due to prolonged periods of living and working in isolation. Making with textiles has always been popular for the amateur maker, from step-by-step kit formats through to one-off pieces that demonstrate extremely high levels of craft skills. This chapter starts with a review of recent reports from research councils and government departments from which a rationale for this research will emerge. The chapter then goes on to examine how the amateur maker is understood within a society that upholds the professional as a benchmark for ultimate success. I address the history and context of the home as site for the making of work and draw attention to the incredible quilts made by the women of Gee's Bend, who, despite the mass injustice of Black slavery in the USA, have been making quilts for over a century and continue to challenge Western perceptions of quilt design. I endeavour to understand how craft and the amateur can lead to communal making practices that in turn provide opportunities for autonomous actions and a range of creative voices.

Reporting In [some facts]

Since 2008 in the United Kingdom, there have been several significant pieces of research undertaken by research councils and government departments that contribute to the narratives in this research. Within this section, I highlight those key reports and their findings [Figure 1].

Figure 1 Mapping of key reports and papers, 2008 – 2020.

The contents of these reports and papers were notably written during the 'age of austerity' (Smith, 2019), in a time of financial insecurity and budget cuts (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). Although not part of these reports, it was specifically noted by Rozsika Parker that both additions of the *Subversive Stitch* [1996, 2010] were written during a recession (Parker, 2010). As a result of both austerity and a recession, funding cuts to the arts have been significant and as such have created challenging cultural environments.

In 2008, the report *Our Creative Talent; the voluntary and amateur arts in England* by Fiona Dodd, Andrew Graves and Karen Taws for the Department for Culture, Media & Sport and Arts Council England was published (Dodd et al., 2008). In 2014, Jane Milling and Angus McCabe with Robin Simpson and Hamish Fyfe wrote a report *The Amateur and Voluntary Arts* as part of the larger AHRC funded research investigation *Understanding Cultural Value* (Milling et al., 2014).

Although the reports show numbers of people engaged in art groups [number of groups and number of people] neither of the reports hold information on the number of people who undertake arts activities outside of an organised group [see Table 1 for details]. During this time there has continued to be a rise in amateur engagements with the arts [including craft].

	No of Art Groups	Individual Members	Source
2008	49,000	6 million	2008. Dodd et al. DCMS
2014	60,000	10 million	2014. McCabe et al. AHRC

Table 1 Engagement with crafts in the UK [2]

In the UK, aside from the online resources and formal educational classes, people can access amateur craft through tradeshows and guilds. The benefit of guilds is that you can also connect to global associations, for example, *The Quilters Guild of the British Isles* has several thousand members (Quilters Guild, personal communication, November 30, 2020), but *The Modern Quilters Guild* globally has 16,000 members (Hines-Bernay, Amanda, personal communication, December 1, 2020). Two of the key textile craft based shows or fairs in the UK are *The Knitting & Stitching Show* and *The Festival of Quilts* which accordingly attracted 30,000 (Upper Street Events, 2020a) and 26,000 (Twisted Thread, personal communication, December 1, 2020) visitors in 2019, for which both have seen rising numbers each year.

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[2] A] these figures do not include individual participants in such activities B] with a growing economy, this figure is expected to double C] these figures are far higher if you also include creativity through digital means.

Connected Communities [2009] is a cross-council project, led by the Arts & Humanities Research Council [AHRC]. As a multi-million pound research programme designed to further our understanding of the changing nature of communities [historically and culturally] it looked at the role they have in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life (Connected Communities, n.d.). As can be seen in the mapping of this ambitious project [Figure 2], numerous methods were used to gather insight including scoping studies, community heritage projects and a range of research disciplines.

Key points from the findings of the *Connected Communities* project can be found in the full report; *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture* [2016], led by Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kasynska and will be further discussed a little later in this chapter.

Figure 2 Connected Communities – Facts & Figures, 2014. (Connected Communities, n.d.)

A scoping study *The Role of Grassroots Arts Activities in Communities* (McCabe et al., 2011) was carried out from which *Connected Communities* identified a range of benefits in amateur activities these include: enhanced health, wellbeing and improved social skills. There were also a number of unexpected elements such as individuals discovering new, unrecognised aspects of themselves and the 'contagion effect' which describes how participation and enjoyment of

one activity, will encourage people to explore other arts activities as well as inspiring others to also engage in the arts (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016).

The 2014 Milling and McCabe report *Understanding Cultural Value: the Amateur and Voluntary Arts* (Milling et al., 2014) provides focus and insight into the voluntary and amateur cultural sectors. It considers the benefits of engaging in cultural activities that do not just measure value against the generation of income. Several elements from Milling & McCabe's report seem particularly pertinent. Mirroring Knott, Hackney and Adamson who argue that those who engage with creativity as an amateur are producers, consumers and the audience, there is consensus that 'amateur creative cultural activity is vital to the subsidised and commercial sectors through reciprocal sustainable relationships' (Milling et al., 2014). There is a reliance on all cultural aspects working successfully so that each may inform and support the other.

There also is also commentary on the chosen methods of evaluation of activities within this sector suggesting that it is important to reflect the scale and capacity of a group rather than just the individual. For the group, the output is not purely focused on a physical object but is also mindful of its social standing and contribution to culture in the wider sense. Urban researcher, Cara Courage in their book *Arts in Place* [2017] in part, refers to this as placemaking. Placemaking is concerned with re-imaging the city or town with the visions and aspirations of local communities, so, when we consider the nature of each amateur group, we can understand that their known existence can contribute towards new urban generation projects (Bailey et al., 2019; Courage, 2017; Milling et al., 2014). In 'Cultural Ecology and

Cultural Critique' [2019] Rowan Bailey, Claire Booth-Kurpnieks, Kath Davies and Ioanni Delsante discuss the benefits of providing temporary free rents, in-kind support and meanwhile spaces for building and connecting communities in Huddersfield: 'there is a greater value at work in the development of a cultural ecology for communities and networks to emerge and deliver on the ambitions of the cultural heart of the town' (Bailey et al., 2019).

Financially, most amateur arts practices do not directly seek public subsidy and as such, makes it a suitable position from which to understand cultural value and how it is assessed on two axis: social and economic indicators of value. Amateur arts participants tend to frame their engagements with an activity in terms of experience as opposed to economic value, understanding that the depth of engagements and quality of experience may provide more accurate indicators of the success value of an individual. In an analysis of an individual's engagement with an activity, it is also important to consider the wider implications of that experience as it does not usually sit neatly within the group itself. For example, the experience someone has being part of an amateur activity should also include engagements like gallery visits as part of the parcel of experience. As Milling et al explain: 'amateur participation in creative cultural and artistic activity is the facilitating precursor to the acquisition of aesthetic knowledge, skills and activity' (Milling et al., 2014, p. 8).

Engaging with a creative activity as an amateur pushes people to become more knowledgeable about their chosen area of focus, particularly once one is 'sucked in'. For example, someone who starts to crochet is more likely to read magazines, attend crochet related shows, make connections with other like-minded people and join a

guild or club, to establish a more embedded relationship and connection with the act of crocheting. In the report, they refer to an element of this as the "Pitman Painter effect" which explains that when someone has attempted to make work using a particular process, they immediately have a heightened understanding and appreciation of that working method (Milling et al., 2014). Considering experiences beyond the actual engagements with method invites greater levels of insight.

In 2016, the AHRC published the report *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture.* Led by Professor Geoffrey Crossick and Dr Patrycja Kaszynska, the report represents the in-depth findings of a 3-year Cultural Value Project [70 individual, smaller projects]; the key directive was to understand the value of the arts and culture and the difference they make to individuals and society. Written in an 'age of austerity' [that remains current], the report sought to understand the challenges of the cultural economy in the UK. The report expands existing understandings of what constitutes culture, in a bid to find a position that could be to the benefit of everyone in the UK. They write: 'enlarging the focus to include not only subsidised arts, but also the commercial, third sector, amateur and participatory, immediately shifts the discussion away from the conventional focus on the publicly-funded' (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, p. 13). Historically, previous reports had focused on the subsidised cultural sector, here, we also find research into the 'commercial, amateur and participatory, which, after all, are where most people find their cultural engagement' (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, p. 7). The premise and central position of the report is that the experience of the individual as the consumer and/or producer, is where we should conduct our understanding of culture. From this position, we can then work outwards in order to

understand what the benefits of culture can be for society, communities and public health.

Regarding debates around the *amateur*, Crossick & Kaszynska suggest that it is important that we ask the right kind of questions. For example, 'asking primarily social questions of amateur arts led to a neglect of distinctive artistic practice, motivation and ambition' (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, p. 27). There is a need to disregard the assumptions that work made by an amateur is simply referred to as a leisure activity as this negates the possibility that the products of the activity are without artistic, technical or aesthetic merit or that they could not possibly have had them as the result of a decision – it would only be an accident or coincidental occurrence. The report also highlights current understandings of culture as being polarised: 'the intrinsic vs the instrumental, the elite vs the popular, the amateur vs the professional, private vs public spaces of consumption' (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, p. 6). By looking at culture in this way, too many boundaries are created, if we start to dissolve these walls then we start to see a more honest appraisal of the values of culture for a broader number of people. With regard to the influence of technology, if we are to accept that digital access to commercial cultural works has provided the biggest change in recent years to the ways we can engage with culture, then co-production blurs the boundaries between the user and supplier [consumer / producer] and offers the biggest leaps of [accessible] opportunity (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016).

Across the spectrum of reports presented here, there is limited [if any] attention given to cultural consumption in and through the home. Indeed, Crossick and Kaszynska state that this needs addressing further. The home frames most of our cultural engagements through

film, music, television, radio, literature and on-line activities. Despite knowing this, we still refer to experiences such as watching a film as seen at the cinema or listening to music as going to a music venue (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). The ways in which we experience culture goes beyond the traditional understanding of where and how we can engage with culture – by looking in the home for example we can immediately move beyond those dual ways of seeing amateur vs professional.

Understanding the Amateur

In general society, the term amateur is a status applied to someone in a state of transition, someone who wants to shed this descriptor and is always reaching towards professionalism. Professors Julia Bryan-Wilson and Benjamin Piekut, in the special edition of "Third Text" [2020] present an amateur that positively has no wish to be assimilated:

> The amateur is 'defiantly unprofessional… they grow out of sensual labours that are propelled for reasons other than remuneration. Some demonstrate a punk ethos, understanding themselves as contributing to an oppositional, anti-corporate culture, or are queer, outlaw, or minoritarian ones, with no desire to be assimilated or hailed into the category of the professional – but they can also be popular or commercial, gleefully partaking of and participating in the flows of mass culture. (Bryan-Wilson & Piekut, 2020, p. 9)

This research is powered by the stories and narratives of everyday people, moments that capture a temporary taking back of control and the relationships that evolve as a result of searching for a [perhaps] common goal. These goals are often explored through hobbies and are recognised by the term 'amateur'.

The amateur of today sits in opposition to its counterpart; the professional. Firmly embedded in an economic structure of capitalism, the amateur overall is either reliant on earning an income through paid labour or is retired from such a status. The amateur then engages in interests external to their day job through which they can have autonomy, operate within its own framework of time, can base its ethos on little to no prior formal learning or education and is often situated within marginal groups. The activities of the amateur, can be considered as resistant to or, as a negotiation of capitalism (Bryan-Wilson & Piekut, 2020; Hackney, 2013; Jackson, 2015; Knott, 2011, 2015; Lippard, 2010; Merrifield, 2017; Ramos, 2020). However, the activities of the amateur are rarely experienced in isolation and are recognised as being part of an interdependent relationship with the professional. For example, a person dabbling in piano playing as an amateur will become interested in listening to other people playing the piano [often professionals], they will purchase music, attend piano recitals, search out opportunities to discuss and play music with others. Different and often opposing parties, such as the professional and the amateur, are often reliant on the existence of the other (Bryan-Wilson & Piekut, 2020; Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Franco, 2020; Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2011; Kouhia, 2016; Lippard, 2010; Milling et al., 2014). In this scenario, the amateur refers to the professional for inspiration and insight while the professional, seeks out the amateur to engage in artistic culture and contribute to the

creative economy and ultimately, provide an income for the professional.

The Latin root for the term *amateur* is *amare*, meaning 'to love' and is associated with virtuous, voluntary activities undertaken for their own sake (Knott, 2011). The term is used to describe an object, such as: 'this hand thrown bowl has an amateur finish', an individual; 'an amateur cabinet maker' or even to excuse; 'well they did say they were an amateur'. The understanding of this term today is a far cry from its *amare* origins. Sloppiness, without skill, unimportant, superfluous outputs and something that only those with time and money can engage is how we have come to understand it (Adamson, 2007; Bryan-Wilson & Piekut, 2020; Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2015; Merrifield, 2017; Sheppard, 2013).

Stephen Knott, author of *Amateur Craft: History and Theory* [2015] and the thesis "Amateur Craft as a Differential Practice" [2011], provides both a historical and contemporary understanding of what is considered an amateur craft [in its wider sense], and discusses the nature and drive of individuals who participate in creative practices. Knott states that amateur work is 'the freest, most autonomous form of making within structures of Western capitalism' (Knott, 2015, p. xi). As both consumers and producers amateur craft makers negate conformity to academic currencies, they are not under financial obligation or beholden to deadlines. In short, they are making and engaging as an amateur for the love of making.

There is value in looking to the work of amateurs because despite working in similar political and societal systems to that of its professional counterpart, the amateur creates work, opportunities and

meanings that can create fresh perspectives and insights. As a result of making within an expanded set of parameters, Knott suggests that:

> The story of modern amateurism is about the continuation of autonomous action within the constraints of capitalism. Amateur craft practitioners negotiate limitations of skill, space and time that arise from inhabiting a system that is geared toward productivity, motivated by the desire to temporarily control their own labour. (Knott, 2011, p. 10)

In this respect, amateur practice is far from the popular idea that it lacks originality, self-critique, is superfluous and without overt political intent. Knott presents a rich and curious observation of a misrepresented, creative endeavour that makes a vital contribution to the material culture of the modern world.[3]

Like Knott, Paul Atkinson, author of the text "Do-It-Yourself: Democracy and Design" [2006] looks at a wide-ranging set of amateur activities such as garden design, knitting, vehicle customization, the making of soft furnishings and discusses the identity of the amateur under the guise of DIY. Atkinson divides this broad spectrum of activity into four categories that highlight differences in the drive to make work, approaches to making and the reliance on outside support/influences. The categories used are: 'Pro-active', 'Reactive', 'Essential' and 'Lifestyle' (Atkinson, 2006, p. 3) and focus on autonomously directing one's time, learning and approach. Atkinson

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[3] Knott goes onto connect the concept of the modern amateur craftsperson with the term *capitalist bricoleur* coined by anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss which, describes the making of products with items that are to hand. This approach to craft and making will be further explored in this thesis through the act of communal quilt making [pages 106 & 129].

explains that *pro-active* DIY consists of 'those activities which contain significant elements of self-directed, creative design input, and which might involve the skilled manipulation of raw materials or original combination of existing components, where the motivation is personal pleasure or financial gain' (Atkinson, 2006, p. 3). In this respect, *pro-active DIY* provides a clear positioning of the term amateur for the context of this research project, although this thesis steers away from aspects of financial gain through craft activities.

When a person engages with an activity as an amateur, they do so outside of time spent undertaking their 'day job'. It is an action that is carried out by choice, under their own terms and within time frames that they set themselves (Stalp, 2006, 2007). It often requires financial outlay but does not necessarily provide any financial returns; any pay back is in the form of autonomy, a sense of achievement and belonging to a community [physical or virtual]. Participants of amateur practices are reliant on an income stream to pay for materials, equipment, tools and space. This means that a majority of participants engage in paid work therefore creating a situation where the amateur is in a 'condition of its unfreedom'. (Knott, 2011, p.181)

Amateur makers [amateurs who craft] carry out work-like activities for leisure with the outcomes tending to escape the scrutiny of 'those in the know' (Adamson, 2007; Jackson, 2015; Knott, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Paterson & Surette, 2015). The focus of such makers tends to be about the experience of making as opposed to the end-product. In his study titled "Constructing at Home: Understanding the Experience of the Amateur Maker", (2015) Andrew Jackson provides a deeper understanding of the intrinsic rewards associated with amateur designing and making, identifying the key concepts that provide the

structure for the amateur maker as: investment, the project, the experience of the moment and the materiality of making (Jackson, 2015, p. 5). Jackson recognises that the value and enjoyment of amateur making is focused on the range of experiences as opposed to the end-product. Kayak maker Greg makes this point very clear when discussing the results of his amateur kayak making: 'to tell you the truth I am quite glad to see the back of them […] I have worked and worked and I have had my pleasure out of building it and then it's just sitting here' (Jackson, 2015, p. 12). For a lot of amateur makers, the process and time spent making is the major factor in enjoying the experience. Once the object is completed, the maker tends to move on very quickly, often planning the next project while the current one is still in progress (Knott, 2015; Stalp, 2007).

Class and the Amateur

Today, we often continue to understand the amateur as someone who dabbles in a leisurely act that takes place as a result of having expendable income and having free time that needs filling (Gelber, 1999; Grace & Gandolfo, 2014; Hackney, 2013; Merrifield, 2017; Stannard & Sanders, 2015; Turney, 2004). In the text "Quiet Activism and the New Amateur" [2013], design historian Fiona Hackney states that the new amateur is historically and contextually savvy – they are aware, foster tactics and help develop strategies (Hackney, 2013, p. 171). Hackney writes of the need to throw off the shackles of thinking the amateur and its related past times are simply middle class. Hackney states that while we continue to think about the term as a tool for idle hands and minds, we fail to recognise the full extent and

possibility of such activities and the breadth that amateur activities bring to contemporary [and historic] culture.

The class system [a social construct] that exists in Britain is ever evolving. Karl Marx equated class with the relationship an individual had with the means of production and recognised three categories; landowners [income came from rent of their estates], bourgeois capitalists [income came from the profits of their businesses] and the proletarian workers [income came from the sale of their own labour to their employers as a wage] (Marx, 1894). During the industrial revolution [1770's / 1780's] of Victorian Britain, a *middle class* of people emerged as a growing number of people began to move into higher paid roles within the means of production and were then able to create personal economic capital (Barker, 2008; Cannadine, 1999). Art historian and author of the influential book *The Subversive Stitch* [2010], Rozsika Parker, considers the role that women held in society and the home in industrialised Victorian Britain. Parker makes a clear argument for a Victorian understanding of what it is to be a woman which is to be serene, obedient and caring and the ways in which this behaviour is aligned to the practice of embroidery in the home. This pervading understanding of textile making in the domestic interior by middle class women not only covered up the prior history of the oppression of women but, created a hold on making with textiles in particular that was [and still is] hard to shake off (Parker, 2010). This hold often reinstates the idea that *making with textiles* is essentially a submissive, mindless and domesticated act (Parker, 2010; Stalp, 2007).

The class formations of the nineteenth century brought into play a range of amateur activities such as embroidery or stitch. These were,

however, utilised for different reasons and not always simply for leisure. For example, amongst the proletarian working classes, sewing (the functional act of joining together pieces of cloth) to make clothing/household textiles and mend textiles was an act of economic necessity. It would also have been a method to provide additional income. For the middle classes, embroidery (creating decorative additions to cloth) had an equally important but different role. Spending time stitching patterns onto cloth would aid the passing of time, was used to hone fine skills and as a finished result would communicate affluence to others. Having time to engage in this activity marks out a privilege at the same time demonstrate social and domestic obedience (e.g. potential suitors seeking out appropriate skills and demeanour to be a good wife) (Adamson, 2007; Hughes, n.d.; Parker, 2010). During the early twentieth century, following the reform of the Educational Act of 1902, needlework was included in the curriculum for girls [woodwork for boys]. As Parker explains, with reference to the implementation of textiles into education: 'for the working class girls, needlework was connected to domestic work in preparation for their future as wives, mothers or domestic servants; for the middle-class girls needlework was increasingly taught as an art, following the principles established by the women at Glasgow School of Art' (Parker, 2010, p. 188)[4].

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[4] The Glasgow School of Art had begun a quest to re-consider embroidery as simply being an extension of one's femininity. Teacher Jessie R. Newbery, from 1894-1908 recognised embroidery is 'an art with a history which determines but need not limit its practice' (Parker, 2010, p. 186) and encouraged the making of work that was as good as it needed to be [according to its purpose] which, was quite at odds with the idea of the time in which embroidery was to always be done perfectly as it was a reflection of the person making it. Around 1900, embroidery became part of the curriculum for girls in all schools and Newbery's approach was adopted as part of that learning, Ann Macbeth who had studied at The Royal School of Needlework, London, was placed in charge of the new curriculum pushed our understanding of embroidery further through the questioning of its connection to class. Macbeth rejected the use of silks for cheaper fabrics, recognised that design should arise out

Hackney recognises that these nineteenth and early twentieth century associations with domestic craft cloud our current understandings of the work of amateurs. This Victorian context has hindered the values of amateur making outside the institution of education, the arts canon and/or the general understanding of the generation of monetary wealth from textiles production.

Despite societal pressures of conformity and obedience [for women], Parker [and Lucy Lippard] provide alternative ways to read and acknowledge the amateur makers of the past and the much-maligned amateur of today. Parker suggests that embroidery became a powerful tool when women would use this mode of making to empower and subvert societal expectations of the time. She writes: 'Historically, through the centuries, it has provided both a weapon of resistance for women and functioned as a source of constraint. It has promoted submission to the norms of feminine obedience and offered both psychological and practical means to independence' (Parker, 2010, p. xix). If, the power and subversion found within embroidery is also a 'condition of its unfreedom' (in Knott's sense) perhaps it would not need to be used as a tool to push against its repression. For example, in the text "Making Something from Nothing [Towards a Definition of Women's 'Hobby' Art']" [1978], art critic, writer and activist, Lucy Lippard talks about greater access [in terms of class] to amateur craft activities noting class differences in mindset towards making:

> The less privileged she is, the more likely she is to keep her
> interests *inside* the home with the focus of her art remaining

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of the technique itself and encouraged students to come up with their own designs rather than replicate what has been done historically.

the same as that of her work. The better off and better educated she is the more likely she is to go *outside* of the home for influence stimulus, to spend her time reading, going to concerts, theatre, dance, staying "well informed". (Lippard, 2010, p. 486)

In other words, the status of the maker is determined by class privilege, with the inside of the home serving as a space for exploration and the culture of the outside world afforded to those who feel entitled to access stimulus from elsewhere.

The Rise of the Amateur

As previously suggested, the emergence of the amateur is also linked to the growth and development of the middle-classes during the industrial revolution. The development of accessible art materials such as paint in tubes and easels, 'how-to' manuals and advice-based literature happened as a direct result of changes in manufacturing and the desires of the middle classes to pursue leisure-based activities. Until now, leisure was something only gentrified landowners had been able to enjoy. As Knott explains:

The unpaid aristocratic virtuoso was joined by a vast array of amateur makers – women engaging in home arts, beginners learning a craft, tourists capturing a scene through watercolour, and throughout the nineteenth century an increasing number of middle-class workers wanting to fill spare time with useful and enjoyable practices. As a result, amateur practice increasingly became associated with conditions of making

[labour], rather than mere curiosity or a love of acquiring knowledge. (Knott, 2015, p. xiii)

If, engaging in amateur activities is a 'condition of its unfreedom' (Adamson, 2010; Knott, 2011), essentially, in order that we may engage in an activity with autonomy, we need to have the conditions of paid work in our lives too. It is this point of difference that establishes the role of amateur practice versus professional practice. This does not mean automatically that amateur work is made poorly or without critical engagement. Quite simply, it is done voluntarily and unlike its professional counterpart, often achieved without monetary gain.

In the foreword written by Glenn Adamson for Lucy Lippard's 1978 text "Making Something from Nothing [Towards a Definition of Women's 'Hobby' Art']", Adamson states that Lippard 'reframes amateurism not as an embarrassing condition which women artists need to transcend, but as a measure by which to judge the extent of gender and class prejudice' (Lippard, 2010, p. 483).[5]

For some authors it is clear that makers who engage with amateur activities do not want to be passive consumers, they want to be entirely immersed in an experience that they have fully orchestrated (Adamson, 2007; Paterson & Surette, 2015). Makers push themselves to learn and engage in ways beyond the amateur act itself. Going to exhibitions, sourcing materials, reading around the history, watching

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[5] Lippard also goes on to say that even with the wrongness of art being considered higher than craft, within the craft field itself there are purists who would deem that amateur craft and select textiles to be considered as lowly. Basically, women making quilts as an amateur engagement is pretty lowly – bring in non-white ethnicity and it falls lower [or, is considered as folk art] (Lippard, 2010)

instructional videos, amongst other things, in order that they can become more engaged and present within their 'arranged' amateur activity. As Knott explains 'So often overlooked, amateur craft is more complex, innovative, unexpected, roguish, humorous and elusive than its use as a cover-all term for inadequacy and shoddy work' (Knott, 2015, p. xii). These characteristics can be quite simply a characteristic, or they can be the means by which one may elevate oneself or move beyond those embarrassing conditions that are potentially recognised because of one's gender or perceived class. Developing expertise, insight and the confidence to engage with an interest in the wider world of culture, has the capacity to make an amateur engagement, an empowering act.

However, these positive highlights can also be the markers by which amateur craft takes most criticism. As Adamson explains in *Thinking through Craft* [2007]: 'when craft manifests itself as an expression of amateurism […] it becomes genuinely troublesome […] one of the hallmarks of amateur activity is a lack of critical distance from the object of desire' (Adamson, 2007, p. 139). One of the primary definitions of making as an amateur occurs as a result of enjoyment and for the love of making itself. One of the criticisms heralded at this driving force is that it lacks critique and does not directly engage or present a challenge to established dialogue and debate in the fine arts or the art system itself. The historical hierarchy between art and craft means that culturally amateur activities and work are often dismissed from those outside the field of amateur interest. However, Adamson explains that 'the disdain goes both ways' (Adamson, 2007, p. 139). One only has to spend time at an amateur event such as a science fiction or quilting convention to understand that what takes place outside of their amateur passions, has little to no relevance. In other

words, those engaged in such activities can become so absorbed in this aspect of their world, that they take no notice of external critique and commentary. [6]

Textile Craft

In *The Invention of Craft* [2013] Glenn Adamson writes; 'For me, craft has always meant something like "making something well through hand skill," no more and no less' (Adamson, 2013, p. xxiv). Most contemporary makers [both professional and amateur] would consider the traditional definition of craft in this way, however, contemporary craft is complex, slippery and presents multiple perspectives and positions (Adamson, 2013; Attfield, 2000; Frayling, 2011). Craft is an act of making that usually evolves through a particular commitment to process and as a result, develops material expertise (Kats, 2014; Kouhia, 2016; Niedderer & Townsend, 2015). Some interpretations of craft have an understanding that it is wider than just the act of making. A more holistic viewpoint encompasses the ideation of the end-product, the act of making as well as a reflective evaluation of the process itself. These acts are not a formal sequence of static events

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[6] Within the hierarchies of the arts, craft has often been considered as lessor to fine or contemporary art – in terms of its monetary value, contribution to high culture and recognition of those that participate in craft-based activities. The reasons for this are often cited as craft being female orientated or gendered, functionally driven, process over concept (Adamson, 2010; Lippard, 2010; Parker, 2010; Paterson & Surette, 2015). However, Glenn Adamson, in his book *The Invention of Craft* [2013] reminds us that the placement of craft in opposition to fine art is largely a post war [1945] tendency (Adamson, 2013, p. xiv) and that it should be discussed within a far wider remit of creative acts that include material science, amateur practice and design, to only judge it by the standards of contemporary or fine art closes craft down too much (Adamson, 2007, 2013; Frayling, 2011; Risatti, 2007).

but actually crossover and can happen simultaneously (Huotilainen et al., 2018; Pöllänen, 2009).

Christopher Frayling, educationalist and writer, clearly presents a more fluid understanding in *On Craftsmanship: towards a new Bauhaus* [2011] stating that craft is 'a short word that has been stretched in recent years almost to breaking point' (Frayling, 2011, p. 9). Adamson reflects on this and refers to our understanding of craft as *elastic* (Adamson, 2013) and 'nearly always defined by what it is not rather than by what it is' (cited in Niedderer & Townsend, 2015, p. 626). Frayling refers to designers for whom craft is considered as the *workmanship of risk* and more recently, *slow* design as a response to fast living. For large scale manufacturers, *craft* can be an opportunity to highlight 'the good old times' through advertising – think Hovis and you see a romanticised cobbled Yorkshire street or Levi's 'Craftwork' campaign, where denim is aligned to heritage, quality and innovation or for, evening television viewers, craft is about watching from a distance as experts demonstrate cooking, dressmaking, mending (Frayling, 2011). Recent examples of this include The Great British Sewing Bee, The Great Pottery Throw Down, The Great British Bake Off and Make! Craft Britain.

Amateur craft activities that specifically utilise textiles are well known to have therapeutic effects and to contribute to the well-being of the individual (Collier, 2011; Huotilainen et al., 2018; Jefferies, 1984; Kouhia, 2016; Stannard & Sanders, 2015; Turney, 2004). The experience that makers often describe relates to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi concept of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) which can be articulated as a mindful space that we inhabit when we intensely engage in an activity for its own sake (Collier, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi,

1996; Hackney, 2013; Huotilainen et al., 2018; Knott, 2011; Lane, 2013). Furthermore, time that is spent quilting and patchworking enhances feelings of satisfaction, flow and confidence (Burt & Atkinson, 2011; Huotilainen et al., 2018; Kouhia, 2016; Stalp, 2007).

The cabinet maker and craft theorist David Pye, author of "The Nature and Art of Workmanship" [1968], celebrated the *Workmanship of Risk* [WoR] in which made objects were free of the regulated *Workmanship of Certainty* [WoC] which, was the focus of industry standards of production (Pye, 2010, p. 341). Written in 1968, at a time when craft theory was emerging in a bid to be considered in conversations about the status of craft making in relation to art and design, Pye brings in measurable scales of understanding surrounding the hand making of products as an artisan as opposed to the making of products as part of industrial production practices. It is useful to consider Pye's thinking here as it provides a way of looking at positions that differ but are dependent on their relationship to other points of view. For example, Pye provides an understanding of the nature of crafted objects and their intent, and whilst not entirely linked to amateur making, helps to provide a distinction with its binary counterpart: professional making. The term *Workmanship of Risk* refers to hand crafted works that do not look or feel like they have come off a production line, each piece bears the traces of the *hand of the maker*. In opposition is the term *Workmanship of Certainty* which describes objects that are made on industrial production lines, every item comes off the line looking exactly like its predecessor – if it is not, it is deemed to have failed and will be considered as waste. The *WoR* emphasises that the quality of the result is always at risk due to the nature of making individual items by hand. This approach keeps the focus on the outcome over the experience of engaging with making.

Within the field of collaborative craft making [but also by the individual contemporary amateur maker], the experience and time spent engaging in the act of making is of greater importance than the outcome itself. In *Collaboration through Craft* [2013] Felcey et al explain: 'more emphasis is placed on innovation; intentionality has replaced objectivity and chaos and risk have taken the place of determinate rules and judgement. Expertise in this sense is now less about end-result driven processes and more about engaging in a process' (Felcey et al., 2013, p. 9). Here we recognise the importance and relevance of the wider experience in making through craft, as opposed to the focus being on the end-product, which in commercial environments is of paramount importance.

The term 'textiles' encompasses a broad spectrum of elements and processes that, enable you to make cloth. Fibres are spun to create yarns, yarns are connected through knitting and weaving to make the cloth and then dyes can be used to add colour. Stitch can be used decoratively or to construct items for use in the home or for clothing. Textiles are, overall, produced industrially but are also utilised within the arts / crafts sectors and incredibly popular as an approach to creativity for amateur makers. Textiles are embedded with social meanings, they often bring people together and help to foster social bonds (Barber & Macbeth, 2014; Hemmings, 2012; Pajaczkowska, 2016). The skills of making cloth are often passed down through the generations and connect us to our ancestors (Hackney, 2013; Mason, 2005; Robertson & Vinebaum, 2016).

The making or manipulation of textiles within the amateur sector is highly accessible in terms of learning through open sources like the

internet, television, books, guilds, evening classes (Frayling, 2011; Hackney, 2013; Huotilainen et al., 2018; Jackson, 2011). From crochet to cross stitch and macramé to quilting, textiles are utilised to aid health and well-being (Burt & Atkinson, 2011; Collier, 2011; Huotilainen et al., 2018), as a creative outlet (Hackney et al., 2016; Jackson, 2015; Kouhia, 2016) and to bring communities together (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Ratto & Boler, 2014). The transportable nature of textiles and particular skills such as knitting, crochet and patchwork means that it can be taken outside of the home and engaged with in public social situations, i.e. the pub, cafés and parks (Myzelev, 2009; Robertson & Vinebaum, 2016; Twigger Holroyd & Shercliff, 2016)

Anna Kouhia, is author of the thesis "Unravelling the Meaning of Textile Hobby Crafts" [2016] and highlights a broad range of textile based activities that are undertaken by the amateur as a hobby, from the 'seemingly uninventive step-by-step craft projects portrayed in craft magazines [… through to] radical-activist riot crafts' (Kouhia, 2016, p. 17) and uses the term 'shifting culturescape' to suggest something that does not sit still for long (Kouhia, 2016). Engaging with textiles as a hobby [or for the amateur] is undisputedly popular; in the USA, 28.8 million people participated in knitting and crochet [2016] (Decker, 2018) and there were 7-10 million quilters in 2017 (*Quilting in America 2017*, 2017). In the UK, crafting generates over £5.4 billion in the retail economy, almost 70% of British women have engaged with craft in the past year and crafting amongst 16-34 year olds is up 12% since 2013 (*Immed. Media Co*, 2020).

At the time of completing this PhD, we are in the midst of the global pandemic; Covid 19. As the world went into a lockdown, there was an exponential rise in people taking up new hobbies and for many, this

included delving into the world of textiles. The UK Hand Knitting association states that during the initial weeks of lockdown there was a 50% increase in internet searches on how to knit (*UK Hand Knitting*, n.d.) and from personal experience, fabric shops were so inundated with orders they were having to close to catch up on orders and to restock.

As a format, textiles have traditionally been shunned as a medium by art galleries (Lippard, 2010; Robertson & Vinebaum, 2016) as it is so often relegated to domestic creativity, but in the last 20 years this has started to change. As male artists specifically choose to use textiles as a medium, you also see a growing cultural acceptance of it as a *serious* medium. Grayson Perry, Yinka Shonibare, Do Ho Sun, Nick Cave and Gerhard Richter work exclusively with textiles, or utilise it on occasions. Coincidentally [or therefore] it has become more acceptable to be presented in a gallery setting.

In recent years, there have been more opportunities to experience and see textiles in galleries. Currently [2020] on display at Yorkshire Sculpture Park is the exhibition *Beyond* by Joana Vasconcelos which includes several major textile sculptures. Sheila Hicks has a major exhibition *Off Grid* at the Hepworth, Wakefield [now postponed to 2022] and *We Will Walk – Art and Resistance in the American South* at the Turner Contemporary in Margate had some of the Gee's Bend quilts on display as part of the exhibition. Within the last few years, Anni Albers had a major retrospective at the Tate Modern and two of the joint winners from the *Turner Prize* 2019, Oscar Murillo and Tai Shani included textiles within their works.

A recent article "How Quiltmaking's Deep Traditions are Influencing Contemporary Art" on Artsy recognises that textiles as craft is increasingly being noticed and particularly the work of Black African quilt makers. This tradition of quilting is now being used by numerous contemporary artists including Bisa Butler, Faith Ringgold, Sarah-Joy Ford, Tracey Emin, Dawn Williams Boyd, Terrence Payne, Josh Faught and Natalie Baxter. The fact that quilts always draw us back to the domestic and the homely [rightly or wrongly so] is the reason for this craft making being revisited as an art form during troubled social and political times, 'quilts inherent associations with warmth, nostalgia, and community make them particularly appealing now, in the midst of the pandemic and widespread division and inequity' (Davis-Marks, 2020).

Amateur Textile Craft.

Millions of people across the world engage in textile based amateur craft as a leisure activity for enjoyment and as a way of self-expression. Approaches are diverse; from the step-by-step methods found in magazines and online to the more inventive DIY makers [who usually started out as a step-by-step maker], through to community and activist based craft (Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Mason, 2005). Sociologist, Harry Hillman Chartrand recognises this growth of participation in craft in relation to three demographic changes: rising levels of education, increasing participation of women and the ageing of the population (Chartrand, 1989). Engaging with craft as an amateur is now firmly embedded within popular culture (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Knott, 2015; Mason, 2005; Turney, 2004).

Engaging with craft as an amateur hold's similar values to those of the professional craft practitioner; making something well [by hand], mastering a technique and finding joy in the time spent making. Where they differ is the purpose for pursuing the craft. For the professional, the focus is on the consumer who in turn demands qualities in finish and particular products. For the amateur, it is more insular in that they are generally doing it for themselves [despite frequently gifting the products of their time] and care less for what other people may think of their endeavours or, what current high culture deems worthy. As Adamson explains: 'the amateur mindset implies a complete indifference to the self-critical values of the avant garde' (Adamson, 2007, p. 139). Kouhia goes on to state that the non-professional uses this time of making as an opportunity to think on matters that are on the mind and make according to their personal taste, thus completely ignoring what is considered good taste by those trained to know: 'craft making [for the hobbyist] has become known in the current debates as a means of expressing oneself, since it lets ordinary people illustrate their own aesthetic taste and creates an avenue for self-contemplation' (Kouhia, 2016, p. 23).

Lippard disdainfully refers to distinctions in craft as "high" and "low" craft (Lippard, 2010). High craft, can be seen in galleries and museums and individual items form part of a small, bespoke production line that have aesthetic similarities (Risatti, 2007). Low craft however is considered as derivative, not created with consideration for wider cultural trends, often jumps from one style to another with each piece produced and, is of low quality (Lippard, 2010). This inference, that an amateur automatically assumes low quality [in making, concept, design] is considered offensive by some who partake in craft as an amateur. For example, guest editors of a special edition of *Third Text*

on *Amateurism*, Julia Bryan-Wilson and Benjamin Piekut, explain that this 'progression' is not on an equal footing for all amateurs 'for someone with privilege, amateurism functions as a temporal condition: one begins as the first timer and then, over time, develops into a pro. For others, including many minoritarian subjects who have not been granted access to the same narratives of progress (i.e. indigenous or women makers), no amount of experience is sufficient to promote them out the category of amateur' (Bryan-Wilson & Piekut, 2020, p. 10).

Amateur craft is often paired down to being a disguised affirmation of work (Gelber, 1999; Jackson, 2011), is categorised into levels based on intention and skill (Atkinson, 2006; Stebbins, 1992) or, as actively standing in opposition to its professional counterpoint (Merrifield, 2017). But we can also understand it as a more fluid occurrence that is constantly re-balancing itself. Rather than recognise the amateur within set categories, it might be more pertinent to understand it as something that shifts in response to its social and physical habitat. The amateur is 'inherently constrained, mediated and socialised' (Knott, 2015, p. xvi). This fluid way of thinking enables us to have a more inclusive understanding of the value of amateur craft engagement to individuals.

Making Communally

In the book *Collaboration through Craft*, edited by Amanda Ravetz, Alice Kettle & Helen Felcey, craft is considered as 'socially and culturally situated... with the potential to be highly adaptive' (Felcey et al., 2013, p. 8). Felcey et al recognise that our understanding of craft

can be renegotiated and understood differently depending on the contexts within which we encounter it. When we consider craft in a communal making environment, it is useful to recognise its ability to transform not only those who engage with it but as an act that can be amended or adapted and is likely to be different to each person who engages with it.

Collaboration in making, while having its pitfalls such as the [potential] de-skilling of a piece of work due to the number of partners involved, is nevertheless considered as an opportunity to expand upon its foundations; an opportunity to capture the benefits of working with a number of people (Hackney et al., 2016; Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009; Minahan & Cox, 2007; Shercliff, 2014a). Professor and author of *The One and the Many* [2011], Grant Kester discusses the nuances and specificity of working communally: 'new modes of aesthetic experience and new frameworks for thinking about identity occur through the haptic and verbal exchanges that unfold in the process of collaborative interaction' (Kester, 2011, p. 113). Kester is describing how conversations that take place during a communal making experience shape and inform the work we are making. These close-up and shared encounters encourage the maker to consider their own identity and how that may or may not differ when seen as part of the group.

Emma Shercliff, as a maker, researcher and educator acknowledges in their thesis 'Articulating Stitch: skilful hand-stitching as personal, social and cultural experience' [2014] that the specificity of stitching, helps or aids the development of making communally. 'The ability to interact socially ... is implicit in the rhythms and patterns of stitching gestures,

which in turn are reflected in the rhythms and patterns of speech in collective work' (Shercliff, 2014a, p. 159)

Lecturers, Jane Maidment and Selma Macfarlane, in the text "Craft groups: Sites of Friendship, Empowerment, Belonging and Learning for Older Women" [2009] looked at how well-being was improved amongst older women (65+) when they engaged in craft making as a communal activity: 'The women … perceived the craft groups as a place where they could learn from each other, validate feelings, discover their right for verbal and creative expression, experience autonomy, foster support and service each other as well as other women outside of the group' (Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009, p. 16). For these women [as in most female focused craft groups], it is an opportunity to learn from your peers and to lift each other. For example, one of the participants in Maidment and Macfarlane's research commented, it 'makes you feel good, brightens you up, lifts you up … I love it when someone asks, you know, how did you do that?... And you feel, I suppose, a little bit important. (Elsie)' (Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009, p. 17).

Craft making has historically been associated with women and the domestic (Hackney, 2013; Hemmings, 2012; Kouhia, 2016; Lippard, 2010; Mason, 2005; Parker, 2010; Shercliff, 2014a) and is often conceived as being nostalgic with connections to parents and grandparents. Amongst younger women there has been a resurgence over the past 25 years in craft as an amateur activity with groups such as Stitch'n Bitch (Stoller, 2004) and Craftivism (Corbett, 2013; Greer, 2014) bringing making back into current popular culture. Women, particularly in their twenties, thirties and forties often recognise craft as 'empowering …because it provides an opportunity to undertake

something purely unpractical and inefficient' (Myzelev, 2009). But it is not always recognised as being fun, mindful and a release from daily pressures as authors Jack Bratich and Heidi Brusch point out in "Fabricating Activism: Craft-Work, Popular Culture, Gender" [2011]. They write: 'old domesticity, with its attending negative associations with female subordination, devalued labour, and social role restrictions, could never fully capture what was actually going on in these spaces' (Bratich & Brush, 2011, p. 238) meaning that for some women, particularly those who have lived through oppressed feminine domestication will find it difficult to understand the use of certain crafts for pleasure (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Kouhia, 2016).

Making work communally requires negotiation, compromise and can bring anxiety [due in part to a lack of full control over creative, technical or material choices] (Kester, 2013; Lewis et al., 2013). If, however, we push past these initial [but real] challenges we can recognise other opportunities. Often the outcome of making work together shifts the focus to the experience of working with others through a communally shared process as opposed to prioritising the final outcome. For example, The Profanity Embroidery Group [PEG] [2014 – present] is a group of women [and one man] who meet regularly in a Whitstable pub in Kent. The premise for the group is that they embroider profanities onto cloth, sometimes they work as individuals and at other times they work on a project together. In an interview on the blog *womensart*, with founder Annie Taylor it was noted that 'groups like PEG are reflective of much more than the crafts created but highlight the value in collective experience within the tradition of women's communal work' (*Stitching & Swearing: Interview with Annie Taylor of the Profanity Embroidery Group (PEG)*, 2018). On being asked about a feminist slant to the group she replies: 'Some of

the work is more subtle than others, but there is something rather glorious in beautifully embroidering the word Cunt. It is an old word, but it is seen as vicious and derogatory, the worst of the worst, but if you can happily use it, and stitch it, the word has lost its power to hurt you' (*Stitching & Swearing: Interview with Annie Taylor of the Profanity Embroidery Group (PEG)*, 2018).

The makers of PEG use the confidence that being part of a group brings to empower themselves (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Minahan & Cox, 2007) and in their case, to push back against the oppressive use of language that has been used to quieten them and make them feel de-valued. In the book *DIY Citizenship; Critical Making and Social Media* (2014), editors and Professors Matt Ratto and Megan Boler recognise this group of proactive makers as DIY Citizens, that is, people who are politically participating in society or, those who 'redeploy and re-purpose corporately produced content or create novel properties of their own, often outside the standard systems of production and consumption' (Ratto & Boler, 2014).

Figure 3 Sue Prevost of PEG, 2019. (PEG - Profanity Embroidery Group - Whitstable, n.d.)

PEG and Stitch'n Bitch groups are examples of the power that can emerge from a group [usually women] coming together to create work as individuals. But what of groups of women who come together as a collective to engage in making work as one? *Guerrilla Girls*, formed in the 1980s, represented a united front and created artistic protests in the fight for equal rights, anti-racism and against sexism particularly found within the arts. More recently, *teamLab*, formed in 2001 as an international collective explore the relationships between the self and the world, using high technologies as their medium of choice. Both Guerrilla Girls and teamLab work as a collective in order to create outputs that communicate a shared vision, yet they still operate in a

way that makes use of multiple roles and individual identity. What would happen if work was to be made that negated the individual in order to create a new whole?

A thoroughly integrated approach is taken by *Brass Art*, a UK based, all-female collaborative artist practice, consisting of Chara Lewis, Kristin Mojsiewocz & Anneké Pettican. Describing themselves as hybrid, performative and playful in nature, they have been working together since 1999 and have a desire to 'explore spaces from which we are excluded' (Lewis et al., 2013). For Brass Art, the experience of making work as a collaboration have benefits that cannot be achieved if working as individuals. They write: 'The focus of our practice – embodied experience, the body in space, doubling – demands recognition as three artists working as one; however, the production of a collective voice entails a necessary negation of the self to some extent, and this blurring of forms extends our narrative' (Lewis et al., 2013, p. 66). Lewis, Mojsiewocz and Pettican actively negate individual traits and 'surrender the security of self-expression' (Kester, 2013, p. 8) in order to create a new voice that can only happen collaboratively. Brass Art notably recognise themselves as unique in that they actively work towards one, distinct voice: 'we have yet to meet other collaborations of three women artists that function like ours' (Lewis et al., 2013, p. 67).

Shercliff also recognises the ability of a group to morph and adapt in order to find a group or communal balance, 'aspects of group stitching pertain to women's traditions of gathering informally to share knowledge through talk and practical activity that is in itself a form of tacitly embodied knowledge – knowledge of mutuality and cooperation' (Shercliff, 2014a, p. 156). This positive affirmation of

creating new voices through a group of people can be an opportunity for empowerment, particularly when done through personal choice.

An example of women working communally in a creative manner but for a brief amount of time [one Mother's Day in 1987], comes together in a piece of video art. The social engaged artist, Suzanne Lacy created a body of work titled *The Crystal Quilt*. Currently, it is displayed at The Tate Modern as a second generation of the work, but was originally carried out in Minneapolis, 1987 [see

Figure *4* & Figure 5]. Consisting of an event in which 430 women, aged over 60, gathered to share their views on growing older, they performed / re-enacted the formation of a quilt with the use of furniture, movement and swathes of cloth. The aim of the piece was to explore 'the visibility, or invisibility of women and their leadership capacity', Lacy emphasised that she didn't want us to 'see these women as potential reservoirs of memory, but as potential activists within the public sphere' (Tate, n.d.).

Figure 4 [left] The Crystal Quilt by Suzanne Lacy, 1985-1987 (Lacy, 1987a)

Figure 5 [right] The Crystal Quilt by Suzanne Lacy, 1985-1987 [detail] (Lacy, 1987b)

Lacy's work is one piece in a history of artworks that question the visibility of feminist artworks within a patriarchal art system (Parker & Pollock, 1987). Questioning what is deemed to have value and what does not, a number of artists have specifically used materials and techniques usually recognised as craft within what have become iconic artworks such as Judy Chicago's, *The Dinner Party* (Chicago, 1979), *Womanhouse* by Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro and 21 of their students (Chicago & Schapiro, 1972) and *True Patriot Love* by Joyce Wieland (Wieland, 1971).

Quilts and quilting have more often been relegated to the home, the domestic, because overall, it is carried out by women. As a result, it is understood and debated as being outside the art system (Parker, 2010; Stalp, 2007)[7]. If, as Janis Jefferies discusses in "Women and Textiles" [1984], it was carried out mostly by men, [whom constantly seek recognition for achievement] then it would be considered more favourably (Jefferies, 1984). Within the system, work is validated, understood as authentic and therefore recorded as truth and it enters into the history of art (Adamson, 2007; Auther, 2012; Chidgey, 2014; Lippard, 2010). Lacy brings 430 women, who, over the age of 60, are more accustomed to being invisible and are certainly not

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[7] So, what is wrong with women's work, women engaging in craft within the home? It comes down to a traditional understanding that a key characteristic of being a woman is that of housework and childcare (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Brooks, 1987; Matthews, 1989; Parker, 2010). Housework [and childcare] is an act of labour, yet unlike any other forms of labour this is not remunerated and is not recognised as producing surplus value. In contrast, the factory worker is paid a wage for working a particular number of hours, at the end of their working day, they are now in a position of leisure. For the housewife, because they are not paid, there is no demarcation of time between labour and leisure and therefore all activities that take place in the home fall within this never-ending cycle of housework. Anything that may be carried out as an act of leisure within the home, such as knitting and quilting, is consequently understood as a domestic duty as opposed to something that may be considered with or of value. This perpetual cycle of producing items that have no value outside of the home, keeps women and the products of their so-called leisure time, invisible (Brooks, 1987, p. 139).

representative of the art world directly into the system to be heard, recorded and seen.

Finding Autonomy

From the Profanity Embroidery Group of Whitstable [2014 – date] to Kirstie Allsopp's Handmade Christmas [2014 - date], DIY 3D printers in the home to the Women's Institute engaging in Craftivism (Wilson, 2017) and the Ikeahackers (Yap, n.d.), it is very clear to recognise that people from a wide range of backgrounds and interests are engaging in making as an amateur activity (Adamson, 2007; Chidgey, 2014; Hackney, 2013; Knott, 2015; Ratto & Boler, 2014). These voluntary engagements with making take place outside of paid employment and allow us to tinker, have an element of control over our actions and create our own goals.

In the book *Craft Reader* [2010], Glenn Adamson considers the everyday engagements that non-professional makers have with craft-based activities, suggesting that our time spent in labouring at work and hours spent working on our hobbies have different groundings: 'The workplace might be driven by the imperatives of capitalism, but dress, music and hobbies could be reimagined in subcultural terms as "free self-activity with goals of its own"' (Adamson, 2010, p. 458). This free self-activity can be recognised as autonomous actions, doing something because you choose to, self-imposed deadlines [or the lack of], accepting of the less than pleasant tasks, gaining joy from not being told you are doing something wrong (Jackson, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Myzelev, 2009). This activity can be an empowering and

attractive motivation. Furthermore, these moments of autonomy can have a positive impact; re-balancing oneself, empowerment and the building of confidence (Myzelev, 2009).

A lot of crafts [and arts] that are undertaken by an amateur, include time spent using patterns [knitting, crochet] or kits [painting, patchwork, cross stitch]. These patterns and kits are created by designers, and provide the user with the opportunity to engage in creative activities without needing extensive, or any prior experience (Hackney, 2013; Knott, 2015; Myzelev, 2009). However, there is another way in which inventive, questioning amateur crafters utilise such sources. The user will often swap materials and colours from the suggested format and the more experience the person using a pattern or kit has, the more likely they are to adapt, exchange and freely use their own imagination (Myzelev, 2009). These actions demonstrate autonomous approaches to the kit and shift the outcomes from *copy to original* through customisation (Campbell, 2005; Hackney, 2013; Myzelev, 2009; Ratto & Boler, 2014).

In the book *Making is Connecting* [2018], David Gauntlett celebrates the power of making through everyday activities that connect people. An important factor in a person's happiness is having moments of autonomy. Not having control over one's actions or being able to make our own decisions denies the opportunity to 'express their meaning in action' (Gauntlett, 2018, p. 115). Such actions do not need to be grandiose; small actions embedded into our daily routine can have a large impact. Understanding that amateur actions are inextricably tied to the labour of the workforce [inside or outside of the home] (Adamson, 2010; Knott, 2011) can be further extended if we consider how, as an individual, we manage our time and space so that we may

make the most of an opportunity to engage in craft. The time we *gain* arrives as a result of compressing and coordinating other responsibilities such as care for family members, a career, maintaining friendships, exercising, walking the dog, but we also tend to arrange and manage our craft spaces in terms of tools, materials, purchasing so that we can more effectively use our time. This process is not too dissimilar to the work place in which spaces, equipment and processes are driven to be efficient, reliable and functional (Adamson, 2010; Jackson, 2015; Knott, 2015). This mirroring of the efficient workplace can be an enabler towards greater freedom and autonomy in our leisure time. Bratich and Brush refer, in part to this as the *social home*, similar to the *social factory* in which the procedures and mechanisms of factory discipline begin to permeate everyday life (Bratich & Brush, 2011).

The internet has been instrumental in shifting textiles and craft from the private [inside the home / not in galleries] into the public realm. This, in turn, has promoted a desire for co-learning and social making (Gauntlett, 2018; Loveday-Edwards, 2011; Robertson & Vinebaum, 2016) while it [the internet] simultaneously disrupts our ability to form and maintain more traditional, face to face social connections (Shercliff, 2014a; Turkle, 2011). Kestor reminds us that 'concepts of collective solidarity and community identity have never been more important' (Kester, 2013, p. 130). In order that we can collectively make connections and to understand what we have in common, is it possible to also have autonomy when you are not operating as an individual?

In the book *Happiness Explained* [2016], economist Paul Anand identifies four crucial elements for individuals and society to flourish;

'fairness', 'autonomy', 'community' and 'engagement' (Anand, 2016). As we have already found, making work communally can increase the confidence and curiosity of an individual. When surrounded by like-minded people we are more willing to take creative risks in our making. When we intentionally choose to make work as part of a communal activity, we have already decided that we want to embrace the sharing of ideas and approaches. In return, we are able to gain higher levels of enjoyment and it becomes more meaningful (Gauntlett, 2018). If we understand autonomy as actions in which individuals can make their own choices, choosing to be part of a communal making group and all that comes with that association is in itself an autonomous act. But is this negated with all the levels of compromise that need to be made? The individual does not disappear into the crowd of voices, instead, you find opportunities to create a new voice, one that is embedded in the DNA of the group. There is also the possibility of building strength in the conviction of your choices when those whom you work with, encourage, adopt and find value in your points (Gauntlett, 2018; Lewis et al., 2013). It could be said that autonomous choices become richer, when you have the backing of your community (Gauntlett, 2018).

Sites for Communal Making

Site, in the context of this research, refers to the spaces and places in which the making of quilts and artwork take place. These spaces are more often domesticated; the living room, spare room or attic studio, occasionally, they are public spaces such as a Church Hall or local Market and Gallery Space. The domestic setting has, for women in particular, often had a dual / multi-purpose use; for living, unpaid

domestic work and raising a family and also a place of [historically low-paid] skilled labour: 'In the hidden world of the homeworkers, skilled machinists and finishers undertake the same work as factory workers, often with additional tasks and responsibilities, but in the confines of their own homes' (Bowman, 1987, p. 121). Alternately, it is also a site for creativity and women's production (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Elinor et al., 1987; Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Milling et al., 2014; Parker, 2010).

Knott refers to the space in which amateurs make work (individually or as a group) as being a 'temporal zone'. It is a space where 'definitions of work, productivity, aesthetics, play and labour are continually negotiated' (Knott, 2011, p. 20). Space is constantly (indirectly) realigned depending on a particular situation, for example, the site itself may move from one location to another. Considered as an action [in this case knitting / cross stitch] or, the physical site itself, transforms the use of space as a dining room to a maker's studio dependent on the requirements of the day. These negotiations of space ensure a site remains temporal, it fluidly adjusts from a space of work and labour to a place of relaxation.

The home has long been referred to as a private space [since the seventeenth century] and is linked with the feminine and the mother (Scott & Keates, 2004). The challenge with understanding this space as private is that it is often a site for devalued labour, female subordination and confinement (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Parker, 2010; Stalp, 2006). This charged and loaded term in turn contributes to the persistent narrative and recognition that homegrown crafts are a field of work, not to be taken seriously and therefore, it is work that should be kept out of the public eye. The home, had in fact been recognised

as a site for the production of textiles. During a pre-industrial era, there was a cottage industry in which women were the primary makers of commercial textiles and would be paid for their labour. With the transference of production to the mills and to mechanical machinery such as looms, men were viewed as better equipped to run the machines (Bratich & Brush, 2011) and women were re-assigned to the unpaid labour of domestic duties and the raising of the family.

This historical understanding of the home led to a particularly subversive use of textile crafts with the production of banners within radical movements including the Suffragettes (Greer, 2014; Liddington, 2006; Parker, 2010). Some individuals also devoted time and skill to subverting traditional techniques and editing pre-determined patterns through embroidery. Rozsika Parker talks of making textiles that reflects a personality or personal thought: 'the art of [a] personal life outside male-dominated institutions and the world of work […] has given it a special place in counter-cultures and radical movements' (Parker, 2010, p. 204). This rebellious action was not just a response to the abhorrent treatment of women that came from wider society at the time, but also emerged through an empowerment felt by women coming together to make work. The opportunity to work away from the patriarchal gaze and gather as sewing circles or quilting bee's allowed women to 'swap stories, skills, knowledge, strategies and generally speak about the more oppressive aspects of the social home' (Bratich & Brush, 2011)[8].

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[8] The social home acknowledges that the home has been and can still be understood as a site of oppression while simultaneously recognising it as a space that can be social (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Matthews, 1989).

Figure 6 Embroidered runner, Beryl Weaver, reproduced in Spare Rib, 1978 (Parker, 2010, p. 205).

Text says   [left]   'How is little ♀ today?'

                 [right]   'She's getting stronger and angrier thank you'.

At a conference I attended at Tate Liverpool, entitled *Collaborative Conversation* [2018], it was clear that artists, communities and activists utilise a range of names for the spaces they inhabit. Each have a particular reference to the conditions and situations of the environments in which creativity occurs. For example, Nina Edge from the *Welsh Streets* project, Liverpool (*Welsh Streets*, n.d.) referred to both homes and outside spaces where politically charged artworks appear as *Limboland*. Battling against gentrification, windows become noticeboards and small public galleries, where text was scribed into wet concrete and felt pen onto paper scraps – this is the material

media of activists. *Meanwhile Space* is the term used by Metal, another community driven arts lab based in Liverpool (also Southend & Peterborough) (*Metal*, n.d.). This particular term is now recognised nationally as towns and cities strive to make use of empty shops on the high street through regeneration programmes (*Meanwhile Found.*, 2020). For Metal, these spaces expand to green areas and parking lots on housing estates. They described the space that sits on the doorsteps of homes as 'usually being green spaces which are owned by the council or companies which is not maintained so it attracts antisocial behaviour' (Tate: Liverpool, 2018). Local spaces relevant to this particular thesis, find Kirklees Council letting out [including rent-free and in-kind support] local authority owned spaces as temporary and meanwhile spaces (Bailey et al., 2019). Like Knott, they recognise that working with communities to change the nature of these spaces is 'temporal' and changes according to needs on the day, from a community meeting to a football ground or the site for a fete. Space becomes flexible for different ways of living, communing and making.

Bringing the private into the public, through groups that meet in pubs, parks, galleries and café's (Hackney, 2013; Kouhia, 2016; Minahan & Cox, 2007; Myzelev, 2009; Ratto & Boler, 2014; Turney, 2004) has sought to reclaim and demystify amateur crafts. For example, knitting while listening to conference papers (*Public Displays of Knitting*, 2006) enable people to reconnect outside of the home and create communities of like-minded individuals. For the PEG group, they have chosen to purposely meet in a local pub as it creates an open invitation for anyone to join. Founder Annie Taylor says: 'We meet in the pub, The Duke of Cumberland, a public space where people can come in on their own or observe us from a distance and decide whether they want to join us. If we met in a closed space, it makes it difficult for

others to feel as though they can just rock up and join in, and if the meeting is in someone's house, they are not necessarily going to want to welcome total strangers. So I think the 'where' of the meeting is very important' (*Stitching & Swearing: Interview with Annie Taylor of the Profanity Embroidery Group (PEG)*, 2018).

Home as Site

So how might we consider the home as a purposeful site for making work communally? The domestic setting has, for women, often had a dual/multi-purpose; for living, raising a family at the same time as being a place of work. As Bowman explains: 'In the hidden world of the homeworkers, skilled machinists and finishers undertake the same work as factory workers, often with additional tasks and responsibilities, but in the confines of their own homes' (Bowman, 1987, p. 121) and the home is often a site for creativity and women's production (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Elinor et al., 1987; Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Milling et al., 2014; Parker, 2010).

The home as a site or subject for feminist artworks has been questioned with regularity since the 1960s [or at least been seen within the artworld]. For artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, domestic acts of labour became the artwork itself when, as a performance piece, she carried out her domestic chores at the Wadsworths Atheneum Museum of Art, Connecticut in *Washing / Tracks / Maintenance: Outside* [1973]. Rethinking what an artwork could be, while confined to the home, the work of the *Women's Postal Art Event* [1975-79], comprised of a range of small objects, often incorporating household

items that were posted around the UK to be developed into artworks. The premise of the action was to provide support and reach out to woman artists who were otherwise isolated and alone (Gosling et al., 2018).

In recent years the idea of *home* has become increasingly important to design historians (Attfield, 2000; Clarke, 2002). Those who live in the home actively use it as a site for the consumption of craft; through the display of craft artefacts, as a producer of craft and a consumer; with the purchase of craft items and kits and (Knott, 2015; Mason, 2005; Turney, 2004). Turney explains: 'Home as both an actual place, and as a 'lived-in' space, and as an imagined ideal raises questions about, and poses solutions to, dilemmas of taste, consumption and to display in everyday life' (Turney, 2004, p. 268).

This review of literature provides insight into the research and develops a particular understanding of the core concepts of amateur, communal making and textile crafts. There are several threads of enquiry that will be carried forward into the case study to form a network of methods to consider and understand what is taking place.

3

Methodologies of Research

This chapter provides an overview of the research questions and the methods used to gather data. This research utilises a mixed method approach to undertake the study and considers two philosophical worldview approaches: transformative and constructivist. The methods fit within a qualitative framework and includes a longitudinal case study, interviews, participant observation and a personal arts practice. Arts-Based Research as a way of thinking has provided a framework for the design and for understanding the research. For example, the research questions emerged organically out of an area of interest [non-commercial craft making practices] and over a period of time as opposed to a more traditional research approach in which a question is posed as a result of identifying an issue or problem to further investigate.

This research is a hybrid of both practice-led and practice-based. It refers to practice-led in that the outcomes of the research refer to alternative understandings of the nature of communal making practice itself. With regards to practice-based the outcomes of the practice [communally made quilts and drawings from a personal practice] demonstrate innovation in social making practices. As an artist, maker and teacher, this research has developed from my experience as a practitioner and as a tutor in craft-based learning environments.

As we will come to understand in the concluding thoughts of this PhD [p273], the methodologies do not just provide a framework for research, but they very much become embedded and patchworked into the quilts themselves that have been made by the Meltham Quilting Bee.

The Research Questions

This research endeavours to investigate the communal and collective craft-making practices of quilt-making specifically considering:

a) the autonomous, learning experience of a group
b) the social exchanges in a group
c) the changing identity of the amateur through communal making of craft.

An encounter at a conference where I heard the phrase 'not all crafts are communal' (Shercliff, 2014b) really stuck in my head, while my experiences of my own practice were done [by choice] in isolation, I was drawn to this new way of understanding craft. Dr Emma Shercliff was talking of her experience learning to carve stone in a class; the room would be full of people learning to carve yet everyone was working on their own stone and were all focused on the individual task at hand. This was in stark contrast to the stitching practices she had been part of where groups of people stitched cloth as part of a group for the local church (Shercliff, 2014b, 2014a).

A key point of difference when we consider this type of making are the two terms 'community of makers' and 'communal making'. The former, *Community of Makers*, indicates a group of people who come together with something in common, for example, to keep an allotment, engage in dressmaking or quilting. These individuals gather to work on something but are more often focused on individual projects and the group is often led / managed by an individual or a group of people. *Communal making*, however, refers to a group of

people who come together to work on a group outcome. For example, all working on a single quilt, with all members of the group making the decisions – there is a distinct lack of a hierarchy in this kind of activity

From my own experiences as a practitioner and this understanding of group making this research seeks to explore what an autonomous learning experience of a group looks like and what might the social exchanges of the group be? If a communal group of learners considered themselves to be amateurs at the start of the process, how does their identity change over a period of time and when working as part of a group?

With Shercliff's statement in mind about communal craft and the key areas of investigation in this research a quilting group case-study [Meltham Quilting Bee] was set up as this had the potential to accommodate the concept of communal making and, could be observable as a research process with a set of findings. In order to contextualise the methodological framework and the Meltham Quilting Bee as a case study, it is necessary to provide a historical overview of quilting with specific reference to acts of *communal making*. This helps to situate the purpose of the research practice and the methods used to help generate a range of outcomes, which as findings provide opportunity to further analyse the changing identity of the amateur in a group process.

Methodology & Support

The methods used within this research can be seen as a triangulation of approaches that converge to create a methodological framework for generating, analysing and understanding a range of findings. In Figure 7, you can see a framework for research that includes the *philosophical worldview* which is 'a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study' (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 6). Essentially it is the context of the way we may view and judge the research. The *design* refers to the type of enquiry and its approach, i.e., quantitative / qualitative, while the *research method* states the ways in which any data that emerges may be gathered, analysed and interpreted.

Figure 7 A Framework for Research – The Interconnection of Worldviews, Design and Research Methods. (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 5)

Figure 8 highlights the key methods and strategies utilised in the design of the research, the actionable elements, and the analysis stages. Each of these elements will be explained in the following section: what they are and how it is relevant to this research.

Figure 8 Methods and thinking for this body of research based on Creswell's Framework for Research.

Arts-Based Research

Arts-Based Research [ABR] recognises art practices and the actions of art themselves to be considered as methods of gaining knowledge that the sciences and social sciences arguably do not always reveal. Shaun McNiff, in the text "Philosophical and Practical Foundations of Artistic Enquiry" [2018] recognises that research enquiry through the arts can offer alternative ways of researching more than the typical social science models.

ABR is inclusive of Arts in the broadest sense: theatre, music, dance, visual arts, poetry, drawing, quilts, craft, video and graphic novels (Leavy, 2009, 2018; S. McNiff, 2018). Within each of these fields there are subgroups, cultural differences, varying ambitions, and each of these could of course be grouped across specialist fields of interest i.e., amateur theatre/craft/photography. In the context of this research, I recognise the term *Art* to encompass *Craft* and should be considered as interchangeable. Later, I will expand upon the nuisances and specificity of *Craft* and its important position within this research.

ABR recognises the value of research that unfolds and reveals itself. According to McNiff:

> A fundamental premise of artistic enquiry is that the end cannot be known at the beginning. Art [craft] is infinitely variable… Arguably, the artistic standard of influence corresponds more closely to the complex and ever-changing realm of human experience and action. (S. McNiff, 2018, p. 32)

This research does not have a theoretical answer that I intend to prove or disprove, rather the intentions are more about discovery and revealing opportunities. For example, as sociologist Patricia Leavy explains in the *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* [2018]:

> Arts-based practices are particularly useful for research projects that aim to describe, explore, or discover, or that require attention to processes… ABR can expose people to new ideas, stories, or images and can do so in the service of cultivating social consciousness. (Leavy, 2018, p. 9)

In *Method Meets Art* [2009] Leavy provides a clear set of cases and arguments for the value of the arts [crafts] as a range of research methods. This body of research intuitively responds to situations and events as they occur 'practices are holistic and dynamic, involving reflection, description, problem formulation and solving, and the ability to identify and explain intuition and creativity in the research process' (Leavy, 2009, p. 10).

For this research, ABR has provided a framework for me to adjust my case-study from short term to longitudinal and for the personal practice of my own art making to be recognised as a credible contribution to the overarching research aims of this project and the and nuances of amateurism in communal craft practices.

Worldview

This research adopts two philosophical worldviews as opposed to just one. A *Constructivist* perspective allows the research to recognise value in the subjective meanings of individuals and that these alter depending on the circumstances of the individuals' lived experiences. As a result, there can be a complex network of understandings that emerge. The questions of the research and participants in the research would need to be broad and open in order that a more 'honest' set of data can evolve. For the data to be contextually understood, the historical and cultural setting of the participants should be recognised, in addition, my own background and experience would inform the way in which the data is considered (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

A *Transformative* viewpoint allows the research to be understood from the perspective of those in society who are marginalised [women, craft, amateur] and looks ethnographically at groups of people recognising the possibility that an action-based agenda for the research can change the lives of the participants in the research. This mode of thinking recognises the value of the research participants to the extent that they themselves may start to ask or design the questions and analyse the information (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

The benefit of using the two worldviews in this research is that it recognises and values the subjective nature of the data and that it is relative to the lived experiences of individual members of the study. Although not the intention of the research, this work does encompass several marginalised groups namely women and craft.

Longitudinal Study

In the book *Methodology of Longitudinal Surveys* (2009), Professor Peter Lynn recognises a longitudinal study as a basic design within a qualitative body of research. During such a study a process or state can be analysed on several occasions as opposed to just once at the end of a study. The strengths of a longitudinal study enable researchers to document changes of view or action through repeated data collection cycles, the initial stages of research and data collection can be considered and acted upon during the research as opposed to just at the end of the process (Flick, 2018; Kasprzyk et al., 1989; Lynn, 2009).

It is important to consider a range of ways to analyse the study as opposed to asking the same questions at different stages of the case study. Due to the nature of the research taking place over a longer period of time, it is also possible for the processes of the case study to adjust and be altered according to the changing directions of the project (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Flick, 2018). Within this research a case study [Meltham Quilting Bee] has been running for almost the entirety of this enquiry, now spanning over six years. This is quite an unusual position as it is usually difficult due to costs and sustaining interest from members of the study. From the literature review, it became clear that most of the research comes from studies that have taken less than six months, however, once you pass this period, a different understanding of the social, the learning experience and changing status of the amateur in communal making practices takes place.

As a qualitative method it is important to identify the process for study before it begins, however, when used as a method within Arts Based Research, its value is recognised as something that evolves over the duration of the study (Flick, 2018; Leavy, 2018). Longitudinal data can be gathered in several ways including surveys, diary methods and retrospective recall. As a result of collating data at several points throughout the study, retrospective recall of participants can be an effective method of data gathering as opposed to short term studies where recall can be obscured by other events. As Lynn explains: 'longitudinal surveys are able to collect information about expectations and reasons for choices and untainted by subsequent events and outcomes' (Lynn, 2009, p. 8).

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a widely used method in which the researcher embeds themselves into the study as an active member. They engage in the activities rather than just observe (Flick, 2018, p. 314). Participant observation creates an opportunity where the research moves from a position of being "on" a person to being "with". The status of the person/s being researched become flattened and a dual, 2-way relationship can develop, breaking down the distinction between the researcher and the researched. This creates a more democratic space in which the research can evolve (Banks et al., 2019; Leavy, 2009, 2018; J. McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Participant observation recognises that knowledge and contribution can come from any person involved in the research: 'In the process "popular knowledge" is generated by the group, taken in, analysed, and reaffirmed or criticized, making it possible to flesh out a problem and understand it in context' (Leavy, 2009, p. 166).

Niedderer and Townsend discuss how craft based research, which is relatively underdeveloped, is often recognised as research that is into, for and through craft practice (Niedderer & Townsend, 2015). The very nature of craft making, and this field of research mean that observing as a participant is a valid approach as it enables one to think 'through the craft' as well as fully engage with the insights that all participants can bring to the research.

As the researcher I have engaged as a participant and participant observer on a couple of levels. As an artist and craftsperson, I participate by making work as a response to the unfolding tales in the Meltham Quilting Bee and to the experience of being part of a

communal making environment. As the researcher, I have been a fully-fledged participant observer in the case study, following suggestions, presenting ideas and engaging as part of this communal craft making experience.

Case Study

A case study can be of an individual or of a group of people and it enables a deep understanding of a particular question / phenomena. Case studies can capture the subject of the research in great detail and can include factual aspects, the experiences and the perceptions of the participants (Alasuutari et al., 2008; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Flick, 2018). One of the key challenges is to identify a suitable case that will further the research and provide valuable insight and understanding. Within this study the bigger picture is that of the amateur maker in an autonomous group learning environment; the case is a group of amateur quilters who work as a communal entity.

Using a case study allows the researcher to present the story of the research to the reader, it has the ability of 'providing a sense of almost having been present to witness the events documented in the case studies' (Alasuutari et al., 2008, p. 219). As a participant observer within the Meltham Quilting Bee case study, I can present the narratives and experiences of the participants but also relay my own tacit experiences and responses to the case study.

Group Making

Group or collective making as a mode of production needs to both recognise the value of a group identity and the significance of the individual member. Each of the participants should be recognised for the values they can bring to the group while the participants need to acknowledge the identity of the collective voice (Banks et al., 2019; Leavy, 2009; Lindström & Ståhl, 2016; Ratto & Boler, 2014; Sullivan, 2010).

The Meltham Quilting Bee case study, while having several research motivations, also had a strong dependence on group making as a process. This study recognises the value of multiple voices and perspectives but also seeks to further understand the nature of making, collaboration and the co-production of a crafted object [quilts] together. In the text "Making with Others: working with textile craft groups as a research method" [2016], Amy Twigger Holroyd and Emma Shercliff discuss the role of group making as a research method when the emphasis is on the experience of making as opposed to the group being able to answer external questions. Twigger Holroyd and Shercliff go on to discuss the merits of being engaged in a making activity as a group 'making supports open, constructive conversation, which helps to gain a detailed understanding of the opinions and experiences of our participants' (Twigger Holroyd & Shercliff, 2016). Collective making over a long period of time, stitches together different kinds of knowledges, experiences and narratives. The quilts communicate a group identity but the nuances of the individual stitch lines represent distinct voices 'the past and present are never far below the surface as histories and traditions inform group identity yet do not constrain individual agency' (Sullivan, 2010, p. 166).

Group making as a method of research requires some initial organisation for it to start to self-generate, become self-sufficient and to be undertaken with autonomy. It is also important to factor in plenty of flexibility so that the group may evolve in a way they choose but moreover to respond to unexpected twists and turns. This research recognises co-production as a valuable contributing factor to the evolving character of group making. The multiple voices and actions of Meltham Quilting Bee members and a range in perspectives help to create a framework and direction for this enquiry. This approach to participatory and co-produced research centres on equality and a democratic approach to create positive changes in the practices of those involved (Banks et al., 2019; Reason, 1998).

Interviews & Questionnaires

As a result of running a longitudinal case study, a range of approaches to gathering data has been used that includes the use of diaries and the creation of visual observations alongside the more usual format of questionnaires and interviews. Both approaches were used to gather data at different stages of the study. During the earlier stages the intention was as a scoping exercise to consider the validity and direction of the research whereas later the research started to focus on understanding the experiences and new insights of the participants and helped to further establish them as co-producers of this study.

In Table 2, you can see an overview of methods used to collate data from the Meltham Quilting Bee (MQB). Each stage is delineated by the completion of a quilt. Some methods of data retrieval occurred more

formally at the end of a stage while others were ongoing and took place throughout each stage.

	Stage:	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Title	MQB 1&2	MQB3	MQB4	Exhibition	MQB5	MQB5*
	Location	Village Hall	Home	Home	Queensgate	Home	Home
During each stage.	Photography	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	Voice recording	yes	no	no	no	no	no
	Diary	no	yes	no	no	no	no
	Drawing	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
End of a Stage.	Interview	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
	Questionnaire	yes	no	no	yes	no	no

Table 2 Methods used to collect data from the MQB.

MQB5* Continuation of the making of the quilt without myself being part of the group.

A questionnaire was used at the end of stage 1 which was the when the MQB had initially intended to finish. The short, written questionnaire was designed as a scoping exercise to gather data from all participants of the MQB. The purpose was to understand their experience of the MQB and establish a feedback loop.

A series of open questions were asked during a group interview with the participants of the MQB who had remained with us until the end of stage 2; this was carried out at the end of making MQB3 and almost two years since starting the MQB. This style of interview is called a *responsive interview* where a flexible use of open questions can be adjusted in response to the interviewee's statements (Flick, 2018; Rubin, Herbert & Rubin, Irene, 2012). This approach to gathering data

ensured an opportunity for the participants to express personal thoughts and opinions on the developing case study and research, as Flick comments, 'the focus is typically on what the interviewee has experienced and sees as important in relation to the issue of the study' (Flick, 2018, p. 217). Responsive interviews should enable the gathering of both factual and the more elusive readings of a case study: 'In a responsive interviewing model, you are looking for material that has depth and detail and is nuanced and rich with vivid thematic detail' (Rubin, Herbert & Rubin, Irene, 2012, p. 101).

During Stage 1 of this research, all participants had their names anonymised but were happy to be facially recognised through photography. After this stage however, the feelings of group members adjusted, and they requested that their names be included in the research. This change of ethical consideration aligned with the developing idea that the members of the group were not simply participants of the research but were coming to recognise their contribution and identify themselves as co-producers. For this reason, as approved by the appropriate ethics board, those members of the MQB who continued after Stage 1, have been named within this research. This position of co-production can be recognised as part of a transformative viewpoint, one that recognises and values the contribution of all participants and the ability for the individual to be an active, rather than a passive role in the research (Banks et al., 2019; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

Format of the interviews and questionnaires.

Two sets of interviews have taken place with participants of the Meltham Quilting Bee. The first interview took place at my house [one

of the venues used for quilting by the group so the space was known to the participants]. We all sat around a table and the interview was recorded with a dictaphone [just voice], I had prepared a series of 'starting points/open questions' to promote a discussion amongst the group and these were read out prior to starting the recording. The group that was interviewed included 4 of the 5 people who had been involved in the making of the third quilt [the first quilt made within members' homes as opposed to the Church Hall]. The fifth member of the group had moved away from the area to start University and was unable to attend, the interview lasted 1.5 hours.

This responsive interview was designed to ensure that any thoughts and opinions that were held by the whole group, as well as individual ideas, could be expressed and recorded. As a group, we had by this point been working together for nearly two years and were therefore quite confident in expressing themselves. Much of what was discussed had been raised unofficially before, during our quilting sessions.

The second interview occurred during stage 6 and was reflective of the experiences throughout the time of the MQB. Stage 6 had been running differently to all previous stages in that we had a new member of the group and four months into the making of this quilt, I had stopped attending the group to enable some distance to develop between myself and the case study. Due to the Covid-19 situation, this interview took place over Zoom with one member responding by written notes due to not having internet access. For all participants, the questions asked were supplied one week prior to the interview. Like the previous interview [aside from the written feedback] the interview was run with a responsive interview approach.

Initially intended to be a short-term study, this research transitioned into an invaluable longitudinal study. While the number of participants may be limited, the value in engaging as a participant observer over such a long period of time has highlighted the changing status of the study and the transformations in the making practices of individual members. Interviews, questionnaires and more informal methods of discussion have occurred on several occasions throughout the research. Undertaking multiple interviews has enabled the research to develop comparisons of understanding and to engage with the idea that different timeframes of the research have resulted in varied outcomes (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Flick, 2018; Lynn, 2009).

Practice as Analysis

I make, draw and paint as a tool to analyse, engage and reflect upon the experiences of creating quilts as a group within the MQB case study, this process enables me to observe from a variety of perspectives. Within art therapy this is called *response art*, Barbara Fish, professor in art therapy talks about the use of drawing / making art to establish connections with the subject of the drawing and that it is capable of communicating as an additional tool to the more traditional methods i.e. written and spoken words (Fish, 2019) 'paying close enough attention to make art about an experience or interaction requires listening beyond words' (Fish, 2018, p. 338).

Practice is used here in conjunction with the more traditional research methods associated with qualitative research, it is a valuable element of this research and brings opportunities to understand the research

questions in other ways. In the book *Art Practice as Research* [2010], Graeme Sullivan states 'to continue to borrow research methods from other fields denies the intellectual maturity of art practice as a plausible basis for raising significant life question and as a viable site for exploring important cultural and educational ideas' (Sullivan, 2010, p. 95). In other words, artists, makers and designers should be confident that the field of art practice, is a justifiable method for research and is an opportunity to learn something that other more established fields may not recognise.

Shaun McNiff, artist, and author of the text "Philosophical and Practical Foundations of Artistic Inquiry" [2018] recognises the use of art to investigate and communicate an idea, as being similar to the more traditional methods e.g., verbal languages or mathematics. It is a method that is accessible and 'an egalitarian and universally accessible process' (S. McNiff, 2018, p. 24). Patricia Leavy in *Method meets Art* [2009] goes further and recognises visual imagery as being a 'created perspective' as opposed to a 'window on the world'. As a society that is becoming increasingly visual through multimedia platforms, imagery can be used as a tool to communicate in multiple ways to its audience. As the artist researcher who is creating the imagery, it can be seen as a simple page from a diary, a compact representation of a series of memories and can encompass emotional responses. Leavy goes on to state that using visual elements can extend the interpretation stage in terms of time [which is often rushed] and bring alternative understanding of the data (Leavy, 2009).

For myself, relaying the experiences and observations of the MQB case study, a more authentic understanding can emerge when new work is made rather than verbally described [particularly in the immediate

timeframe], this making of work in turn enables me to think and consider the existing research and schools of thought and how they may connect. McNiff sums this process up clearly '[The] use of artistic intelligence by applied arts professions to solve problems and understand experience makes complete sense' (S. McNiff, 2013, p. 4).

This chapter has highlighted a range of methods that have been used to generate insight into the research questions and particular approaches have proven to be invaluable in the development, a longitudinal case study and my own practice as a mode of discovery. The next chapter opens with a particular history of quilting in order that we build an understanding of the amateur's role in this craft practice and provides a context for the analysis chapter.

Concluding Thoughts

A patchwork of methodologies has emerged creating a way through which to navigate this research. The activities of patchwork and quilting have generated a new language to help analyse the findings and create fresh modes of thinking using analogy and metaphor.

Patchwork can be conceived as a system for connecting and creating new, more personal, ways of observing and understanding a practice orientated longitudinal study. The act of quilting binds complex layers that pull the multiple voices and levels of amateurism together to form a more powerful whole.

Quilting can be understood as a critical tool, for example, the cohesion of a community and the forming of identity. In particular, how the amateur steps beyond the aesthetic value of the quilt to become an

activist tool. The freedom that comes with amateur engagement means that everyone can contribute and this mobilising of people to work communally and democratically, critically questions hierarchical levels of creativity.

Quilting as a critical tool is further evaluated and considered towards the end of the following chapter [p137] having evaluated and reviewed a context for quilting. Furthermore, patchworking as a methodology is expanded upon in the conclusion [p270] and goes on to state that there is a democratic form of communication that can be understood in and through the practice of communal, amateur making.

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4

Quilting

Connections

In the report, *Understanding Cultural Value: The Amateur and Voluntary Arts* [2014] by Jane Milling & Angus McCabe, it is observed that quilting is unusually positioned as it is a field in which the amateurs are more skilful and knowledgeable than the larger scale manufacturers of quilts: 'take quilting for example... it's often the amateurs that are the world experts' (Milling et al., 2014). So, who are all these quilters?

In North America, there are between 9-11 million quilters [2020], according to the tri-annual survey "Quilting in America" which is conducted by F+W media and funded by commercial companies. 200,000 quilters who were on consumer mailing lists of 'leading quilting brands' responded via email, of those surveyed, 98% are female and 65% are retired but the majority started quilting in their mid-40s (Glassenberg, 2020). Although further research indicates that the shape of the market may differ a little in terms of the general age and employment status of the quilter; due to the demographics of those leading brands, what is uncontested, is the popularity of quilting in the USA. While not quite as established in the UK, with attendee numbers at multiple textile craft related fairs reaching over 25,000 each time (*Upper Street Events*, 2020b), there is no doubt that textile based hobbies, including quilting is incredibly popular.

What is Quilting?

Quilting is a process of binding [stitching or knotting] layers of fabric together to create a cloth that is thicker than its singular counterpart. Typically, this would include three layers of textiles: the first is called the quilt top, this can be a single piece of cloth but is more often a patchworked collection of fabrics that have been pieced [joined] together in some form of pattern. You then have the back of the quilt, which again can be pieced together but in this case is more often a single piece of fabric. Finally, you have a layer of cloth or wadding placed in between the top and back. When layered this is called a sandwich and once these have been stitched together it is referred to as a quilt. The quilting [stitching] element is a functional aspect of a quilt, but it is also often used in a creative capacity; something that enhances the piece work or stands out on its own merit.

Figure 9 Quilt construction illustration [authors own]

Most non-commercial quilts and quilt tops made today are completed using a domestic sewing machine. Although faster than when done by hand, it is still a long and relatively labour-intensive process. By choice,

some quilts and quilt tops are made by hand, either because the technique requires it to be done by hand, or the maker prefers this method. More often, it is done because the process requires one to work more slowly [a desirable option] and because it does not demand the need of loud machinery; it can be a more sociable way to work.

Quilting has a mixed history and range of associations. Most prominently known in recent history as the product of a hobby, they are usually made by women in a domestic setting or as part of a group (again – usually women). Historically, quilts were most used as blankets for the home and were usually made out of necessity. Quilted clothes were also known to be used as a protective layer under armour and for the wealthy to be worn as silk doublets and breeches. Early patchworked quilts were created to either use up scraps of material, parts of clothing and bedding which still had some life, to make up larger pieces of fabric to subsequently work with. Alternatively, patchwork was created as a decorative process and therefore considered pattern and colour as part of the making process.

Historically in Britain, there is a particular approach to the designing of quilts for which it is most known for. Unlike American quilts which are renowned for their patchwork, British quilts are mostly associated with the northern British counties, two particular types of quilt are whole *cloth quilts* and *strippy covers*. It was not until the craft revivals of the early 1970's that patchwork became more common use in Britain (Osler, 1987).

In the book *Traditional British Quilts* [1987], author Dorothy Osler describes *whole cloth* as a quilt that has one whole piece of fabric on the front and back; usually plain rather than patterned. The time saved

with this process as opposed to a patchwork layer means that more time could be spent on an intricate quilting design, the plain fabric enabled the pattern to be more clearly visible. *Strippy covers* [correct spelling] as they came to be known, are again quite simply constructed with just a small number [5-9] of wide stripes [9-12"] that run from the top to the bottom of the quilt in just two colours. These strips of fabric were often left-over remnants from whole cloth quilts, but the use of plain fabrics continued to allow the quilting design to be the dominant feature where both sides of the quilt were given equal importance. This differs again to an American quilt where they tend to recognise a quilt as having a front and a back rather than being double sided (Osler, 1987).

Figure 10 [left] Wholecloth quilt in cotton poplin made in 1933 by Porth quilting group, Rhondda, Glamorgan. (Osler, 1987, p. 26)

Figure 11 [right] Strippy quilt in cotton sateen quilted with a strip quilting design. North Country: early twentieth century. (Osler, 1987, p. 101)

The making of such quilts, particularly in Durham and Wales became a way for impoverished families within mining communities to have a further income stream. The Rural Industries Bureau ran a highly successful quilting scheme from 1929 – 1939 through which support

and networks were developed so that quilts and quilted items could be sold (Osler, 1987, p. 100). One specific venue where such items were sold was the Little Gallery in London which had been opened in 1928 by Murial Rose. As one of the first galleries that presented craft as an equal to art, Rose sought out opportunities to support makers while recognising a need to represent quality crafted goods (Woodhead, 2006).

In the supporting V&A literature about the exhibition *Quilts 1700–2010*, curator Sue Prichard draws our attention to more politically motivated quilt making: 'Quilts stimulate memories of warmth, security and home, yet their layers can also conceal hidden histories and untold stories' (Prichard, 2010). While some examples may be inadvertently revealing stories through the reading of fabric and design choices, there has also been a consistent and overt use of quilts as a communication tool for social issues. For example, secret codes were embedded within quilt patterns and hung outside windows to communicate safe houses and directions to the Underground Railroads for Slaves in the Southern states America (The JBHE Foundation Inc, 2000; Tobin & Dobard, 2000).

Sociologist, Marybeth Stalp, in the book *Quilting: The Fabric of Everyday Life* [2007] observes a particular way of thinking amongst quilters: 'as women quilt more intensely and more consistently on their own time, they develop personally derived standards for setting goals and measuring their success, independent of the judgements of friends, family, or the economy. Quilting becomes an important means of autonomy and identity developments for midlife women, even as they practice a somewhat old-fashioned process of cultural production traditionally defined [often pejoratively] as "women's work"' (Stalp,

2007, p. 5). Women not only recognise the opportunity to make objects that are useful [and therefore justifiable use of their time] but they consequently develop systems and processes that enhance independent thinking and activates greater ambitions.

Janis Jefferies emphasises the relevance of the quilted object itself: 'not only were these sewn items the only memorial that many women, of all classes left behind, but they were made as part of a shared experience within a socially defined community' (Jefferies, 1984, p. 257). Embedded into a quilt is a narrative of the quilter, quilts as objects are often passed onto the next generation and subsequently exist beyond the life of its maker. They leave clues about their lives from the fabric and pattern choices, the time that was spent making is recorded and there is physical evidence of skill and artistic vision (Stalp, 2007).

The contemporary quilter has evolved as an influence as evidenced by the myriad of publications, online communities and blogs. While some will devote their making to particular quilting schools such as Traditional or Modern, falling membership of the Guilds, despite growing numbers of quilters, demonstrates a more fluid approach to quilting. There is now a growing army of quilters that adopt and switch between styles and techniques accordingly (Glassenberg, 2020; *Quilting in America 2017*, 2017; Stalp, 2007). Some find themselves particularly devoted to a fabric designer such as Tula Pink (Pink, 2020) or Alison Glass (Glass, 2020), others are drawn to a particular mode of making such as the hand pieced Millefiori quilts by Willyne Hammerstein (Hammerstein, 2011). The expansive number of free tutorials available online and global access to fabric sources has driven demand.

Quilting as a Community

Each country has its own quilting history in terms of origins, uses and preferences for processes. This research, whilst based in the UK draws from both historical and contemporary understandings of quilting in the USA, in particular, the quilts of the *Gee's Bend Quilters*, Alabama.

Furthermore, contemporary quilt projects have played an active role in raising awareness and engaging communities to talk and work through the challenges they may face. Quilt projects such as *The Living Healing Quilt Project* [2008], *Quilts of Belonging* [2005] and the *Names Project* [2016], do not attempt to conceal but to actively commemorate, raise awareness and communicate untold histories.

There are also numerous examples of smaller community projects [or at least in their early days] that relate to a particular national or global scenario. The *Same Sea, Different Boat* quilt project is currently being made as a response in the UK to makers being isolated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Makers, artists and the general public have been invited to make a small block when finding it hard to be creative under lockdown circumstances. These blocks are then made into a community quilt that reflects a shared experience (Brown, 2020). Another approach, *#bushfireblocks* saw a national call for blocks to be sent to Wollongong Modern Quilt Guild so they could build them into quilts for those affected by the 2019/2020 Australian bushfires. The call went viral and by April 2020, they had blocks from over 30 countries and reached over 15,000 blocks which, will make up over 1,000 quilts (Guild, 2020).

GBQ

Gee's Bend [now known as Boykin] is a small, remote hamlet and black community in Alabama, USA. Generations of black women, who were bought to North America as African slaves to work in the cotton fields, have been creating quilts for use in the home. Gee's Bend is a place where some of these women and their families were forced to settle. The quilts themselves have a particular look to them, in contrast to the Euro-American quilts which are presented as ordered and with a regularity in their patterns. The Gee's Bend quilts have bold, large scale geometric patterns, are observably utilitarian and made use of re-purposed fabrics including denim, feed sacks, head scarfs, dresses and corduroy: 'Their quilts are both the signatures of individuals and the banners of a community' (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002). For these women, they had very little in terms of wealth or access to alternative means. Making was a release but it was also a necessity in order to keep the family warm. Made by hand, from old, worn work clothes and household materials, the quilts could be considered as self-portraits that provide indications of their lived experiences (Arnett & Arnett, 2002; Stalp, 2007) and demonstrate the actions of the bricoleur (Lévi Strauss, 1962).

Historical archives of photographs and interviews with descendants of the original quilters show that the quilt tops would be made in the family home during the winter months. During the warmer months, women would gather in the church or on the verandas of homes to hand stitch the layers of quilts together (Curran, 2018; Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002, 2012). They would all work together, singing songs from church, chatting about their daily lives while stitching communally to create quilts for the individual homes (Soul Grown

Deep Foundation, 2012). This coming together created quiet moments of freedom, opportunities to make with a mind of one's own. In the book *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903], sociologist and cultural historian W.E.B. Du Bois recognised that from their struggle emerged a resilience through the language and act of quilt making, he referred to this as 'spiritual striving' (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002).

In 2002, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston [USA] presented an exhibition *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*. At the time, the quilts and community of quilters were unknown to the general public and the arts world. The accompanying book and catalogue *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* [2002], edited by John Beardsley, William Arnett, Paul Arnett and Jane Livingston, provides a series of essays and an archive of the exhibited collection. This publication provides insight and greater understanding of the stories and quilts of the women quilters of Gee's Bend. The quilts had been collected by William Arnett and were curated by Alvia Wardlaw. The exhibition captured the public's attention, from quilt makers to arts commentators. These quilts had not been created with an understanding or acknowledgement of what had been decried as acceptable forms of artistry of the time, and nor did they intend to: 'Outside the salons and formal institutions… Armies of artists and craftsmen were creating artistic worlds that were free of academic rules and dedicated to providing a bewildering array of objects for both utilitarian and decorative purposes' (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002, p. 6). Curator, Paul Arnett and collector, William Arnett, in the essay "On the Map" draw our attention to the rituals and empowerment of quilt making for the women of Gee's Bend:

> […] quilts are always [even if unintentionally] self-portraits. Indeed, of all the imperatives of womanhood, quilt making [and

sometimes sacred music] provided the most completing creative experience. Tending to home, procreation [often a pregnancy a year] and child rearing, working in the fields – all were expected of women but were forums for limited self-expression. In piecing a quilt, everything could be controlled, simplified, magnified, miniaturised, and rearranged – a genuine and culturally sanctioned occurrence of art making as an emancipatory act. (Arnett & Arnett, 2002, p. 39).

Through the act of painting [within my personal practice] I was able to connect with the complexity of making outside the 'day job'. Consideration for the need to be able to multitask can be experienced through compositional choices and the layering of multiple mediums and processes [see Figure 70 and Figure 73]. An engagement with self-expression, in these cases created opportunities for my reflection upon the profoundly different lived experiences of these women.

Although the quilters of Gee's Bend were not an isolated group of makers who made from necessity, designed intuitively or according to what was available, the supporting exhibition catalogue captured and highlighted an independent and autonomous approach to making. This in turn caught my attention as being important to the underlying spirit and ethos of this research.

Figure 12 [left] Fragmented 'star' – 12 block variation, by Nettie Young. 1937.

Figure 13 [right] Nettie Young, 1916 – 2010. (Souls Grown Deep, n.d.)

Figure 14 [left] Blocks and Stripes by Delia Bennett. 1960's

Figure 15 [right] Delia Bennett, 1892 – 1976. (Souls Grown Deep, n.d.)

Figure 16 [left] Blocks by Aolar Mosely, c1955

Figure 17 [right] Aolar Mosely, 1912 – 1999. (Souls Grown Deep, n.d.)

Group work, or group making is recognised within the practices of the Gee's Bend quilters. While there are clearly individual identities, the continued coming together, for over a century to complete quilts demonstrates a unified ambition and vision for their work (Leavy, 2009; Sullivan, 2010). Each member is recognised and valued for what they contribute to the whole but through co-production they are able to elevate their practice onto the world stage and contribute towards a historical understanding of African American culture (Snoad, 2020; Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002). In this respect, Gee's Bend has been a core influence in the approaches undertaken within the Meltham Quilting Bee case study (as outlined in more detail further on).

NAMES Project

The *Names Project* [now known as the AIDS Memorial Quilt] was conceived in 1985 by long-time gay activist Cleve Jones. For this project, individual quilts are made in remembrance of a family member, friend or lover who has died from AIDS. Each quilt measuring 3 x 6 feet, has the name of a person being remembered stitched into it. Currently there are over 48,000 panels, it was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and remains the largest community art project in the world. The last display of the entire quilt [which is still growing and now accessible to view online] was in October 1996 when the quilt covered the entire National Mall in Washington, D.C and had an estimated 1.2 million viewers [Figure 18]

Figure 18 Names Quilt display in Washington 1996. (National Aids Memorial, n.d.)

In a video interview with Jones about the project, he states: 'we took a monument […] that was made of cloth and thread and sewn by ordinary Americans and from people from all over this planet, who loved someone who died of AIDS, and wanted them to be remembered, it was that simple, and that amazing' (Cleve Jones. *National Aids Memorial*, n.d.). For Jones, the quilt was recognised as a symbol that was both comforting and stood for traditional-family-values, the combination of this and the purposeful size of the quilts to be similar to that of a coffin was to make wider communities recognise that it was people being lost to this disease and not just a number. The making of the individual quilts helped the family and friends of the victims to remember and celebrate the lives of lost ones. In the text "Knit One, Stitch Two, Protest Three! Examining the Historical and Contemporary Politics of Crafting" by Sociologist, Trent Newmeyer [2008], we are reminded that this was also, very much a political act. Aimed at raising awareness of AIDS and the negligence of the

government due to those who were mainly affected were considered as marginalised [e.g., homosexuals, heroin addicts], Newmeyer states:

> The purpose of the quilt was to remember those lost to the AIDS pandemic, but its purpose was more than memorial. Given the astounding silence by government, families and the mainstream press, the quilt in its construction and to display, had a political purpose as well. (Newmeyer, 2008, p. 448)

Historically, textiles and quilts have been used in death. Mourning quilts are created from items such as clothing and blankets the lost one has left behind, quilts can be given to a person as a source of comfort as they come to the end of their life and, either through necessity [because there was no access to a coffin] or choice, loved ones would be wrapped in a quilt for burial (Breneman, 2001; Knauer, 2017; Rinner Waddell, 2019).

In the book *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* [2000], design historian Judy Attfield discusses the type of connection we, as humans, have with cloth. From our first baby blanket to the first school uniform, from the new set of bedding in our own home to the hand knitted scarf made by a grandchild, 'clothing and textiles have a particular intimate quality because they live next to the skin and inhabit the spaces of private life helping to negotiate the inner self with the outside world' (Attfield, 2000, p. 121). For the makers of the *Names* quilts, the use of cloth and in this case the quilt, allows people to mourn, commemorate and express one's loss.

Living Healing Quilts

The *Living Healing Quilt Project* [LHQP] is a series of three quilts made to tell the stories of (often indigenous) residential school survivors in Canada. The children placed in these schools 'to better themselves' had been forcibly removed from their land, culture and families, 'young women learned to sew as part of a bio political project of assimilation, with the goal of creating docile bodies living and working in a residence that was never home" (Robertson, 2009, p. 88). The project organiser: Alice Williams of the Curve Lake First Nation (Curve Lake, Ontario) and sponsored by the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission developed the project following a formal apology by the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper to the students at such schools. The intention of the project was for survivors to have an opportunity to express their experiences and tell their stories.

In 2008, blocks (individual patches) were made by survivors of these schools and sent to the project organiser, Alice Williams. Each block tells the story of an experience in the residential school with the choice of materials connecting to a more spiritual or native way of living. "As a whole, the blocks of the quilts bear witness to the systemic physical and emotional abuses of the residential school life and occasionally to moments of joy that could be found there" (Robertson, 2009, p. 91). This project exemplifies the ability of quilting as a technique to act as a telling of stories, particularly when collated as a series of tales from varying individuals.

Figure 19 Quilt from The Living Healing Quilt project (*The Quilts and Stories from the Living Healing Quilt Project - Quilting Gallery*, 2008)

These exemplars of quilting demonstrate moments of control or glimpses of autonomy through the act of quilting, historically and culturally embedded in our lives today. The following section of this thesis draws a focus onto the Meltham Quilting Bee case study, from the methods that were developed for this research followed by a discussion of my personal practice and how it was used to provide further understanding of the case study.

Meltham Quilting Bee Narrative

The Meltham Quilting Bee [MQB] started in 2015 and is still running to date [2021]. It is based in the Yorkshire village of Meltham, although the numbers and locations of the study has changed, the initial parameters remain intact.

A quilting bee is mostly associated with North American culture. The *bee* initially developed from both a desire and a need to gather to produce quilts. The *desire* came from wanting to be closer to neighbours and re-build communities following waves of migration to America, these communities included people that were working as slaves as well as people who had voluntarily moved to America. The *need* to run a quilting bee arose from a more efficient and productive mode of making quilts that were seen as invaluable household items (International Quilt Museum, n.d.; Robertson & Vinebaum, 2016). Essentially, a quilting bee is a group of people who come together to make a quilt.

The MQB started as a short-term case study and scoping exercise so that I, as the researcher, could engage with the concept of being an amateur in a group making environment. Essentially, I wanted to be one of the amateurs, amongst amateurs. I had very little experience of quilt making myself and I assumed that a good proportion of the people joining the MQB would consider themselves as amateur group quilters.

Participants were voluntary and expressed their interest by answering a small poster call out which had been placed in a local Post-Office, Library and the village Co-op store. The poster [Figure 20] advertised

an opportunity to make a quilt as part of a group in the local church hall, no experience was necessary with tea and biscuits being provided.

Figure 20 MQB call out for volunteers. 2015.

The intentions of the MQB were to initially run as two groups, bi-weekly for a period of 2 months. In order to accommodate a broader demographic one group ran on a weekday afternoon and the second group took place on a weekday evening. The purpose of two groups was to attract people who were currently employed [hence the evening option] and those who may not want to venture out in the evening.

The daytime group attracted 2 participants with a few further drop in attendees who only attended once. The evening group attracted 8 participants, a further breakdown of the participants can be found in Table 3 but essentially the age range was from 16 to 83, all the participants were female. Aside from the 16-year-old who was a student, all participants were currently employed or retired from employment. It was not an intention (or a concern) for this to be a female group of participants, it simply reflects the general gender imbalance in textile crafts and current amateur quilting groups globally (Chan Fung Yi, 2012; Glassenberg, 2020; Sheppard, 2013; Stalp, 2007). This is further highlighted as a general association with the amateur by professors Julia Bryan-Wilson and Benjamin Piekut in an editorial about Amateurism: 'within the realms of visual art and music, as with many other cultural forms, the designation of amateur is not neutral: amateurism clings to the non-white maker, the female maker, the non-Western maker, the 'non educated' maker' (Bryan-Wilson & Piekut, 2020, p. 15).

PARTICIPANTS

■ # participants

Age range	# participants
81-90	1
71-80	2
61-70	4
51-60	1
41-50	1
21-40	1
16-20	1

Table 3 Age range of MQB participants

With regards to experience of quilting, nobody had hand quilted previously or sewn as a group. One participant had made a few quilts by machine and a further participant had extensive dressmaking experience [20+ years previously]. Everyone [myself included] required teaching in terms of hand building and sewing of quilts and all considered themselves as amateur group quilt makers.

As a group of volunteer quilters, we created quilts from concept through to outcome. Except for the initial quilt fabrics, all decisions relating to design and finish were made as a group rather than by an individual. We used a mix of machine and hand stitch [personal preference] to piece together the fabrics and once the quilt is on the frame, we then used hand-stitch to quilt the layers together. The quilts [as decided by the group] were all to be donated to a local women's refuge once the PhD research was completed.

As mentioned previously, the MQB is still running despite the intentions to be a 2-month study. At the end of this initial study, 5 participants from the evening group requested that we continue to meet and quilt together. Those who were interested, met up and rather than anyone take a lead, we collectively decided on what and how we wanted to continue with quilting. The key change to this development of the bee was the practicality of switching from meeting in the church hall [which required payment] to meeting in each other's homes. As a result of moving the meeting location the dynamic of the group and type of work we make has changed. This will be discussed later in the analysis chapter.

The Influence of The Gee's Bend Quilters

The quilters of Gee's Bend [GBQ] have played a fundamental role in this research, from the initial chance encounter with the book *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002). I was initially inspired by the simple blocking of textiles and colour to form designs, which for me held great visual impact but it was the more encompassing practices of making quilts communally that would directly influence this research.

The GBQ, as we know, are a community of quilters based in Alabama, USA. Named after a series of geographical abrupt bends on the Alabama River, the name Gee's Bend refers to a small and unofficially named African American community in a town now called Boykin. The quilts first came into the public eye during two exhibitions of the work during the 1996 Olympics and two subsequent major exhibitions during 2002-2003 at *The Museum of Fine Arts*, Houston and *The*

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. With quilts dating from the 1920s to the present, they have had a great impact not just our understanding of quilting but also in the wider culture of African Americans: 'The quilts of Gee's Bend present a particular place and its people, who have created a body of art so rich in its content and so remarkable in its execution that it now enhances dramatically the American cultural landscape' (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002, p. 8).

Figure 21 [Left] Annie Bendolph. "Thousand Pyramids" Variation, c.1930. Cotton sacking material and chambray. 83 x 70 inches. (Souls Grown Deep, n.d.)

Figure 22 [Right] Lucille Bennett Pettway. "Housetop" Four Block Variation, 1970's. Cotton and corduroy. 73 x 70 inches. (Souls Grown Deep, n.d.)

As female, Black African slaves working in the cotton fields of Alabama, they would make quilts out of necessity. Utilising fabrics they had to hand such as jeans, bed sheets, dresses, head scarves, sacking, they would most often piece together without following traditional patterns.

The designing of the quilt was very individual, some women would favour a particular design in terms of layout but essentially, a lot of decisions would often come down to what fabric they had to hand. Annie Mae Young [1928-2013] was one of the quilters who clearly relished the challenges of designing a quilt: 'I never did like the book patterns some people had. […] I work it out, study the way to make it, get it to be right, kind of like working a puzzle. You find the colours and the shapes and certain fabrics that work out right' (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002, p. 100).

Figure 23 [Left] Annie Mae Young. Strips, c.1975. Corduroy. 101 x 66 inches. (Souls Grown Deep, n.d.)

Figure 24 [Right] Annie Mae Young. Yo-Yo, c.1971. Cotton, polyester, knit, corduroy clothing material, dashiki material. 83 x 80 inches. (Souls Grown Deep, n.d.)

The process of making the quilts would essentially break down into two parts: piecing and quilting. The piecing of the quilt [patchworking fabrics together to make a larger piece of cloth] would often be done during the winter months by the individual quilters and sometimes with the help of their children. Then, during the summer months, the women would gather outside on verandas and work as a group to hand stitch the layers of fabrics together to make the quilts.

I truly admire the aesthetic and painterly appeal of the quilts alongside their use of materials, but it was the methods of making collectively that would prove to have a greater impact on this body of research. The women would work together by sitting around a horizontal frame upon which the quilt would be pinned. When in this making space it became a time to chat, debate and sing (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2012). This democratic and purposeful activity within this community of women quilters and the freehand approaches to designing etched in my mind.

Figure 25 [Left] Gee's Bend quilter Jorena Pettway sews a quilt with assistance from two young girls, 1937. Photographer: Arthur Rothstein of the Farm Security Administration. (Gee's Bend Quilt, n.d.)

Figure 26 [Right] Gee's Bend Cooperative: quilters working together around a frame. 2011 (Bailes, 2020)

The MQB Set-up.

The intention for the MQB was to work together on one quilt at a time. As mentioned previously, there were two groups running initially: a daytime and an evening group. Both groups were set up and run in the same way.

Like the making of a quilt as an individual or, as seen by the Gee's Bend Quilters, it was split into distinct elements.

1	Design	Deciding on a design and choosing the fabrics.
2	Piecing	Patchworking pieces of fabric together to make a large piece of cloth.
3	Quilting	Stitching the layers of cloth and wadding together to make a quilt.

For the initial meeting, I introduced my research and showed the participants some examples of quilts made as a group by the Gee's Bend Quilters. The group members decided on an approach/design for a patchwork pattern that they thought we could achieve given our lack of experience. In Figure 27 you can see the concept of horizontal strips of fabric joined together to make one larger piece of cloth, this was felt to be creative yet accessible for all members of the group.

Figure 27 Annie Mae Young. Strips, c.1975. Corduroy. 95 x 105 inches. (Souls Grown Deep, n.d.)

The group members were eager to get on with some making and were happy for me to make all the design decisions and instruct them on what to do. For this research however, I was keen for individuals to make some of their own decisions about the design so I developed a 'modular' system [Table 4] which meant some elements were decided by myself but the actual construction and styling of the blocks was decided upon by the individual members. It was important that this group was an open learning environment as I wanted to observe how groups of people learn autonomously.

	Task	Group Choice	Individual Choice	My Choice
1	Decide on strips as core piecing element [block design]	x		
2	Analyse piecing element and create a modular system			x
3	Calculate cloth requirements based on number of participants by group			x
4	Choose fabric [solid ecru cloth from Ikea]			x
5	Choose colours and dye cloth accordingly			x
6	Provide 2 colours per group: Daytime – grey & turquoise Evening – grey & fuchsia			x
7	Cut fabric into 6 x 24" strips			x
8	Selection of x3 strips of colour to make x2 strip blocks [option to choose 1xfuchsia/2xgrey or 2xfuchsia/1xgrey]		x	
9	Choose block sizes / sequence [height not width]		x	
10	Option to add in own fabric/s		x	
11	Choose method of construction [hand stitch or machine]		x	

Table 4 The modular stages for the creation of MQB [1+2] blocks.

To get the group into action, as part of the modular system, I selected the fabric and chose to work with 3 colours: fuchsia, turquoise and grey. The daytime group would use the turquoise and grey, and the evening group the fuchsia and grey. I then prepared and cut the fabrics into 6" x 24" strips [Figure 28]

Figure 28 Piecing of blocks for MQB 1&2, initially they would take home selection A or B and would then return with two pieced sections of their own proportional choices.

Each member had a choice of 3 strips of fabric; some chose 2 fuchsia and 1 grey, others selected 2 grey and 1 fuchsia. They then cut these strips into different heights [we had all decided to do 6" width blocks] and pieced them back together as a longer strip to form a pattern of their choice, see Figure 29 for an example. They could keep it as simple as they liked or make it more complex. While we were together, we pieced by hand, but when completing our strips as homework some chose to continue to stitch by hand and others used a sewing machine.

Figure 29 MQB Daytime group showing a clear definition of the vertical block strips.

Teaching and instruction was kept to a minimum; the importance of pressing, a quilters knot and a running stitch were taught as basic required knowledge for everyone, a few others were interested in being taught how to use a rotary cutter [as opposed to scissors]. The key reason for keeping teaching to a minimum was for me to embed myself in the group as a like-minded and equal amateur quilter as opposed to being considered as an authority on quilting within the group. As will be discussed later, I was a participant observer in this study, I recognised the value that every member of the group could bring to quilting and due to the aims of this research I really needed to observe and experience making as part of the group as opposed to being the tutor of the group. An example of how this affected the running of the group appeared very early in the forming of the group. When everyone had selected their 3 lengths of cloth and started to piece them together, half the group asked if they could include other

131

pieces of fabric that had personal meaning for them, this is an example of what both Levi-Strauss and Knott refer to as the bricoleur; utilising that which is to hand (Knott, 2011; Lévi Strauss, 1962). So, the final quilts on the fronts were in two colour blocks, for example, grey and fuchsia with small samples of personal pieces of cloth. Once we had all completed our individual strips, we worked as a group to explore a range of different layouts and made a choice on the final sequence. We joined the blocks together to make the front of the quilt and were then able to all start working on the one quilt at the same time, see Figure 30 & Figure 31.

Figure 30 [Left] MQB: Quilting in the Church Hall. 2015, (Perren, n.d.)

Figure 31 [Right] MQB: Bumping Hands. 2015, (Perren, n.d.)

Based on an analysis of the Gee's Bend Quilters video, I made a wooden frame that we attached the quilt to. We would then sit either side of the frame, hand quilting a pre-determined design onto the quilt.

Because of the geometric nature of the piecing, it was decided that we should stitch horizontal and vertical lines to give a grid effect, the group felt this concept followed on with the piecing pattern and would be simple to follow. The stitch we used is a running stitch and is most used in quilting, as a group, we decided 'roughly' the sizes of the stitches but as this was new to everyone, we were open to the fact that they would not all be identical.

When quilting as a group and for greater physical ease, a process of passing the needle onto the next person takes place. For example, if I was sewing a line horizontally from right to left and sitting between two people, the person to my right would start the line, when they reached me, I would take the needle from them and carry on with the line until I reached the person on my left. I would then pass the needle to them, and they would carry on (see Figure 32 for a visual explanation). The same would happen when sewing vertically across the frame to the opposite side. Each week, you would sit wherever there was a space which means you would not have full authorship over a specific part of the quilt or even your own full stitch line.

Figure 32 Diagram showing the 'passing of the needle' for group quilting

Once the quilt had all been quilted sufficiently to hold it together making it suitable for a working, washable, practical quilt [as opposed to an art quilt], members of the group decided to start sewing motifs in an ad-hoc fashion – this included a sunflower, a mouse with big ears and further geometric shapes. Finally, we attached a border

[which I had cut and prepared]. All our initials were embroidered into various parts of the quilt, and it was washed. One member of the group thought it would be good to stitch the initials of MQB and so took it home to complete. When it was returned, it also included, in addition to the initials, a beautifully stitched motif of a bee.

Figure 33 MQB 2 Quilt with motif detail [2015]

Figure 34 MQB 1 Quilt: prior to adding the border [2015]

Thinking through Quilting

Quilting as a term is more often understood to encompass two core processes; quilting [the joining of layers] and patchwork [the joining of fabric pieces] when in fact, these are two quite separate elements that can be used on their own. For example, patchwork can be used in other products such as fashion and need not be quilted and quilting can be done on whole cloth and therefore does not use patchworked elements.

If we start to break these terms down and consider their process, we can also start to extract and recognise alternative modes of thinking. Quilting on its own, is a process that we consider as working with two sides; a front and a back but as we have previously observed, there is a middle that is usually hidden from plain sight. We can expand this

out as each of the layers themselves have a front and back, the stitching binds these layers, at points, the central wadding acts as an anchor; a place to hold onto a new thread and to hide the knots so both external surfaces appear to be magically held together. The quilt is a non-binary object, it is not just limited to having a front and a back, it is far more complex. On their own, the layers could be considered flimsy, weak, fragile but the repetition of thousands of seemingly insignificant stitches creates a new whole that has rigour and is representative of the investment of time and strength. Like the MQB and the building of an autonomous communal group, the quilting act searches out different positions and becomes stronger, more together, as a result.

Patchwork can be used to mend items, extend life, it can be utilitarian in its ability to bring together scraps and remnants to make a new, larger piece of cloth, broadening its potential. Equally it enables an engagement with aesthetics, the decorative or as a conversation piece. A patchworking of knowledge enables a multitude of concepts to butt up against one another, ideas can be stitched together in order that we allow new readings of a situation or position to emerge.

This understanding of patchworking and quilting as a means to engage with research, draws out and creates new ways of thinking about co-creation, socially engaged practice, non-binary or non-traditional approaches to the information that presents itself to us.

When we look at the wider field of quilting, we must acknowledge its power to transform, communicate and unite (Atkins, 1994; Knauer, 2017; Stalp, 2007). It has an innate ability to create in a democratic manner, naturally engaging with non-hierarchical positions. When this

is combined with aspects of amateur practice; change, evolution and shifting stances can be recognised.

Endeavours such as the *Names* project seek to raise awareness as well as be a means to both grieve and celebrate the lives of those affected by AIDs. We can also recognise quilting's value as a means of queering, in that it throws ideas of heteronormative culture into the air, in turn questioning identity formations and pre-conceived associations often linked to gender and sexuality.

While the MQB was not directly linked to a queering of quilting directly, it was creating a spotlight and conversation around perceived binary positions such as the amateur and professional, individual and group autonomies. The communal making of quilts overall is an inclusive act and can be a means to work through and connect with situations that are not normally heard of, such as *The Living Healing Quilts of Canada*.

Referring to the Patchwork of Methodologies [p94]; queering and binary can be considered as elemental in the generation of a newly associated quilting language that enables the researcher to analyse and allow their understanding to evolve.

Influential Connections.

This research considers a variety of approaches to practice, artists and projects in order that a conversation and debate may emerge around the amateur, communal making and quilting as a social practice.

Quilting in the home and, amateurs engaging with craft, overall has been considered as menial, dismissed as decorative and lacking in *high*

cultural value. Feminist artists such as Joyce Wieland, Eva Hesse and Su Richardson have, despite contextual differences, provided a positioning that seeks to dismiss the automatic *closing down* of quilting and the *amateur* in particular.

Quilters of Gee's Bend have been of great importance in this research from a practice and learning position. While the context of making is clearly not comparable, it is vital that the voices of black women be acknowledged in their contribution to this research. A PhD is a platform that should recognise the contribution and achievements of minorities and those who are underrepresented in western culture and academia.

Other projects such as *Names* and *Living Healing Quilts* are included because they help to demonstrate the wider powers of the quilt as an object to build awareness and instigate political change, again, for those who are *hushed* and underrepresented in Western Society. The quilt is not just a docile object, it can both comfort and change lives.

The *Stitching Together Research Network* (Shercliff & Twigger-Holroyd, 2021b) has recently come to the end of its 3 year venture through which it has built a critical dialogue around participatory textile making with researchers, practitioners, commissioners and textile enthusiasts. Funded by the AHRC and led by Dr Emma Shercliff and Dr Amy Twigger-Holroyd, the network gathered crucial examples of best practice and provided a much-needed platform for research and projects in this field.

Of note is the open source of case studies (Shercliff & Twigger-Holroyd, 2021a), the study day (Shercliff & Twigger-Holroyd, 2021c)

held in May 2021 which was created from the outset in such a way that it is still available for public use, and the vital publication of two special edition volumes of the *Journal of Arts & Communities* ("Stitching Together [1]," 2020; "Stitching Together [2]," 2020).

In the introduction titled 'Stitching Together: participatory textile making as an emerging methodological approach to research', for the first of two special editions of *The Journal of Arts & Communities* (Shercliff & Twigger Holroyd, 2020), Shercliff and Twigger-Holroyd provide an overview of the findings of the Stitching Together Network. This research and practice-based exemplars support several key findings in this research, there is further evidence of quiet empowerment that can emerge out of making with others and, the enduring understanding that textiles, when engaged as craft, has transformative powers. There is also acknowledgement of the challenges that can occur for some people who do not naturally feel comfortable engaging in communal making or, being distracted when the skill being used is not quite so straight forward; participation at time can bring anxieties of their own (Hackney et al., 2016; Shercliff & Twigger Holroyd, 2020).

The longitudinal character of the MQB case study for this PhD has revealed that over time there is always a transformation in the skills and practices of craft making, and that to some extent, the journey of the amateur in this case study has been the journey from the amateur to a group of skilled practitioners.

The Stitching Together Network has successfully pulled together a lot of existing research in this field as well as generating an impetus to create new research. But through this vital network, we are also able

to recognise the distinct lack of longitudinal studies in this field. This PhD research is contributing to a growing network of research on craft making in collaboration.

There are several makers and artists whose practice mirrors a core idea emerging in this research, that is to 'quietly take control'. Catherine Reinhart leads *The Collective Mending Sessions* (Reinhart, 2021), through which she brings together communities to mend old worn quilts. Serving as a practical solution for the repair of an item in need it also teaches valuable textile mending skills that can extend the life of an object. Reinhart recognises benefits that move beyond the practical; the ability of the group mending to also metaphorically mend communities.

Melissa Sarris engages communities where craft is seen less often. Working with prisoners and ex-offenders, Sarris seeks out opportunities where the public become active participants and co-authors of the work in hand (Sarris, 2021). Sarris looks to reducing and flattening senses of hierarchy in 'a space where enquiry, compassion and generosity may flourish' (Sarris, n.d.).

Lady Kitt is a maker, researcher and drag king who describes their practice as 'Mess making as social glue, driven by an insatiable curiosity to explore, share and [gently] incite the social functions of stuff that gets called art' (Kitt, 2021). Kitts' practice observes the individual approaches to creativity, the difficulty of consistently working with strangers, whilst also contributing to *human culture*.

As socially engaged practitioners, Reinhart, Sarris and Kitt strike out to make work that can have a real impact on those that physically

engage with the making process. The MQB as a *communal* making group, *quietly* pushes against a system that seeks to dismiss its amateurism as having no discernible impact on society or high culture. Kitt pushes for a *gentle* approach, Sarris looks for *equal* partnerships and co-creation and Reinhart uses time and *understated* repetitive stitches to mend and heal communities. There is a common thread amongst these examples of practice that *quietly, is taking control* of their means of production and their forms of expression.

A Personal Practice

In addition to being a researcher, I also identify as an artist, a craftsperson and a lecturer. This triangulation of experiences can be described as a/r/tographical which is a specific category of arts-based research practices. a / r / t stands for artist – researcher – teacher and merges knowing, doing and making as knowledge (Irwin et al., 2018; Irwin & de Cosson, 2006; Pinar, 2006; Sullivan, 2010). I have been able to use the skills of my own practice; painting, drawing and making to further analyse and understand the case study and approaches to the amateur. These aspects [of who I identify as] relate to my experience of being part of the Meltham Quilting Bee as a group, in particular my responses to the spaces in which collective work is made.

My practice is an ever-evolving undertaking. With a 'big picture' understanding, I recognise a body of work that likes to respond to situations, build narratives and is investigative of the time in which we have [or don't have] ownership of. In practice, I paint, draw and make artefacts using textiles. Often these reflect back on each other – I draw textiles, I make paints, I paint textiles and they are sometimes made into artefacts. I recognise no hierarchy in these mediums or the processes I use, and I create work in isolation in my home-based 'studio' [not usually as part of a group].

Aesthetically, a lot of my work might be described as decorative, rich in colour use, abstract. As a practitioner I have been described as productive in relation to the amount of work I create. There are numerous reasons why I make work but essentially it comes down to the ability to create 'thinking time' as a result of engaging in doing and making. Using my own practice within this research enables a range

of research and analytical methods to be used; it is a collage, patchwork, assemblage of approaches. I am undertaking this PhD as a part-time student and as a result, I have been able to develop a longitudinal case study. One of the benefits of such a study is the opportunity to analyse the data on several occasions but also using different practice methods. Throughout the case study, aside from the more common methods used such as interviews, questionnaires and diary entries, I have developed a number of creative studies [mainly paintings, drawings and quilts] that enable reflection and understanding of the experiences I am having when engaging in group making.

While I have been positioned as a participant observer and as a practitioner in a practice-based case study, it is useful to consider my direct observations of elements of the case study, as it can bring further insights to the research. Sociologist Patricia Leavy, in the book *Method meets Art* raises this point but also adds that it is a mechanism for the researcher to question their own ideas: 'researchers share their experiences as a part of their ethnographic work – as a means to developing their own ideas, questioning their assumptions and positionality, building rapport, and building reciprocity' (Leavy, 2009, p. 39).

Learning and producing knowledge through practice is an idea that philosopher, Donald Schön has written extensively about, particularly in his text *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* [1983]. 'Reflection [and knowing] in action' describes the moments in which you think through a situation while you are in that situation. For example: during the making of a communal quilt, you can reflect on the quilt making process, the act of working communally

and about your presence in, or influence of the site in which you are making. Schön goes further and discusses the idea that the more experience one has within a field such as craft making, the more powerful this reflection can be. There is recognition that each situation presented to you is unique and there is no 'one answer'. The years of experience may allow you to recognise all the smaller elements of the problem at hand, but when all the problems come together as a whole – it is a unique situation that you must immerse yourself in to understand more coherently (Schön, 1983, p. 129).

Philosopher and chemist, Michael Polanyi in the book *The Tacit Dimension [1966], explained that* we know more than we can tell. Using the term tacit knowledge, he observes that a number of elements such as sensory and conceptual come together in order that we make sense of something *(Polanyi, 1966).* Understanding the tension that the thread needs to be as you pull the knot through to the centre of the quilt may be hard to describe, but through doing we are able to understand this process beyond a verbal explanation. Within my painting practice, I am able to describe my experience of working in close confines around a quilt frame, arguably more eloquently than through describing how I imagine it must be like for the quilters of Gee's bend *[Figure 69, Figure 70, Figure 73, Figure 74].*

The article 'Designing Craft Research: Joining Information and Knowledge' by Kristina Niedderer and Katherine Townsend affirms the importance and specificity of craft as a method of research that can reveal understanding beyond the ability of the written word. They write:

> […] this role of craft is rooted in its flexible nature as a conduit
> from design at one end to art at the other. Its characteristics

are based on experiential and emotional knowledge, which are important strength of craft and therefore an integral aspect any research in the crafts. (Niedderer & Townsend, 2015, p. 641).

In this respect, like Schön, Niedderer and Townsend highlight the experience of the maker in the wider sense but that the experience gained through engaging with the craft itself is knowledge.

By extension, Senior Research Tutor at the RCA, Claire Pajaczkowska, in the text "Making Known: The Textile Toolbox – Psychoanalysis of Nine Types of Textile Thinking" [2016], recognises the specificity of [hand] stitching practice as a means to think through the act of making:

> […] it is surprising how the process of reflexive looping, or doubling back, which is so integral to the stitch process, becomes a metaphorical, as well as literal, mechanism of reflexivity. When the progressive movement forward included backwards movement within it, there is a space and time of reflexive thought (Pajaczkowska, 2016, p. 86).

Here, we understand that thinking through an idea or a problem is never linear; we go sideways, forwards, backwards and often in loops. Hand stitch and the act of quilting does the same, therefore, through the joining of layers in a quilt, we can think through our thoughts.

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Analysing: MQB

The focus of this chapter is on the quilts produced through the case study. As outputs of the Meltham Quilting Bee [MQB] they are also representative of the questioning and analysis directed towards the acts of working and making together; decision making, physicality, designing and the building of a communal voice. This case study recognises the particular nature of quilting and its suitability to communal making: 'quilting is one of many ways in which women can connect with other women on personal and societal levels, develop a creative self in which women find themselves not just as family caretakers, but as subjects of their own lives as well' (Stalp, 2007, p. 136).

From this making experience as a research process, the amateur is questioned and a clear need for a sliding scale or arc of the amateur (Stebbins, 1992) is considered through a pedagogic understanding of experiential learning (D. A. Kolb, 2014). This chapter considers not just the individual but also the group through a skills based model of understanding (Drefus & Drefus, 1980). Furthermore, out of the MQB emerges a range of methods of making in my own practice and I discuss how this body of work developed and is used as a method of analysis in Arts Based Research (Leavy, 2009, 2018; S. McNiff, 2018).

MQB

The Meltham Quilting Bee [MQB] is currently in its sixth year of working communally to create quilts. The number of people involved has fluctuated over the years but four of the original members are still

involved. While it was initially organised by myself, majority of the time [5 ½ years] it has been led by all members of the group with no individual taking any leading role. Communally we work on one quilt together with the overarching objective [except for one quilt] to make quilts that are suitable for daily use and that they will be donated to a women's refuge to use / distribute as they see fit. This is quite a unique way of working as we do not create any quilts for our own personal use. As a result, there are little to no issues with anyone feeling that they have greater 'ownership' over what we are working on or holding the loudest authorial voice. Over the years of working together, like that of *Brass Art*, we developed a new voice and aesthetic, one that belongs to the MQB group as opposed to its individual members.

Organisation

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, there was a certain amount of organisation required for the quilt group 'to be activated'. MQB 1&2 [names of quilts made by the MQB] were made concurrently by the daytime and evening groups and this is where I chose to embed any crucial learning elements, for example, how to piece fabrics together, how to create a quilters knot and then embed it into the quilt, what is an ideal hand stitch length and how far apart should stitch areas be in order to make it a successful working quilt. In the background I organised and planned to ensure the quilters felt this to be an accessible craft i.e., dyeing fabrics, pre-cutting strips of fabric, winding off thread lengths for little packs to take home when working on piecing as homework, supplying tea, coffee and biscuits, setting the room up in the hired space ready for everyone to arrive.

As the weeks went on, individual members would ask how things had been done such as the cutting of so much fabric. For such occasions, I would ensure I had all my equipment with me so I could show them how I had carried out certain tasks. I would have scraps of fabric they could test on with the intention that individuals could develop skills as and when they wanted. Yet I was not the only one providing instruction. As the weeks went on, I would hear individuals chatting to each other and explaining how they had tackled elements of the piecing and layout of their blocks to each other. For these women, this was an opportunity to learn about quilting from myself, but it was also an arena in which they were learning from each other, teaching and 'lifting each other' (Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009).

During discussions and the later interviews, it emerged that most participants [bar one, who had made quilts using a sewing machine previously] had wanted to quilt but it always seemed such a big undertaking and they did not know where to start. The method I had used to break it down into modular parts had made it accessible and was now something they felt they could tackle or were now doing in their own time. As Sue, one of the MQB members commented:

> I'd always wanted to get involved with making quilts and quilting but didn't really know how to go about it and I guess sometimes, excuse the phrase, it was difficult to get your ass into gear… The thing I found really valuable; it was so good to be guided… I think the way it was broken down in that very first quilt, made it very understandable. I learn by doing so the fact that we were involved with the process, practically was, was very good for me'. (S. Mortlock, personal communication, August 23, 2020)

At this point, Sue is addressing a number of points that have been discussed previously; reflection in action (Schön, 1983), tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966; Shercliff, 2014a) and a drive towards making as an autonomous action (Adamson, 2010; Lippard, 2010; Myzelev, 2009).

For the initial meeting at the start of MQB3 [and the making within homes], I suggested that people bring along any fabrics they had at home that they might want to use and any quilting books, magazines or inspiration for a potential quilt design. If people did not have anything to bring then this was equally fine. During that first meeting, we looked through books together, discussing the merits and challenges of what we saw. A design was picked out based on its accessibility [although not a simple construction, it was also not too advanced] and it allowed us to utilise a good range of the fabrics that we had brought to the table. The MQB was clearly demonstrating a desire to customize the design through their choices of fabric to create a semi original quilt. In this respect, the group were acting autonomously via the questioning of the original design (Campbell, 2005; Hackney, 2013; Myzelev, 2009; Ratto & Boler, 2014).

From this point onwards, my level of organisation was on a par with every other member of the MQB. This moment was the perfect time to transfer to a non-hierarchical practice and to 'release control of the process' (Gilchrist et al., 2015, p. 466). Choosing to keep it as low key as possible towards the end of a session, we would decide what needed to be done for the following session [if anything], the date of the next session and where it would be. There were no formal schedules or rota of houses. On the day of the next meeting someone would normally text everyone to check / confirm it was still going

ahead and this is how it has run to date. This laissez-faire attitude was purposefully in direct opposition to its business-led counterpart in its drive towards efficiency. Whilst simultaneously recognising the value in having a basic organisational structure this thus demonstrates Bratich and Brush's concept of the *social home* (Bratich & Brush, 2011). This worked very well for the group, probably the only downside of such an approach to organisation was that we would end up with six people, all bringing cake and biscuits [there was never a session when no biscuits were bought along!].

Social

We get together, we set up our space and we labour over our quilt. It is about making together in an environment that is focused on producing an output with little to no commercial value and creating a space that is more social than productive (Hackney, 2013; Shercliff, 2014a; Stalp, 2007). We chatter about a lot of things. In the initial months this was on the surface, not superficial but it was centred around the process of quilting. Later we become friends, we talk beyond the pleasantries and really get to know each other. Grant Kester describes this happening as 'haptic and verbal exchanges' (Kester, 2011, p. 113) that enable us to reflect on our identity, not only as an individual but also starts to build our new group identity (Kester, 2011; Lewis et al., 2013).

The subjects and directions of conversation could also be considered as a cross-cultural engagement as the home became an important site for viewing exhibitions online [particularly in the later stages during Covid-19], a space to view films, listen to music, watch a documentary,

create 3-D prints, for purchasing craft materials (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Ratto & Boler, 2014).

This interaction with the home, while it may be more greatly connected through technologies today, also reflects the historical home as the main or only option and site for women as makers, particularly when they had small children and had their domestic duties to deal with (Brooks, 1987; Parker, 2010). With the onset of lockdowns and isolations due to Covid-19, these domestic interiors once again have transformed back to the spaces of the past as they become office spaces, studios, school classrooms.

Like the quilters of Gee's Bend the frame used for quilting creates an automatic social space (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2002). It is a *temporal zone* (Knott, 2015) or the home as *Limboland* [9] (*Welsh Streets*, n.d.). The quilt frame invites those who sit around it to engage with each other; bumping hands, knocking knees, negotiating elbow space [Figure 35 & Figure 36], silently engaging us while we sew so we are free to chat about politics, village goings on, weekly happenings, a first grandchild, philosophy, gardening and so on.

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[9] For Nina Edge (*Welsh Streets*, n.d.), Limboland represents a site for the making of politically charged artworks by the residents of an area in Liverpool which was under threat from gentrification. Untrained artists would create interventions to raise awareness of their situation. For the MQB members, this was a political act in that it was a group of women, making craft and working together outside of normal conventions of hierarchical structures, this is also a political act [although not overtly so] in that this is not a normative position (Adamson, 2010; Parker, 2010; Rentschler, 2019).

Figure 35 Quilting spaces above the frame (Perren, n.d.)

Through a series of drawings titled *Form Studies*, 2015 [see page 350 in the appendix portfolio], I observed and engaged with the physicality of quilting onto and around a frame; hunched forms, leaning, reaching and bending were required. The studies themselves, created on large semi-transparent layout papers allowed the previous drawings and marks to seep through and be seen, playing with the idea of consistent movement, adjustment and productivity.

Figure 36 Quilting spaces below the frame (Perren, n.d.)

As stated previously, the first two quilts [MQB1&2] were created at the church hall in our local village of Meltham, from the start of making the third quilt [MQB3], we switched to making in the homes of some members of the group. The church hall is a public space in which no individual person would feel that they have greater ownership. This forms a neutral space in which to introduce and explore the research

157

questions as well as a being a space in which individuals feel they can engage with the tasks on their own level.

Bratich and Brush remind us that the Freudian term *unheimlich* occurs when we are spatially disoriented, or, when we engage in something in a space for which we do not usually associate together. For example, quilting or knitting usually happens in the home and not in public (Bratich & Brush, 2011). As a result, the act of making in public becomes a question about the societal values of public / private spaces. The church hall, however, provides a space which is perhaps more intermediate, it is both a public space, but unlike a café or park, it is used as a closed space. We used an enclosed space, so the public were not able to see us working. This in-between space became a site for forming a non-hierarchical structure for the MQB.

Switching to the home was a decision made by the group of quilters who wished to continue making together. Initially, this was a practical choice as it had no costs attached and some members had the space to accommodate up to six people and the quilting frame. This is a far more personal environment and had the potential for individuals to feel uncomfortable and therefore not willing to continue in the study. However, this choice was a unanimous decision and therefore such an outcome was avoided. In the text "Crafting Community" [2016], Professor Kirsty Robertson and Scholar/Artist Lisa Vinebaum discuss the shift for textile-based crafts from the domestic sphere to the public, to pubs, cafés, parks. They discuss the performative nature of making in a public space. For the MQB, this performance is being bought directly into the home. These domesticated spaces, usually reserved for privacy and making on one's own, were now being

opened up for communal making and by association, the performance (Robertson & Vinebaum, 2016).

For those members of the group who were unable to offer spaces in which we could work, made a point of arranging other elements for the group such as organising the purchase of fabrics and wadding or supplying home baked treats. This role or action, although not put-upon people, enabled the group to move towards a situation in which everyone felt empowered.

Within the making environment of the home, discussions would lead on from the observation of an object that occupied our new quilting space such as a picture, photograph or book, to the research topics of the case study. Often, within the homes of crafters, are indications [or blatant displays] of artefacts that demonstrate their experiences of making (Turney, 2004). Having access to items in these domestic spaces meant we were able to form meaningful connections with each other as they created an environment, in which we could discuss personal agendas, political motivations and family matters (Attfield, 2000).

The group were committed to thinking with and through the process as part of a co-productive enquiry. This engagement with the research going on 'behind the scenes' further validated the individual not as a participant in this study but as an established contributor to the research and its outcomes as co-producers (Banks et al., 2019; Leavy, 2018) or research partners (Gilchrist et al., 2015). This time spent quilting, working together, chatting and engaging in constructive conversation [at times led by myself but more often instigated by other individuals] further enabled me to develop an understanding of the

nuances of the social aspects of making and the opinions of the participants (Twigger Holroyd & Shercliff, 2016). In an MQB interview [August 2020], Sue comments that Debbie's inclusion in each session of a personally selected 'what's on' guide to local events in the village, at the theatre, in the library was a valued regular contribution, often leading to Sue later engaging in these events (S. Mortlock, personal communication, August 23, 2020).

Experience of Making Together

In Figure 31, you can see a photograph that I took during a session when we were working on MQB2. This intimate image of two quilters working in a small space, captures several themes, for example, the close nature of them working on the same spot, their outer arms leaning in towards each other while their arms sit side by side and reach under the quilt together. These are physical signs that two people of different ages are comfortable in each other's presence. What the photograph does not represent are the giggles that took place in-between these focused moments and when the quilters' hands bumped for the first time. Grant Kester talks of the gradation of knowing and experience that can emerge through haptic exchanges when collaborating through making (Kester, 2011). For Sue and Maisie [the hand bumpers], this is a negotiation of space, verbal discussion on how to proceed, a personal moment that recognises that this encounter is not so ordinary and a haptic knowing of the quilting stitch being carried out.

Later, in the painting *Communal Ebb & Flow,* 2016 [Figure 69] I explored this negotiation of space in a composition that leans into a

central position. I made my own highly pigmented paints that maintained a translucency so I could build up layers, this metaphorically navigated the peeling back of boundaries and personal space whilst also acknowledging multiple, seemingly indistinct actions.

Moving onto later quilts in the series we continued to navigate the haptic experiences, that is learning and knowing through the experience of touch and reaching towards a greater control of our quilting skills. An example of knowing through haptic encounters is the pulling of the thread and knot through the top layer of cloth and embedding it into the middle layer [without pulling it all the way through the quilt]. Similarly, when mixing gouache paint, I am only able to understand if the consistency is perfect when I mix the paint and respond in that moment to the thickness of the paint emerging from the tube. The social exchanges and the nature of working within close spaces, enhances this method for knowing. One such instance occurs when we set the tension of the quilt on the frame. Facing each other with less than a foot between us, we would put our hands onto the quilt to test the tension and communicate [a mixture of verbal and / or nods, smiles] to the people attaching the quilt to the frame.

As I write this thesis and analyse the experiences, we are coming close to a year of national and local lockdowns in which we have had to live in isolation, keep two metres away from people we do not live with and wear face masks. Bumping hands and sitting shoulder to shoulder, knee to knee now feels sadly like an alien experience. Quilting around the frame in close quarters bought moments of physical and social connection, a lack of judgement and provided moments for improving one's wellbeing. In this case, amateur making pulls people together,

creates connections and cultivates a sense of belonging; it will be good to get back to these times.

Like the members of *Brass Art* we also make conscious choices to quiet or hush the self as we negotiate and develop a voice for our little quilting group (Lewis et al., 2013). This process of negotiation and compromise was not always straight forward and provided challenges as Sue notes with reference to the final decisions on the piecing of MQB5: 'we had started with a plan, and it ended up somewhere completely different, and I found that difficult, I don't mind where we ended up but found the process rather difficult' (S. Mortlock, personal communication, August 23, 2020). Debbie then commented: 'well can I say Sue, you hid it quite well… it was not uncomfortable for us' (D. Ford, personal communication, August 23, 2020). This reassurance to Sue, who subsequently exclaimed her relief at knowing this, demonstrated the ways in which some aspects of our individual preferences were being willingly put to the side as the MQB developed a visual language of its own. In fact, Sue went on to make the quilt on her own in the manner that we had first intended as she was really taken by the improvisational methods used and wanted to engage with that fully.

The piecing together and patchworking of multiple fabrics reflects the joining together of numerous voices and approaches. At times the pieces do not match in size or shape but with mindful adjustments and consideration of the bigger whole, these jarring elements join together to create a new fabric and are representative of storying through making.

The making of work communally and the inclusion of people in the group helped to further their knowledge of quilting independently. These are informal moments of skill-sharing. As we sit around the frame, we note how each other tackle elements of hand quilting. Because we are also doing the same task, we can respond and test out such approaches immediately. Such experiences in making together create shifts in the status of the amateur, the nature of someone who may be considered as an experienced quilter [and therefore no longer an amateur] can be acknowledged because they are able to communicate and recognise their quilting knowledge through haptic and tacit experiences.

Learning as a group

Being an amateur group of quilters, we were engaged in a learning process. The simultaneous making of the first two quilts by the MQB were an experiment in how little information could be provided to a group of people with a range of hand quilting experiences: from a smidge to none. Autonomy was desired but instruction was needed, free flow was encouraged but clarity was required. So, over the initial weeks, I proceeded to lead the sessions through instruction but created a modular system [Table 4] with the aim that as soon as possible, the group itself would drive not only the direction ahead but also the learning.

As a participant observer with an interest in autonomous making, my intention was to flatten any sense of a hierarchy and to ensure that the members of the group understood themselves to have non-passive roles in this research; this was to be a two-way / dual relationship (Banks et al., 2019; Gilchrist et al., 2015; Leavy, 2009, 2018; J. McNiff

& Whitehead, 2011). Quite early in the initial stage of the case study, quilt members started to contribute to the group, sometimes these involved micro actions where a person sat next to another person and would follow the lead of their neighbour. At other times there were far grander displays of action at work. For example, during the third meeting, in front of the group, I realised that I had made a mistake in my calculations for the back of MQB2. It was meant to be a solid grey piece of cloth; however, it was simply too small. Other members of the group quickly put forward suggestions for how we might fix the problem and remembering the concept of how the Quilters of Gee's Bend approached their making [having introduced them to images of their quilts in the first meeting] suggested that we might 'simply' add in some patches of the fuchsia fabric that was on the face of the cloth [Figure 37]. I felt this was an ideal moment for me to step back and demonstrate that I fully trusted their input and as a result, the back of the quilt includes some shards of another cloth [and is possibly my favourite aspect of this quilt].

Figure 37 Fixing the backing with the addition of a fuchsia panel, as suggested by the quilters of MQB. (Perren, n.d.)

Upon reflection, this moment was pivotal in enabling all members of the group to realise they have a valid contribution to the concept of 'group making' and therefore the research (Gilchrist et al., 2015; Leavy, 2009). At this point I would not describe the group as co-

producers of the research but there was clearly an indication that it might evolve this way given time (Banks et al., 2019).

With a few more sessions, individuals started to question the method of stitching that was being used. I had demonstrated a technique called 'rocking the needle', it is not the simplest of techniques but once mastered it is a less time-consuming method for hand quilting. Everyone had been using this method to different degrees of success and started to adapt it in a way they felt more comfortable with. Some quilters chose to use a much slower method called a 'stab stitch'. However, rather than just switch due to ease, they would explain that our approach to quilting was not about efficiency of labour but about an experience of making together allowing themselves to take their time to enjoy the moment and appreciate the skill. This is an excellent example of the *Pitman Painter effect* in which members of the group were demonstrating a heightened awareness of not just the skill of quilting but also the concept of autonomy within the context of this case study (Milling et al., 2014). The *Pitman Painter effect* recognises that 'once someone has attempted to make art, sing or play a complex piece, they have a heightened understanding and appreciation of the technical and aesthetic qualities of that work' (Milling et al., 2014, p. 8). Furthermore, it clearly demonstrates that within amateur arts, participants frame their level of engagement through an experience as opposed to its economic value (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2011; Milling et al., 2014), and that the experience of group making was of more value than the end result or a quilt being completed to schedule (Felcey et al., 2013; Shercliff, 2014a).

As we built up the layers of the quilt we could recognise different planes of thought, some were tentatively joined together, a thicker

and more substantial wadding would provide purpose. The act of stitching to create a quilt bound together our thoughts. As the needle repeatedly switched from one side of the quilt to the other, the months and years required to carry out this important act of binding, mirrored the cohesion that emerged over time within the MQB.

Space & Physicality

As stated previously, the making of quilts has taken place in two different environments [sites]. The making of MQB 1 & 2 took place in a local church hall and the other quilts were made in the homes of the quilters. This switch, from a multi-use public space in which exercise classes and coffee mornings would be held, to the domestic settings that are more often personal and private spaces was quite a change for the case study.

A clear shift in thinking towards communal rather than community making occurred once this switch happened, so what did these spaces look like and how does it feel to make quilts in such an environment? As an individual maker, particularly when engaging as an amateur making work in your home, shed or garage is quite expected (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Elinor et al., 1987; Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Parker, 2010). However, we were inviting relative strangers to come into our homes to continue working as the MQB, when a normal course of action would be to remain in a public and community orientated space (Minahan & Cox, 2007; Myzelev, 2009).

Bratich & Brush identify the hacking or re-routing of the home for use as a group quilting space as *reclaiming* the site. This positive

affirmation of a temporary switch of one's private, domestic living space into a working studio is called *detourning the home* (Bratich & Brush, 2011, p. 239) and one that enables us to re-vision our homes. When the initial switch happened there were six of us working together, three homes were offered up for use and belonged to Sue, Lois and myself. For those who were not able to offer space to work in, they were keen to take on other responsibilities such as the sourcing of a fabric or purchasing of wadding. This distribution of labour and organisation of the group emphasised the status as a communal group that was gradually flattening any form of hierarchy (Gilchrist et al., 2015). For Lois, there was a clear recognition of the significance of offering one's home as a space for the group and that, perhaps, also reflected the anxieties that one might have if you were to act as a host in your home for friends and family:

> I think I was the one who suggested working at home and this was mainly because I thought hiring a space would be costly for five or six people. It does impose the extra role of guest or host, and maybe the arrangement was felt to be a bit cramped or inconvenient. For myself, sometimes it worked fine, sometimes not so much, and I think this depended on how I felt the social interaction / conversation was going (L. Garling, personal communication, August 30, 2020).

In group work practices and analysis, the organisation, arrangements and care for the individuals in the group is referred to as *dynamic administration* (Foulkes, 1975, pp. 99–108). This includes being aware of who is attending, setting up the room ready for the arrival of the group and generally making people feel welcome which could include the offering of refreshments. Moreover, Knott refers to the space of

amateurs [both physically and mentally] as being a temporal zone, a space where 'definitions of work, productivity, aesthetics, play and labour are continually negotiated' (Knott, 2011, p. 20). These new sites for making work communally, required adaptation and around us we would see evidence of spaces that were already considered as adaptive; desks to work at, baskets of craft projects mid completion, extendable tables.

The next section of this analysis introduces us to the homes and sites of quilting for the MQB. These spaces were not simple voids in which we gathered to make but would come to influence the experience of group making and would contribute to creative choices being made of the quilts themselves. These spaces, or environments became interconnected with the emergence and ethos of the MQB.

Sue's space [shared with Matty the young Yorkshire Terrier].

Sue has an open plan ground floor which consists of the kitchen, dining area and lounge. On occasions we sit at the dining table, but mostly, we would be working around the frame in the lounge area. Upon arrival, Sue would have already moved a coffee table to the side ready for us to set up the frame and we would then transfer the dining chairs to be round the frame. Attention would always be given to Matty and then we would take in the amazing view from the patio windows. Meeting in the evenings meant we had opportunity to watch ever changing sunsets over the duration of the study [Figure 38 & Figure 39]. Sue would also have signs of craft-based engagement around us; this was a space that Sue uses to knit in and work on bindings for quilts so these would be sitting on the side in mid-production. Sue also has a small sewing room upstairs which we have seen, but not worked in. On one occasion, we needed to see what the layout of the blocks would look like but needed a large space in which to do this. Later we found ourselves putting the sections out on Sue's bed in her bedroom.

Figure 38 Sue's Space

Figure 39 Matty taking in the view

Lois's space.

When working at Lois's we would be based in the lounge. Before we would all arrive, furniture would be moved to the edges of the room so we could set up in the middle. There is a large bookshelf that takes up almost one side of the room [ranging from philosophy to fiction, cooking to biographical] and on the walls are evidence of a creative past; a collaged drawing made while on a foundation course and a frame with a collection of politically motivated [left leaning] postcards, the most memorable being a reference to the 'milk snatcher'. During the piecing stage of MQB3, we would often all sit on the floor doing our sorting or hand stitching, and on occasions, we would nip down to the kitchen [Lois lives in a 3-storey mid terrace house] where the ironing board would be set up ready to use.

Figure 40 Lois's Space Photo of space / bookshelf

Figure 41 Clip frame of postcards in Lois's front room.

Nicola's space.

This is my house, and you need to pass through the kitchen and lounge to get through to the dining room where we would quilt. Like Sue and Lois, I would prepare the space before people would arrive by putting the folding dining table to the side and as I was the 'keeper' of the frame and legs, would set this up too. On one of the walls are a collection of family photos and the other walls house a range of paintings [some of own]. There are patio doors that open into the garden. The house is shared with my husband, two teenage daughters, a cat and the later arrival of a puppy; all of whom would make a brief appearance at some point most evenings.

Figure 42 Nicola's Space

Each member of the group took responsibility for several aspects of the group organisation. The arranging of the space before people arrived, so that they would feel comfortable and welcome, is a form of *dynamic administration* (Foulkes, 1975). Within its traditional sense, this responsibility usually falls to the lead conductor of a group. However, in this case, each member of the MQB shared the dynamic responsibilities.

Tea, coffee and biscuits or cake [some homemade] were offered about midway through each session and the relaxed nature of the MQB meant that sometimes we would all stop for five minutes and at other times, some would carry on stitching while others enjoyed some tea. The timings of the meetings were on alternate Mondays but if someone could not make a session, often we would wait a further week or, on occasions, meet a week earlier. Texting was used in between sessions to update any changes, check where we said we would meet with everyone taking responsibility for this; nobody took the lead, and it remains to be a relaxed group. This process mirrors acts of impersonal fellowship (De Maré et al., 1991) as we move onwards without apparent need for leadership.

Conversations, as mentioned previously, would be varied over the duration of a session and once we were making in each other's homes, our attention would be drawn to something in the room [a book, picture, a knit in progress] leading us to learn about aspects of each other that may not have evolved had we remained in the church hall. Grant Kestor, in his book *Conversation Pieces* [2013] talks of the impact conversation has in community-based projects: 'conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is reframed as an active,

generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities' (Kester, 2013, p. 8).

Losing inhibitions

One of the unique factors of group quilt making that you rarely see in other craft practices is the concept of sharing. Almost all tasks are completed by multiple members of the group and therefore there is a lack of ownership over specific aspects of the quilt. As mentioned previously, from the initial stages of quilting as a group, individuals would not sit at the same spot from previous sessions and the needle would be passed from one person to another meaning that each line of stitch was always carried out by multiple hands. As a result of this approach to making [sharing, collaboration and a lack of distinct ownership] the quilters of MQB were quick to form their own rules, standards and vision for the quilts.

Quite early on, during the initial stages of the case study, and while still meeting in the church hall, everyone becomes less interested in instructions and the decisions we made as a group. While the daytime group was less questioning, the same cannot be said for the evening group. For example, the first break-away action happened at 'the other end' of the quilt frame to where I was sitting. Some members, who had been the clearest in demanding well-defined instruction, started to sew motifs and ignore the lines that had so carefully been chalked onto the cloth. Leaves, a daisy and even a Mickey Mouse started to emerge. As soon as the declaration to not follow instructions had been acknowledged by the whole group then the motifs became more ambitious. A full sunflower and stitching moving from purposeful

running stitch to chain and cross stitch. This is what Ravetz, Kettle and Felcey would refer to as 'chaos and risk' (Felcey et al., 2013) which happens when judgement and rules are no longer deemed as important. Debbie recognised the change in the nature of people quilting from *following* to *creating* the instruction, but acknowledged the approach that had been set up within the group, made this feel ok to enact:

> I do think we felt able to do it [change the design] because you weren't saying you must do it like this. You're always happy for people to be adventurous and do their own thing. […] we didn't do it thinking, don't let Nicola see this. It definitely felt to me that you would encourage people to do their own thing (D. Ford, personal communication, August 30, 2020).

This process of changing of the goals and parameters *mid-making* is evidence that the process and engagement of group making has superseded the outcome [or product] as being the most important factor in the experience of group quilt making (Bryan-Wilson & Piekut, 2020; Jackson, 2011; Knott, 2015; Stalp, 2007). Craftsmanship can be seen in their ability to work collaboratively (Downey, 2009; Lewis et al., 2013) and in the creation of new rules of engagement for group making (Atkinson, 2006; Felcey et al., 2013; Stebbins, 1992).

Autonomy

Knott recognises the amateur as someone who is the 'freest, most autonomous' of makers (Knott, 2015, p. xi), in part because they negate western standards of acceptability in their practice as they are

not beholden to any benefactor or time based deadlines. The established artist, on the other hand, more often recognised idyllically as the ultimate free spirit, is in fact obligated to a gallery that represents them or, clients who have deadlines and price brackets, schools of thought that get attached to their work and a host of critics who seek to challenge artistic directions (Adamson, 2013; Risatti, 2007).

When the amateur is observed in relation to its professional counterpart in the art and craft fields, it is clear to see how, as an individual, you can have autonomy and a freedom from the pressures of commerce. Essentially, the amateur has little interest in the rules, they form personal boundaries of aesthetic judgement, choose whether something is to hold any practical function and create their own standards and modes of progression (Adamson, 2007; Hackney, 2013; Knott, 2015; Kouhia, 2016). But how does this understanding of autonomy apply to a group of amateur makers rather than the individual?

In Table 5 we see an understanding of three stages of motor learning by psychologists Paul Fitts and Michael Posner, as presented through an understanding of sports coaching by Jeffrey Huber in the book *Applying Educational Psychology in Coaching Athletes* [2013]. The concepts that apply to the swimmer or runner, can be applied to the quilter, the concept of a team sport such as hockey, could equally be applied to the MQB. This mode of thinking allows us to engage with the physical act of quilting as a way of understanding engagement and application of the process to observe autonomy.

Stage	Process	Characteristics	Other name	Individual within MQB	MQB as a group
Cognitive	Gathering information	Large gains, inconsistent performance	Verbal-motor stage	Learning to hand quilt	Making communally
Associative	Putting actions together	Small gains, disjointed performance, conscious effort	Motor stage	Developing stitch & piecing quality	Developing of one voice/hand
Autonomous	Much time and practice	Performance seems unconscious, automatic, and smooth	Automatic Stage	Automatic, and consistent quality of stitching	Predicting and subconsciously responding to the actions of others

Table 5 Summary of Three Stages of Motor Learning: applied to the MQB (Fitts & Posner, 1967).

The *cognitive* stage is one which sees the participant learning not just from instruction but also from watching (Huber, 2013). If you are a someone who has never seen how a quilt is constructed, providing details on how to quilt becomes an abstract selection of signs and symbols (Risatti, 2007). If, however, you see quilt making in action, these same signs can be more readily translated and understood. This cognitive stage happens in the early phase of learning and is one that draws upon lots of sources of information but does create large leaps of understanding. At this point, it is most likely that the focus is on the development of the individual rather than the collective.

The *associative* stage is the point that takes place over the longest period. This is about repetition of concept or action (Huber, 2013).

For the individual this is a time to develop your hand stitching skill and of building an understanding of the consequences of your action, i.e., the way in which you insert the needle into the quilt can create different visual outcomes for quilting. As a group, this is a time to explore the value in all carrying out quilting stitches in the same manner, to give the appearance of one maker, one voice. Or do we choose to keep those individual identities, which, when they come together create a new visual language? The repetition of movements and actions feel like they are creating far smaller leaps of learning, but the combination of multiple voices, revisiting the minutia of quilt making, starts to build a more confident voice and one that starts to understand what it represents.

Within my painting practice, this is a stage that feels familiar. The repetition of applying paint, the angle you hold the brush, the amount of water you allow to stay in the bristles requires repetition in order that you build muscle memory. When making my own paints, the time spent grinding the pigments and thoroughly embedding into the binding ingredient requires a repetitive motion that is mediative. This commitment to time learning is instinctively understood to be imperative for the process to evolve.

The final stage is the *autonomous* stage and comes after years of practice and engagement. This stage occurs when actions are carried out automatically. We are not required to think as such as our body has built muscle memory and is now able to automatically carry out tasks (Huber, 2013). Think about those knitters who can have their eyes on the television while their hands continue to knit, stopping only when they automatically know something is not quite right. For the quilters individually, it is straightforward to understand the translation

to automatic stitching, however, it is less clear how the physical act of quilting can be understood as autonomous action. Perhaps, we should recognise autonomous acts in communal quilting as occurring as a result of the mind being freed from having to think about the stitching or piecing? As the group now has time to think beyond the practical, we can engage with the wider concepts of quilting together. For example, understanding the consequences of decisions made in the design stage upon later potential developments, or knowing where to move the body on the frame as you survey the quilters around the frame and, predict how their movements and needs may require you to adjust.

Making Decisions

More chatter occurs as we work; the weather, village happenings, the news, things we have done in the week. We also discuss what we are doing on the quilt, I get asked about the development of this PhD, Debbie disappears under the frame to remove another knot, we talk about our creative ambitions in the garden and at the sewing machine, books to be read, recipes to try out, things to do with a set of knitting needles.

The Greek term Koinonia 'refers to the atmosphere of impersonal fellowship rather than personal friendship, of spiritual-cum-human participation in which people can speak, hear, see, and think freely, a form of togetherness and amity that brings a pool of resources' (De Maré et al., 1991, p. 2). The group analyst Patrick de Maré in the book *Koinonia: From Hate, through Dialogue, to Culture in the Larger Group* [1991], explores the interpersonal relationships, frictions and

dynamics that take place within groups (small, median and large). For example, 'No goal setting was the goal' as a method of *management* was applied in an experiment at a conference, to explore how to get a large group of people to successfully work together. De Maré et al had no fixed question that needed answering or explanation of what was to be done, initially this created heated debates, however, over time, people naturally distilled into groups that self-managed until a matrix emerged, and dialogue was re-established.

Within the Meltham Quilting Bee case study, while there were no heated debates and we had set ourselves a broad goal of creating a quilt together, we formed our own structure through which we could operate in a group making environment. We would make decisions, either through individual actions, for example, the embroidered mouse or through group discussion which started to emerge in the initial weeks of meeting. Minimal fabrics were presented to each group; solid colours in grey and fuchsia or grey and turquoise but it turned out they expected patterns. Liberty lawns were far from my mind so those who wished, introduced remnants of cloth from home stashes into their pieced sections; florals found in their fabric collection which had been passed on from mothers, fabric purchased on a recent trip to the United States. This not only represents the de Maré matrix of decision making and direction but also a high level of autonomous engagement by individuals for the group.

Using conversation to think through ideas and problems, however, was not the only process that we adopted. Embedded within the course of patchworking and quilting were also opportunities to make decisions. Claire Pajaczkowska refers to this as *reflexive looping* and is an opportunity for the physical act of stitching enables the

development of thought and directions for the group (Pajaczkowska, 2016, p. 86). The ability for the group to make decisions on the development of each quilt was enabled and strengthened by the very making of the quilt itself.

Making Decisions within my own Practice

The Meltham Quilting Bee is a longitudinal case study of group making through quilting. As a result, aspects of the organisation of the group are adaptable to an evolving scenario (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Flick, 2018). As the instigator and participant observer of the group I developed a modular approach for learning how to make a quilt as a group. I introduced a 'low-level' of organisation in order to enhance the opportunity for self-sufficiency, enable group bonding and to aid the development of a collective voice (Banks et al., 2019; Leavy, 2009; Lindström & Ståhl, 2016; Ratto & Boler, 2014; Sullivan, 2010).

A particular 'bonding' event emerged from an unlikely occasion that I introduced; the embedding of a quilters knot within the middle layer of the quilt [Figure 43]. This was unexpectedly challenging on several levels. The quilters knot allows you to precisely place a knot at the end of the sewing thread by creating a series of wraps around the needle – seems simple yet this technique was still needing demonstration reminders during the making of the third quilt. The other tricky element of hand stitching a working quilt is the embedding of a quilters knot into the central layer of the quilt, so a knot is not visible on either the front or the back of the quilt. This action requires you to pull sufficiently on the thread to get it through the top layer of cloth but not so much that it pulls all the way through or creates a hole in the cloth. Both actions / processes of hand quilting created an experience that was new to all of us but also enough of a regular challenge [perhaps frustration] to create a connection between us.

Figure 43 Embedding a quilters knot in the batting / wadding at the start of hand quilting (Clements, 2011)

This same event also provided opportunities for building rapport and reciprocity (Leavy, 2009) as individual members would show those sat next to or opposite them on the frame how to approach these processes. Observing this moment repeatedly in the initial months of quilting provided further evidence that I had shifted my position from being the teacher to a fellow quilter; my engagement with the group transferred from being focused on the group to being with the group. The quilting process as a research process was creating a dual / 2-way relationship and a democratic space (Banks et al., 2019; Leavy, 2009, 2018; J. McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

The Decisions of Individuals

A constructivist view on this research recognises the individual agency of the quilters and the experiences they bring to communal making. The speed and style in which we would stitch was an ever-present sign of the individual but what about the choices we made that affected the emerging group identity?

At the end of the making of MQB2, we all stitched in our initials somewhere on the quilt but a discussion at the very end of the last session developed about including the MQB initials. Without enough

time to do this during the session, one of the quilters, Sue, offered to take the quilt home and do it one evening. It was the summer by now and we took a break before those who wanted to continue working together met back up. At this meeting Sue revealed that the quilt initials had now transformed into a logo, which she had designed and was beautifully executed in chain stitch. Sue was showing clear signs of feeling empowered (Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009) enough within the group to make an autonomous decision (Felcey et al., 2013; Kester, 2011).

Chain stitch, is a stitch that majority of adults experienced and learnt as a child completing samplers for school projects, 'the past and the present are never far below the surface as histories and traditions inform group identity yet do not constrain individual agency' (Sullivan, 2010, p. 166). The addition of this motif points to the individual voice helping to create a group identity, highlights the past and lived experiences of the group and the welcoming of autonomous actions (Lewis et al., 2013).

The signing of the quilt enabled the makers to be clear about their participation in the making of the quilt and recalls the signed quilt of the Hadley Abolitionist Quilt of 1842 [Figure 44]. This quilt was made over a period of a year by a group of women who were all members of the *Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends* and met monthly to quilt together. These same women had been disowned by the Quakers for engaging in anti-slavery activities, signing their names onto the quilt, enforced a clear political stance for emancipation (*Hadley Abolitionist Quilt - Ohio Memory Collection*, n.d.). Thirteen years later, they were accepted back into the Quakers, but this quilt,

amongst others remains as a testament to the decisions and choices women were making and embedding into quilts (R. Clark, 2001).

Figure 44 [Left] Hadley Abolitionist Quilt, 1842 (Hadley Abolitionist Quilt - Ohio Memory Collection, n.d.)

Figure 45 [Right] Hadley Abolitionist Quilt, 1842. Detail with signature. (IBID)

How the Group made Decisions

Each quilt made by the MQB has an individual and unique appearance that has emerged organically out of the making process but, they also reference a particular quilt that has been made by another person or an approach to quilting. MQB 1&2 are a clear nod to the quilts of Gee's Bend quilter Annie Mae Young in which you see the idea of large vertical blocks, divided into random sized stripes in her quilt [Strips, 1975 [Figure 23]. Due to the relatively short timescale for making these quilts, one module I created was that each group [daytime/evening] would work with just two-coloured fabrics each, this was more likely to keep instruction to a minimum and would be guided by the approach to quilting that we see in Young's quilt.

Following on with the knowledge that the Gee's Bend Quilters only used remnants of textiles within their quilts, members of the group demonstrated that they could reflect upon and respond to a wider cultural presence (Milling et al., 2014). Individuals adopted this approach and put this knowledge into action with the inclusion and upcycling of old shirts and skirts [MQB 1,2,3 & 5].

MQB3 [Figure 55] was the first quilt made within the homes of individual members, at the start of this process we only had one goal in mind, which was to make a new quilt. Everything else, such as the fabric choices, the designs, the organisation, the timescale was an unknown and would evolve as we went on. This act of *impersonal fellowship* (De Maré et al., 1991) was subconsciously adopted as the group started to form an understanding of its new identity and collective voice (Lewis et al., 2013).

We decided that we all needed to bring along any fabrics we were interested in using and assumed something would emerge. Some of us also bought along books and images with ideas, one of these books was *Modern Bee* [2013] by Lindsay Conner and provided a basis for a quilt we were interested in [Figure 46]. The design was selected for its clarity in instruction but also for its ability to enable us to manipulate and adjust according to our own developing group taste. Key to this was the option for all members to include fabrics of their own choosing while having a solid blue fabric throughout the face of the quilt to pull it all together. The process of discussion and decision making as a newly formed group was agreeable, purposeful, open and a further example of de Maré's matrix of *impersonal fellowship* (De Maré et al., 1991).

Finished size: 60" × 60"

Figure 46 Mosaic Tiles quilt design by Lindsay Conner [inspiration for MQB3], (Conner, 2013)

MQB4 [Figure 57] was an experiment in what happens if we don't respond to the work of others and while we had a few people engage with the making of this quilt as an occasional guest, essentially this quilt was made by the smallest number of members [three: Sue, Debbie and myself]. It also differed in that we spent nearly three quarters of the time on embroidery as embellishment prior to turning it into a quilt. The inspiration for this approach came from our experience of the incident in the making of MQB2 when the mouse had appeared, the direction arose out of discussions about the merits and memorable aspects of the previous quilts, as co-producers (Banks

et al., 2019; Gilchrist et al., 2015), everyone was providing insight and direction for this case study.

We chose to explore de Maré's concept of Koinonia and 'no goal setting as the goal' (De Maré et al., 1991) further for this quilt; aesthetically this piece is questionable as it lacks any coherence, clarity or consistency but it can also be recognised as an action that embraced the various choices and hand-writing of the makers who engaged in the making of this quilt (Shercliff, 2014a; Stalp, 2007).

The decision of the group to take this approach demonstrated a clear change in the status of the members. It was at this point that we fully saw the value that we each had to add to this research, these quilters of the MQB had become co-researchers of the case study (Banks et al., 2019) or as collective creators (Leavy, 2009; Norris, 2000) as we endeavoured to understand what autonomous making as a group could look like.

MQB5 [Figure 60] saw the return of previous MQB member Lois and the addition of a new person [by request] to the group, Liz. MQB5 took reference from a quilt by Rayna Gillman [Figure 47], this quilt design required a shift in thinking as we did not have any instructions on how to create it [as provided for MQB 1-3] and, we needed to work out the maths for sizes, spaces and construction methods, ourselves. We created our own process for designing the blocks and then, while we explored the layout as set by Gillman in the original quilt, we decided to format the blocks in an alternative format. This approach demonstrates the advanced skills of interchanging and customisation of a pre-existing design (Atkinson, 2006; Campbell, 2005; Hackney, 2013; Myzelev, 2009; Ratto & Boler, 2014). For this decision, and

perhaps for the first time, there was a short period when people had differing views on what layout we would settle on. This resolved itself quickly and peacefully but did provide a point of recognition within the group that there were differing opinions but, that these are being quashed for the overall thinking and identity of the group (Kester, 2011).

Figure 47 Quilt design by Rayna Gillman [inspiration for MQB5], (Gillman, 2017)*.*

MQB5 is the current quilt and is still in production as this is written. It was during the switch from piecing the top of the quilt to the actual quilting that I chose to stop working with the group in order that I

develop some distance for reflection on the case study. This opportunity would enable me to recognise the *popular knowledge* (Leavy, 2009) that had been generated by the group, particularly as I had now been involved with the group for 5 years at this point.

There were a few options open to the group at this point: to cease working together, to stop and then restart once the writing up of this study was complete or, as they chose to do; continue to meet as a group and quilt, but without me as part of the MQB [but, to re-join later].

One common factor in all the quilts [except MQB4 which used knotting to bind rather than a quilting stitch] is the simultaneous absence and presence of the individual in the handwriting of the individual quilters [particularly in MQB3]. On the face of the quilt, all the stitches have uniformity in length, straightness and spacing. It is hard to see that this was completed by more than one person. However, if you turn the quilt over there is a very different story; it becomes clear that we are all stitching differently due to the angle that each of us repetitively use when inserting the needle from front to back and vice versa [Figure 48]. The presence of autonomous individuals pervades throughout the quilt and provides evidence [despite contextual differences] of David Pye's Workmanship of Risk through which there is the mark of the maker and the absence of an automated production line (Pye, 2010).

Figure 48 Hand stitch angles in quilting

This type of observation of the seemingly unimportant fine detail recalls time spent observing and considering a painting or drawing you have made, the analysis of the methods you chose to use in its production, the decisions you make when squeezing paint onto your palette. Such micro actions and observations can also be seen by fellow painters at a gallery; standing up close to a painting at an angle which allows the light to glance of the painted surface, their hands giving away the idea that they are trying to work out how the artist may have applied the paint (T. J. Clark, 2006).

The designs of these quilts reflect a collective mode of making and recognition of a developing group identity [solid colour blocks with smaller, patterned elements] but also the significance of the individual

member [changing handwriting of the quilting stitch as seen on the back of the quilts] (Banks et al., 2019; Leavy, 2009; Lindström & Ståhl, 2016; Ratto & Boler, 2014; Sullivan, 2010).

Aesthetic value of the MQB Quilts

The appearance of the quilts made by the MQB chronologically have quite a range of aesthetic values that consider proportion, colour, balance and tell the tale of an emerging exploration of style. As quilters, the MQB would look to other quilts in order that they generate further insight into techniques and approaches but also to make aesthetic judgements. This reflects Glenn Adamson's point that the amateur lacks critical distance and is quite at ease with simply self-referencing, there is an 'interiority of amateur social structures' (Adamson, 2007, p. 139). A case in point was the visit by some members of the group to several quilting exhibitions, during and after which, quilts were critiqued for their technical undertaking and aesthetic appeal.

Over the next few pages, each quilt made [or currently in production] will be introduced with specific reference to its visual language. This will be supported with reference to moments of interest that occurred in the making of the quilt.

MQB1.

Turquoise and grey, bold vertical strips in a quilt made by just three people: 88 x 135cm [a very pleasing scale to the eye]. Although it was finished later [due to time constraints] by the long-term members of the MQB, this quilt was created and designed by the three members of the daytime group. It has an engaging and uncomplicated simplicity; with a range of widths of rectangular colour blocks and an open grid formation used for the quilting. Three small blocks of a striped fabric provide points to help guide the eye around the quilt, as you do this, the grey or turquoise shift to the forefront to highlight a subtle diamond formation. The quilt is framed with a striking black and white ticking around the edges, and it is finished off with the initials of the makers.

Figure 49 [left] MQB1 [front view] (Perren, n.d.).

Figure 50 [right] MQB1 [back view] (Perren, n.d.).

MQB2.

Fuchsia and grey, following a very similar structure to MQB1 but with a lot more packed in, reflecting the ten people engaged in its making. The fuchsia immediately pops out against the grey but the scale [101 x 214cm] when presented vertically just seems odd and not the 'right size', perhaps with our subconscious understanding of the scale of a bed? However, when presented horizontally it reads more like a coded chart, a map of DNA and feels to be proportionately accessible.

In this quilt, the strips have a greater range of colour proportions, for example, mostly grey or, mostly fuchsia. The group spent a relatively long time deciding on the composition of the strips to each other and it does have a strong sense of balance. Embedded into the columns are five additional patterned fabrics with the core quilting coming from a series of diagonal lines which create a diamond formation.

This is also the quilt that has an additional 'outbreak' of embroidered motifs [Mickey Mouse, sunflowers], and provides elements of decoration, humour and insight into the personalities that went into the making (Stalp, 2007). The border is a combination of fabrics found within the main body of the quilt, the back has fuchsia shards on an almost whole grey ground and, it has been finished with the initials of each of the makers and an MQB motif with a date has been chain stitched in.

Figure 51 MQB2 [front view], (Perren, n.d.)*.*

Figure 52 MQB2 [back view], (Perren, n.d.)*.*

Figure 53 MQB2 mouse detail

Figure 54 MQB2 detail

MQB3

The third quilt made by the MQB but the first to be made in the homes of the quilters. MQB3 was a version of the Mosaic Tiles quilt found in the book *Modern Bee; 13 quilts to make with friends* [2013] by Lindsay Conner [Figure 46]. The group making this quilt started out with six but due to changing family commitments, it was reduced to five quilters. With a solid grey blue ground, this quilt is made with square flashes of colourful, patterned fabrics, using over 25 different designs from the fabric stashes of the quilters.

This square quilt [152 x 152 cm] is pieced together as 4 separate blocks of these confetti like patterned squares, intersected with a wide cross of the ground fabric. Its border is pieced together with strips of fabric found in the main body of the quilt and the back is made up of two large blocks of black, white and grey fabric. The larger piece is a black & white vintage liberty furnishing fabric, which was donated by a lady in the village who had wanted to join the group when we first started to meet but was not physically well enough to do so, the group were touched by this donation and felt a sense of pride with its inclusion in the quilt.

The quilting itself utilises the challenging technique called *stitch in the ditch* around each of the colourful squares, technically it is quite accomplished with the idea of this stitch being that it is very subtle and should not be visible as it disappears between the joining of two fabrics. Within the larger areas of grey blue ground, a stepping formation was used through stitch to both reflect the stepping in the colourful blocking and to draw attention away from the shape of an off-centre cross through the body of the quilt.

Figure 55 [left] MQB3 [front view], (Perren, n.d.).

Figure 56 [right] MQB3 [back view], (Perren, n.d.).

MQB4

MQB4 was made by the smallest number of quilters; just three of us. Of the two who left the group; one quilter [Lois] was less keen on the embroidery element we had planned [she did return for the following quilt] and a further member [Maisie] was now off to University in Glasgow. This was the most experimental of all the quilts and was broadly based on the concept of using stitch as a tool to draw. Further examples of this include *Threads – a Mobile Sewing Circle* [2010] by Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl, through which the sharing of stories and concerns are shared (Lindström & Ståhl, 2011) and the collective mark-making workshop with students at the Arts University Bournemouth [2015] by Emma Shercliff. Through this collective drawing/stitching experience, questions can be asked about the emphasis on individuality (Shercliff, 2015).

Essentially, we chose to spend a year sitting around the frame, stitching whatever came to mind at the time but continued to adopt the idea of nobody having claim over any element. This was further encouraged through sitting in the place of someone else each week and often 'carrying on' with a motif started in the previous meeting – but this time you would change it into something else, depending on how you felt it should develop.

The embroidery was created on just one ground fabric, as opposed to something pieced together [*whole cloth quilt*] and was chosen by Debbie and Sue, it had an ombre that subtly changed from a blue through to a pink. I deliberately had no part in its selection, to further embed the notion that I was not a leader in this group. The motifs are far ranging from an elephant spraying water, to some text stating

'why bother' [following a tough day at work], to appliqued crocheted butterflies.

On the back of the quilt are 3 pieced panels, each panel was designed and made by each of us individually and then joined together. While we did not know what each other planned, we did make a conscious decision to include the use of the same three base fabrics to create some form of connection but otherwise, we were free to add in any other fabrics, use any design and any technique.

A cacophony of ideas and techniques, this is not an example of a harmonious quilt. Pulled together with a simple but traditional hand knotting technique, this non-practical quilt has a playful edge to it. This quilt bears the hallmarks of an opportunity for individuals to let go of the constant need to 'do it correctly'.

Figure 57 MQB4 [front view, hanging], (Perren, n.d.).

Figure 58 MQB4 back of the quilt

Figure 59 MQB4 detail of embroidery

MQB5

MQB5 is the first quilt to be made after the *Quilting Together* exhibition [see page 246], saw the return of Lois and the introduction of a new quilter to the group Liz. Based on a quilt we saw on *Pinterest* by Rayna Gillman [Figure 47], we took the concept of this quilt and created our own version. We later discovered this quilt was from a book of hers called *Improv Quilting* [2017], in which I am sure there are instructions, however, the design we developed, was worked out using our combined knowledge gained from the previous quilts we had made and our collective knowledge that emerges from reviewing quilts made by others.

With a pale, speckled grey ground, the collection of 30+ brightly patterned and solid-coloured fabrics make up sections of a diamond formation. The back of the quilt uses a dark grey ground and contains two types of detailed inserts; 3 long narrow strips and 4 small, rectangular blocks made up of all the scraps from the front of the quilt.

At the point of switching from the piecing stage to the quilting stage is when I withdrew from the group, now with four quilters, I am not aware of the quilt's development, or the decisions being made in terms of designs [purposefully]. I am however, upon reflection, able to recognise that the former members of MQB who relied on my instruction initially, are now tutoring and supporting our new member of the group Liz. Although she has experience of machine quilting, like all other new members to MQB, she has no prior experience or knowledge of hand quilting or of working communally.

A further event that is now embedded in this quilts story is the issue of Covid19, currently a project on hold, it is in storage waiting for a time when people can start working once again closely and safely together.

Figure 60 [left] MQB5, in progress [front view]. (Perren, n.d.).

Figure 61 [right] MQB5, in progress [back view], (Perren, n.d.).

Making Choices

Within each quilt there are several stages in which decisions need to be made: the fabric choices, the piecing [or patchwork pattern], the quilting [or stitching pattern] and the border. Reflecting the words of Gee's Bend quilter Annie Mae Young, it is much like putting a puzzle together; one which comes in a blank box, with no picture of what it should look like in the end (Soul Grown Deep Foundation, 2012).

Big decisions such as the idea for the quilt, the full layout of the blocks and the quilting pattern are made by the group, and we embed elements that allow individual freedom of choice such as the grouping of fabrics within a block which create individual connections to the quilt.

For MQB 3-5, we used a base fabric but then each of us supplied bits of fabrics from our own stashes or clothes that could be re-purposed. Our fabric choices would be placed on a table, and we would go through them together. Once we get over our initial excitement of what is in front of us, we would discuss what we liked about individual designs, colour, scale but more poignant moments arise when some of the fabrics come with personal stories and attachments. A fabric from mother's old stash, of childhood times spent living in Africa, a wrap skirt that was bought from a charity shop because they knew it would be useful one day. Within each quilt is a story of its making and holds a glimpse into the lives of the individual makers 'they leave clues about their lives in the quilts they make' (Stalp, 2007, p. 131).

For the making of MQB4, as stated previously, I made a distinct choice to not be involved in a couple of major decisions, including the

choosing of the ground cloth for the face of the quilt and the three base cloths used in the backing. The face fabric was the first core decision to be made, Sue and Debbie arranged a visit to a local fabric shop and selected the fabric we were to work on over the next year. As an approach to the research, a transformative perspective is welcoming of viewpoints and contributions on a number of levels which includes the empowerment of individuals who are not the 'trained designer' to make decisions that would impact the next eighteen months of this research (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). It was also a moment to re-establish my role which is not as a leader or tutor of the group but as one of several co-producers and contributors to the research.

'it's not a cross'

During the making of MQB3, there came a moment for the whole group when it became clear that we were thinking about our quilts and what they communicated.

Up until this point, focus had primarily been on quality of hand stitching [or process in general] and what individuals liked about fabric / colour choices from a personal perspective. And then, during one meeting there was a recognition that this quilt had the potential of looking like a religious cross, there was much discussion about how we might counter this, even change it as the MQB did not want even a vague association to being a group that created religious connections [Figure 55]. This discussion re-asserted an engagement with the 'lived-experiences' of the MQB members as recognised within a Constructivist worldview perspective (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018) and moved the group closer to an emerging aesthetic of a group

identity (Lewis et al., 2013; Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009). In the end we chose not to rebuild it but to use stitching [quilting] to reduce the emphasis that the piecing had created. We effectively used a stepping formation for a quilting pattern to shift the dominance of the cross shape as it draws the eye to the pieced work sections.

Figure 62 MQB3, detail of stepping sequence within the 'cross section' (Perren, n.d.)

Purpose

Prior to the commencement of this case study, I needed to make several decisions including the idea that these would be working quilts and that when complete they would be donated to a charity. As working quilts that could be used as covers on beds meant that several practical aspects would need to be considered such as the stitch length, ability to be machine washed and that the fabrics should feel good against the skin (Clements, 2011; May, 2014). These decisions were made to provide a more defined set of parameters as would be required for a functional product and to ensure that people did not feel overly precious with its ownership. Being too precious can often be creatively debilitating (Berkun, 2013; Perren, 2015).

As a group [or two groups at one point], we all considered where these quilts would go, and it was decided that they would be donated to a local women's refuge centre. This making of quilts to be passed on for charitable reasons although not a new concept, it is also recognised as part of the contemporary craftivism movement (Newmeyer, 2008). All the *working* quilts will be passed on upon the completion of this research. Photographic records, the exhibition *Quilting Together* [discussed later] and the publication *Temporary Contemporary* (Vol. 1) (Bailey et al., 2020) provide a record of these quilts to date.

Currently, there is only one quilt that could not be considered as a working quilt: MQB4. This is due to the nature of the hand stitched embellishments which make it impractical for general use. During the making of this quilt, however, it became clear that we would like to return to making quilts that were practical and by doing so, allowed us to focus on the techniques of patchwork piecing and quilting.

Experience of group making

The experience of making as a group was built upon several factors: the social, friendship, learning, making and connection. While political activism is not a driving force or motivation for the group, we share a number of connections with DIY feminism as discussed by Red Chidgey in the text "Developing Communities of Resistance? Maker Pedagogies, Do-It-Yourself Feminism, and DIY Citizenship" [2014], the context for which is the politically motivated zine.[10]

The idea that making together as opposed to as an individual holds more power for those making outside of usual parameters, is reflected in the adopted acronym changes of grassroots groups, such as the *Copenhagen Queer Fest*, from DIY [Do-It-Yourself] to DIT [Do-It-Together] (Chidgey, 2014, p. 103) or the use of the term Do-It-Yourselves as used by the *Yes Men* who create politically motivated, media hoaxes (Reilly, 2014, p. 128). Chidgey goes on to say that 'DIY feminism promotes informal, peer-to-peer pedagogies and critical making practices' (Chidgey, 2014, p. 105). Much like the makers of feminist zines, whether consciously or not, the group making experience of the MQB quilters included multiple experiences of learning from each other and critically assessing the work we were undertaking e.g., the recognition and subsequent editing of the *cross* like format.

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[10] A zine is usually produced using low-tech such as a photocopier, it is a non-commercial, amateur text which is produced on the fringes of academia and journalism and cover subjects from knitting to political analysis and fiction to how to manuals.

A further development that can be attributed to group making is the slow but consistent build in confidence of the quilters. An example of this was when Sue decided to sign up for a group workshop on the traditional Japanese technique of Sashiko which took place during a small group outing to Harrogate for the *Great Northern Quilt and Needlecraft Show* [2018]. This was a technique that Sue had been interested in for a long time but now had the confidence to try it. During our quilting sessions, we would discuss a range of textile-based crafts including hand knitting, crochet and boroboro. To add to the discussion people would bring examples of items they had made and books which expanded our understanding to create a rich but natural learning environment. This experience over time had given Sue the assurance needed to attend a class with a group of strangers to learn a new skill. This is a prime example of the *contagion effect* in which participation in one activity, encourages engagement with another (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016).

Amateur

Amateur, within the context of this research is about using time as a group to create quilts that are not being made for monetary gain. If quilt making was to be carried out by an individual, although not always the case, it can be considered as relatively expensive [approx. £120 for a single quilt + time and equipment] and therefore supports the idea that engaging with such a hobby is reliant on paid labour due to a need for funds and therefore are a *condition of its unfreedom* (Adamson, 2010; Knott, 2011). Jane Milling et al also remind us that there is a need for the amateur to exist in order that commercial sectors can thrive, 'Amateur creative cultural activity is vital to the

subsidised and commercial sectors through reciprocal sustainable relationships' (Milling et al., 2014, p. 1).

With the potential high costs of quilt-making in mind, the MQB has created a more democratic approach to the making of quilts in a bid to make this an accessible activity. We have engaged with a range of approaches such as upcycling from items we already have in our households, a focus on hand sewing [so no need to own a sewing machine] and using the houses of people with a big enough space to work in. According to Graeme Sullivan, 'art making practices in communities include artistic forms that draw on all manner of human expression and take place in a variety of settings as the aesthetic interest and educational appeal tends to be inclusive and democratic' (Sullivan, 2010, p. 168). Sullivan talks of democracy often being inherent in a group such as the MQB but at the request of the members of the group; it became a fundamental aspect of the group.

A challenge started to emerge through conversation [and later through an interview] from about a year into our making together: the use of the term *amateur* to describe ourselves. Several members of the group felt the term to be an insult, with reference to the inference that we were lacking in skill. Sue, who had notably been formally trained in the clothing industry, understandably found this to be a challenge, upon talking of the term amateur:

> It's been used in a derogatory manner. Phrases that came to mind like, "that was a very amateurish attempt" or "no, just an amateur". And, and I think that thing has lodged so much in my mind that it almost covers up, the other kind of amateur, which is people who are skilled in what they do but do it for

fun, do it for pleasure or, do it as a sport or whatever. So that to me just gets pushed to one side. Because all the way through my life it has been these derogatory terms of "that was very amateurish", so it fits very personally.

(S. Mortlock, personal communication, August 23, 2020)

Despite my reassurances that this was not the case, the conversation would return on several occasions over the next few years. Bryan-Wilson and Piekut bring our attention to the darker side of the term that was similar to the concerns of the quilters, 'we write in 2019 under a US president […], Donald Trump's amateurism in governance betrays a contempt for knowledge, skill, expertise and craft' (Bryan-Wilson & Piekut, 2020, p. 20). Such blatant disregard for skill or knowledge gained through training and experience is recognised as a trait of the amateur being played out on global platforms as well as historically within creative fields (Adamson, 2007; Knott, 2011; Lippard, 2010; Sheppard, 2013), this disrespect of the amateur or towards the amateur, was clearly playing out in the minds of some of the quilters.

Amongst the longer-term members of the MQB, Sue was the only person who felt this strongly. However, it should be recognised that with Sue's prior professional training in a similar field, and the time that Sue dedicates to quilting on a weekly basis [creating 2-4 quilts of her own per year outside of the group], as we will learn a little later, Sue has moved / or is moving into the field of *expert quilter*, and this does impact on this study, in particular, it demonstrates the changing status of the amateur.

Although not concerned with the term in the initial year, all the MQB quilters were equally mindful of the associations of the label amateur. While not claiming to be authorities on quilting, we had certainly developed skill and expertise, we sought out opportunities to learn and know more through visits to quilting exhibitions and exploring quilting or quilting concepts in our own time. Sue goes onto reflect this understanding of the group 'I also don't feel that the word amateur really applies to what we're doing. Because it's an activity, it's a learning experience, and I just feel as though we've got this, we've gained the skills, the knowledge and the application' (S. Mortlock, personal communication, August 23, 2020). Liz goes onto agree, it 'just doesn't seem an appropriate kind of label to what, what we're doing at all […], it kind of devalues what we are doing' (L. Simmonds, personal communication, August 23, 2020). Debbie provides an alternative perspective and goes onto refer to her main reference point for understanding of amateur, is that of the amateur sportsperson, e.g., Olympic athletes, who until relatively recently we all considered amateurs as they were not paid. This connection between being considered elite, yet also an amateur return us to the notion that this position, can simply be a reference to with or without payment.

So where do I sit within this debate? As a participant in the case study, it seems appropriate to consider my position. With years of high-level training in textile processes, and as the instigator of this research, I was perhaps showing my privilege in not having a concern with this label. I was focused on aspects such as freedom from a brief, things not going to plan, compromising with the aesthetic handwriting of others; to me, this was an exciting opportunity that could inform my own arts practice. Milling et al push the 'celebration' of the amateur in a very specific acknowledgement that in some fields, quilting

specifically, the amateur is considered as the most expert within its subject (Milling et al., 2014), demonstrating knowledge, understanding and skill that goes far beyond its 'professionally' produced counterparts in terms of mid to large scale production.

It was time however, to acknowledge the evolving nature of this longitudinal study and recognise the changing identity of the amateur through the communal craft making. Over several sessions, while quilting we would discuss the validity of terms that might more accurately indicate the status of individual makers. Professional and craftsperson were amongst those considered but it was the simple term of *quilter*, that has come to be accepted. The simplicity of the term reflects approaches to descriptors used by others where there is an assumption of professionalism embedded in the role i.e., lecturer, banker, sculptor, painter, maker.

It should also be recognised that some members of the group are vocal about retaining the term amateur and I observe that there is a difference in the practices of individuals who feel comfortable with the term, and those who wish to distance themselves as an individual from the amateur label. For those who have engaged in multiple quilting and other sewing related activities since the start of the MQB, this term has posed the most questioning. For those who have not completed any quilts outside of the group [but have engaged in other textile-based activities], amateur is felt to be an accurate descriptor to prefix the term quilter.

Changing status

In the text "There are No Amateurs in Far West Texas" [2020], art historian Josh T. Franco acknowledges that skill is not the only measure by which we should recognise the amateur. Time, seriality, persistence, re-imagining and repetition are also factors for which we should consider and understand someone's position or identity (Franco, 2020). And, while we are a way from Richard Sennett's reference to the 10,000 hours it takes to become an expert craftsperson (Sennett, 2009), it is clear that there is a sliding scale by which we might move between the status of amateur and its opposite position [expert, professional, specialist].

Educator David Kolb recognises *the experience* as an effective mode for learning in the book *Experiential Learning* [2014]. Although this theory has since been expanded to recognise nine elements that adapt and flow according to each specific scenario (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, n.d.), the original four point cycle (D. A. Kolb, 2014) [Figure 63] provides an insight into the process of short term development of both the individual member, and of the MQB group as a whole. I stress short term because it is cyclical, however the repeating nature of this process leads to long term developments [Figure 64].

Figure 63 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (D. A. Kolb, 2014)

Philosopher, Hubert Dreyfus and engineer, Stuart Dreyfus provide further articulation of the stages of knowing and awareness in the development of skills, that supports Kolb's understanding of *ways of learning*. Dreyfus & Dreyfus provide a clear understanding of skill levels in the text *A Five-Stage Model of the Mental Activities Involved in Directed Skill Acquisition* [1980] that we might refer to as a sliding scale of the amateur quilt maker. They describe the process as moving from the *abstract*, which is a point in which all elements in a process are disconnected and skill is random to the *concrete*, when all aspects are interconnected, and skills are consistent.

222

Drefus model			The status of the quilter, when quilting as part of the MQB.	
Stage	Description		Stage	Description
Novice	Has an incomplete understanding, approaches tasks mechanistically, the activity is carried out without context and needs supervision to complete them.	1	Novice [quilter]	All the elements that go into making a quilt are always considered separately, there is no thinking forward as to the effects of decisions made in the present.
Advanced Beginner	Has a working understanding, tends to see actions as a series of steps, can complete simpler tasks without supervision.	2	Amateur [quilter]	Can complete aspects of quilt making without supervision but there is still a lack of understanding about the connections of all the processes. Making skills lack consistency [in piecing and quilting]
Competent	Has a good working and background understanding, sees actions at least partly in context, able to complete work independently to a standard that is acceptable though it may lack refinement.	3	**Amateur [quilter]**	With previous experience of completing a full quilt, makers can understand the consequences of most decisions, at times, these observations are raised by another person. However, they still do not understand how to rectify a problem in order to avoid a situation later that is currently developing in the making of a quilt. An aspect [either designing, piecing or quilting] shows signs of consistency in quality.
Proficient	Has a deep understanding, sees actions holistically, can routinely achieve a high standard.	4	**Quilter**	The quilter is now able to respond to changing situations. They recognise the matters that will have an impact on their making and are able to block out the noise of elements that should bear no consequence on current decisions i.e., doubts of ability, what someone else is doing. Their making qualities are of a high level and consistent. Will look to other quilts for inspiration and to self-improvement.
Expert	Has an authoritative or deep holistic understanding, deals with routine matters intuitively, able to go beyond existing interpretations, achieves excellence with ease. Can become so absorbed in the process, at times they even supersede their usual high levels.	5	**[expert] Quilter**	They understand and know all 'the rules' but will often quilt and alter directions intuitively [without concern]. They can look at the work of others and analyse how it has been done. This experience of knowing, helps provide elements of originality in their own work and continuously completes all elements of the quilting with precision.
Master	Ceases to pay conscious attention to their performance and therefore all energy is put into the process itself.	6	[master] Quilter	The process of quilting is automatic and consistently executed to the highest of standards. This automatic making al quilter to focus their thoughts on producing work that is original and questioning of the parameters of quilting [through c
			The status of the quilter as an individual [external to the MQB]	

Table 6 The Drefus Model [1] of Skill Acquisition [1st 2 columns] (Drefus & Drefus, 1980) in relation to a status of the quilter both within and external to the MQB

Within
Table 6, we can see on the left, the Drefus's model, which was built with reference to the learning of, Air Force pilots, chess players and the learning of a foreign language. Although the goals of learning to quilt differ, the application of learning parallels this model well. Quilting has many stages in its whole process and at some point, it becomes beneficial to understand the whole, in order to inform the individual stages. It is a tacit skill in which the process of quilting flows from being rigid and over thought to becoming intuitive and natural actions (Shercliff, 2014a). The right-hand side of this table refers to an equivalent understanding of the MQB quilter.

If we are to look at the members of the MQB as individuals, I recognise several levels of quilters. Initially, we all started as level 1 or 2 [novice / amateur] and currently I recognise all members, when quilting as part of the group as levels 3 & 4. However, I also recognise that some members of the group who make full quilts outside of the MQB as level 5. While the group has evolved as one identity, the status of the individual quilter has developed at different stages.

In Table 7, this time modelled on the Dreyfus & Dreyfus understanding of *skill development*, we can perhaps consider the stages of the MQB as a group rather than the development of skill in the individual. For *recollection*, a switch occurs when techniques and skills can be recalled based on prior experience, *recognition* adjusts when the group is able to recognise and connect with ideas outside of the MQB. *Decisions* change when they become intuitive, which, as a position for communal making this is not impossible but is more difficult. I recognise a further [or exchangeable] stage within the MQB which could be described as *trust*. Trust in that each member will quieten their thoughts and trust

ideas that evolve through group discussion. For the final row of *awareness*, this relates to subconscious making; with all the previous levels happening without question, the mind is now able to focus entirely on the task at hand and as a result, creates with consistency and excellence in all matters of quilt making [design, piecing & quilting].

Mental Function	Skill Level				
	Novice [N]	**Competent [C]**	**Proficient [P]**	**Expert [E]**	**Master [M]**
Recollection	Non-situational	Situational	Situational	Situational	Situational
Recognition	Decomposed	Decomposed	Holistic	Holistic	Holistic
Decision	Analytical	Analytical	Analytical [*Trust*]	Intuitive [*Trust*]	Intuitive
Awareness	Monitoring	Monitoring	Monitoring	Monitoring	Absorbed
	MQB 1&2	**MQB 3&4**	**MQB 5**	-	-
Overarching forms:	Primitive			Sophisticated	

Table 7 The Drefus Model [2]: Stages of Mental Activity in Skill Acquisition, relating to the MQB quilts (Drefus & Drefus, 1980)

When reflecting on this model, the distinction between quilts and the phases of the MQB become apparent. Ranging in skill level and application, the MQB quilts start out in the Novice category and currently sits within the Proficient category with some elements dipping into Expert.

With reference to all three modes of understanding the actions and consequences of learning we can observe a crossover in application for the individual and the group [Figure 64].

Figure 64 Model of MQB learning and development for the individual and the group using Kolb [2014] and Dreyfus & Drefus Model [1980] models.

6

A Personal Practice

Play, freedom to make mistakes, making without concern for a client, lack of emphasis on time restrictions. These are just some of the approaches to making and creativity that I sought to experience and understand through my own practice with regards to the term amateur. But what if I also added into the mix the experiences of communal making: lack of control over decisions, the act of making something with other people, allowing the lived experiences of other 'non-traditional' makers to influence my practice?

For the entire duration of the Meltham Quilting Bee case study, I have been developing a body of work that has enabled me to unpick the nature of quilting, unpack the essence of communal making, explore the notion of amateur and consider the multiple visual languages that merge in a quilt made by a group of committed makers. I use my maker and artist practice to further understand the experience of communal craft making: '[the] use of artistic intelligence by applied arts professions to solve problems and understand experience makes complete sense' (S. McNiff, 2013, p. 4). Essentially this is a body of work that creates thinking time (Adamson, 2007; Ingold, 2013; Sullivan, 2010) and is responsive (Fish, 2019) to the MQB with an emic [insiders] perspective (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012).

A good proportion of this work, as stated previously, is responsive but it is also thinking through the medium: 'artists think in a medium and particular dispositions and habits of mind help individuals give form to meaning during the process of making' (Sullivan, 2010, p. 135). Although some work is planned i.e., *Quilt Studies*, most of the work evolves as the making is taking place based on my prior experiences and knowledge; I allow the form to emerge intuitively.

Within this chapter I will focus on four elements of the research folio: *Quilt Studies*, *Making Experience Tangible*, *MQB Portrait* and *Quilts of Delusion*. In support of this written analysis, there is a visual portfolio to view of the broader range of work that was developed over this period [see PhD Portfolio in the Appendix for details].

Responding to the experience of group making

As I found myself falling into the complex, addictive, old fashioned, gendered, life affirming, slow world of quilt making, I developed a parallel collection of painted studies of quilts. I wanted to create a meaningful connection with the quilts and the makers of Gee's Bend, but without the ability to see the quilts first-hand due to geographical limitations, I turned to painting to think through the complexity of the situation these women were making quilts in.

My initial studies, completed in gouache paint were not copies but they were mapping the shapes of the blocks used in the quilts. At times, there was reference to a range of materials used but overall, the 'flattening' nature of gouache paint enabled me to focus on thinking about the physicality of cutting, fitting and stitching together of fragments of cloth that they were able to make use of. As I completed these studies in my evenings after a tiring day at work, I was left to reflect on the abhorrent circumstances of these women, labouring in cotton fields as slaves and then themselves, carving out time to create quilts. The painting and study of the quilt by Annie Mae Young [Figure 65], provided the initial inspiration for MQB1 & 2.

Figure 65 [Left] Painted study of a GBQ by Annie Mae Young [1975], gouache on paper. Nicola Perren [2015].

Figure 66 [Right] Adapted painted study of a GBQ by Sally Bennett Jones [1966], gouache on paper. Nicola Perren [2015].

Figure 67 Adapted painted study of a GBQ by Lucy T Pettaway [1945], gouache on paper. Nicola Perren [2015].

Additionally, I carried out studies of historical and contemporary quilts of the *Quilters Guild Collection* held at the Quilt Museum in York [now closed]. This collection of studies can be seen in the supporting portfolio for further visual information. This collection of studies enabled me to engage with the cultural, social and historical significance of quilting today. This manner of research reflects, in part the approach of anthropologist Tim Ingold in the book *Making* [2013]: 'the only way one can really know things – that is, from the inside of ones being - is through a process of self-discovery' (Ingold, 2013, p.

1). Over the entirety of the case study, I have returned to this process of creating studies of quilts, but the subject has switched to being of the quilts completed by the MQB and of those made by myself. Like the earlier studies, they carved out time to consider the qualities in the quilts and build a firm foundation of understanding.

Through the slow process of drawn and painted observations of quilts, I endeavoured to uncover elements of the quilting process I may not pick up on through more traditional methods of observation and written notes. An excellent example of this repetitive, observational approach can be seen in *The Fabiola Project* by artist Francis Alÿs [2016-2018], for which he has gathered over 450 replicas of a lost painting by Jean-Jacques Henner in 1885 of Saint Fabiola. The majority of these replica paintings have been created by amateur or 'Sunday painters' (Menil Collection, 2016) and while they are all *copies* of the original, each is different in terms of its scale, application of media, colour. When you are confronted by over 400 copies of this painting on one wall at *The Menil Collection*, Houston, Texas, Alÿs hopes 'the viewer will start looking at the differences, because it's all about difference, the more you look at them, the more you pick up, the different interpretations and projections of each woman's profile' (Menil Collection, 2016).

Figure 68 The Fabiola Project, Francis Alÿs [2016-2018]. (Alÿs, n.d.)

The collection of works titled *Making Experience Tangible* includes drawing, painting, painted textiles, quilt tops [as collage] and quilts. I have developed my insider's viewpoint on the experience of making as part of the group, as opposed to just being about the quilts. According to Marybeth Stalp, the process of quilt making is not

generally the subject of research in this field: 'Scholars have examined quilts as cultural and artistic objects, but the process of making quilts and the gendered cultural production that occurs during this process have had very little academic attention' (Stalp, 2007, p. 27). This collection of works drew my attention and research to the central aspect of the study which is the experience of communal making and in turn this would come to inform a dialogue that was not centred on the quilted outcome of the study. This feminist perspective (Shulamit & Lynn, 1992) allowed me to engage with the points of views and actions of women who choose to quilt together.

Through selected drawings [Figure 69, Figure 70], I explored the overlapping nature of the practice of working around the frame; hunched forms sitting opposite each other, arms leaning across each other, the passing of the needle. The making of these drawings drew my attention to the amount of negotiation needed during a communal making experience; we not only negotiate our ideas for the quilt but also the space we take up around the frame as personal space gets eradicated. This mediation of space is reflective of the time and methods used historically for women who have needed to carve out time in the family home and to have the physical space in which to engage with acts of non-labour (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Jefferies et al., 2016; Lippard, 2010; Maidment & Macfarlane, 2011; Rentschler, 2019).

Figure 69 [left] Communal Ebb & Flow, 2016, Nicola Perren

Figure 70 [right] Conversation Pockets, 2016, Nicola Perren

Close attention was given to the social framework of the group through the making of a number of quilt tops and quilts [Figure 71, Figure 72]. Within these pieces are a lack of hierarchy of process / medium; drawings are created onto cloth that is then cut up and used

235

in the piecing of the quilt top. At times the drawing is the dominant visual element and at others the blocking together or collaging of several elements takes precedent.

Figure 71 [left] Quilt Top: Side to Side, 2016. Nicola Perren

Figure 72 [right] Quilt as Drawing #3, 2016. Nicola Perren

These pieces were then studied, and paintings emerged in a similar manner to those of the *Quilt Studies* series [Figure 73]. This process of building, unpicking, layering and reducing allows me to 'listen beyond words' (Fish, 2018, p. 338) and consider the shifting hierarchy of my position initially as tutor in the group towards being an equally considered quilter of the MQB [and not as the tutor]. As the group move towards an equal sharing of knowledge, learning and insight, it is possible to pick up on group autonomous learning experiences. Choosing to not have deadlines and multiple aesthetic ideas transitioning into one are occurring because the quilters trust a system that they themselves are [communally] the architects of.

Figure 73 Study of Side-to-Side Quilt, 2017. Nicola Perren

The act of painting itself within my practice can be broken down to two core approaches: intuitive and layered [Figure 66] or flattened and slow [Figures 70 & 73]. The *intuitive* approach specifically enabled me to consider and decipher the denseness of conversation through the gradual build-up of translucent mediums that are more often

238

created with raw pigments on my palette as I go. The process is spontaneous and engages with unpredictable elements, I need to be responsive to the raw materials and use all my senses to understand what it is communicating to me, how it wants to work and interact with the other elements being placed together on the paper. This process bares an uncanny resemblance to differing perspectives of individuals within a communal making practice and prompted me to navigate through the complexity of positions.

A *flattened* approach to painting however engages with quite a different approach. Choices are made prior to the act of painting in terms of colours, composition and content of the image and may be more closely aligned with a design process. I would spend a significant amount of time pre-mixing paints to specific shades, and particular attention would be given to ensuring a consistency in the fluidity of the paint, in order that I may later paint in a blocked and flat manner. When it came to the painting, with most things planned and prepped, I could work in a more hypnotic state as I fully engaged with creating flat planes of colour by hand. This simplified approach to image making enabled me to reflect on my engagement with the MQB through the texts and papers that I would also be reading in the development of this research. I was able to engage with consistency of the paints and maintain a longitudinal study and, I created breathing space through colour blocking to allow voices to be heard and acknowledged.

Portrait as statement

The Language of Many Hands [Figure 74] was a quilt I produced to explore the nature of the Meltham Quilting Bee in general. What ended up being addressed in more detail was the notion of the many voices and hands that come together to make a quilt. As an artist, maker and designer, I am mindful of the number of different ideas that I bring into a single piece of work; too many and it becomes a shouting contest. Within the MQB quilts though, despite soft attempts [by everyone in the group] to maintain a visual or narrative thread there are a lot of visual references and ideas compressed together. Several years ago, I was challenged to 'create something ugly' and while it was not the ambition of this quilt, the concept of letting go of my own hard-wired preconceptions formed the initial framework for this piece of work. It has a lot of elements; beading, hand painting, English paper-piecing, applique, embellishment, piece work, foiling, machine / hand stitch and knotwork support a range of approaches to colour. In short, this became a portrait of the experience of communal making. Furniture maker and author of *Why We Make Things & Why It Matters* [2017], Peter Korn, explains how the making of an object can embody experience and act as a form of coded memory devise that only the maker is able translate '… the object becomes a memory devise – a tablet on which the maker inscribes a complex of ideas so that he can have recourse to them for further thinking' (Korn, 2017, p. 60).

Figure 74 The Language of Many Hands, Quilt, 2018.

Adjustments in practice [what has noticeably changed]

Prior to the start of this PhD, my practice was primarily using painting and drawing as a medium to explore the provenance of materials used to make art; principally it was focused on the process of image making. An initial line of enquiry within this research was required to see how engaging with the concept of the amateur could have an influence on my practice.

Quilts of Delusion [Figure 75, Figure 76] is an ongoing series of paintings that started to emerge during the making of MQB4. This collection of works visualised my piecing together of my overall experience and, as a note to the self, to carry forward the learning I had gained from being one of several quilters, where the voices of all decided on creative directions. They of course have the now recurrent 'clashing' ideas embedded in them, but they also consider further the idea of mapped spaces; the difficulty of creating and chiselling out space to make our quilts together. From one painting, emerges the idea for the next 'each completed work becomes a springboard for the genesis of its successor' (Korn, 2017, p. 60) and, in a time precious environment; I can play with ideas that would require years to make [as a quilt] in reality.

They act as a prompt to a future me; keep pushing beyond what you know and think you can achieve and make it happen. These are blueprints for quilts I will make when I have finished this thesis. I already know that I will need to design and print fabrics specifically for each quilt and extend my knowledge of piecing in order to

construct such a fantasy. Each will require me to reflect on the time so many of us put aside to quilt together, to embrace the consequences of unusual process or design combinations.

Figure 75 Quilts of Delusion II, Gouache, Nicola Perren.

Figure 76 Quilts of Delusion VI, Gouache, Nicola Perren.

Upon review of the work, I now recognise that the presence of textiles, either as drawn subject or as process, is quite overt and there is a far clearer connection with craft as a process of making. The work remains to be about image making but rather than its driving force

244

being about the process [much like the work of the MQB], it is arguably leaning towards the content and narrative of the image.

Quilting Together Exhibition

The *Quilting Together* exhibition took place at the Market Gallery (*Temporary Contemporary*) in Huddersfield from 24 June – 13 July 2019. *Temporary Contemporary: Creating Vibrant Spaces to Support the Conditions for Creative and Cultural Activity* (Bailey et al., 2020) was later published to support a year of exhibitions [including *Quilting Together*] and events that took place in and around the gallery. *Temporary Contemporary* is a collaborative initiative between the School of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield and Kirklees Council. Included within this collaboration is a white cube gallery in which *Quilting Together* was exhibited, and this sits within Queensgate Market, which, is a rather spectacular Grade II listed building with a hyperbolic paraboloid roof.

Concept of exhibition

Mindful of the remit of *Temporary Contemporary* and the site of the venue, I was keen to not only represent the MQB members as 'cultural producers' (Stalp, 2007, p. 129) through the exhibiting of their quilts, but also to engage with members of the public and those who frequent the market. With the making of a new quilt over the duration of the exhibition and in the gallery environment they could make an active and live contribution with members of the public. In support of the quilts made by the MQB on display were selected works that I have created as part of this research. This solo exhibition opened up dialogue with visitors, prompted by information on the wall about amateurism, communal making and autonomy.

Figure 77 [left] Quilting Together exhibition, Temporary Contemporary, 2019. [photo taken by Andy Bedford]

Figure 78 [right] Quilting Together exhibition, Temporary Contemporary, 2019. [photo taken by Andy Bedford]

One final quilt

For the Market Quilt, *150 Voices* [Figure 81], I created a simple blocked quilt using just three fabrics as a basis upon which, visitors to the exhibition could sit at and stitch into. Reflecting the process used in MQB4, it had a freeform approach to quilting and while I showed everyone the traditional quilting stitch line, virtually everyone who engaged in its making chose to embroider a motif that reflected or meant something to them. By the end of this process there were over 80 motifs and quilted patches on the quilt.

Within the design of the quilt, I had specifically used fabrics that had lines printed onto them. Although a little wider apart, the lines are reminiscent of an A4 notepad and I had hoped, would provide guidance for straight stitch lines. However, several contributors to the making of the quilt commented that having the lines already printed felt less intimidating as it did not seem like a blank canvas. As a result, members of the public felt at ease *doodling* with stitch onto the cloth.

The quilt at this stage was cut as one very long narrow length [50 x 800cm] which enabled large groups of people to work on it at one time, experiencing the physical closeness that is communal quilting, this can be seen in Figure 79.

Strangers sat side by side and bumped knees, old friends chatted about missed loved ones, visitors to the exhibition were able to further identify with the making of the quilts that hung around them on the walls. Colleagues discussed challenging issues from work, families and children sat around the frame and made together, new concepts of maker mending spaces for the market were debated, grandfathers and

grandsons waiting for the bus out of the rain participated. Over 150 people were involved in the making of this individual quilt; it holds the stories of its makers and carries the handwriting of everyone who engaged with it.

Once the exhibition ended, despite all the motifs and quilting, the quilt was not technically quilted enough to hold together sufficiently; guidelines suggest that there should be no more than an open hand width of space between any element of stitching. So, it was taken on a tour for events such as the *Making Futures* conference [2019] in Plymouth where all the delegates for a particular themed event stitched into the quilt, and a local sports team, Halifax Bruising Banditas – a Roller Derby team [11] used it to quilt into while discussing a future vision of their team. During this time, lines were chalked onto the quilt and individuals completed running stitches along the set guidelines; passing and taking the needle as they went. Once the quilting was complete, I then finished the quilt by cutting it into 4 shorter lengths and joined them together to make one quilt that is 180cm squared.

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[11] Roller Derby is a full contact team sport on roller skates, usually played by women and is well known for the phrase 'for the skater, by the skater'. Having been re-modelled in the early 2000's, it is recognised as a feminist, inclusive sport that globally, has over 100,000 skaters; all of whom are unpaid, amateurs (WFTDA, n.d.)

Figure 79 [left] Market Quilt in progress, Temporary Contemporary, 2019. [Photo taken by Laura Mateescu]

Figure 80 [right] Market Quilt in progress, Temporary Contemporary, 2019. [Photo taken by Laura Mateescu]

Figure 81 Market quilt, 150 voices

Responding

Observations by visitors highlighted two different perspectives on viewing / engaging with the work. One set of people were more interested in stepping back and looking at the quilts; these people tended to prefer MQB1 and would comment on the size 'which seems

just right' (anon, personal communication, July 2019). The other visitors all focused their attention on MQB3 and were most concerned with looking up closely [virtually nose to quilt]. Further discussion made it clear that this group were all quilters and were keen to understand the process involved in the making. The aforementioned group were, on the whole, non-quilters and spoke more of their interest in the design of the quilt and its practicality. This reflects the idea that for quilters [and other craft related activities], as an individual or as part of a group, the process of making supersedes the importance of the outcome or product (Adamson, 2007; Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2011, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Ratto & Boler, 2014; Stalp, 2007).

Most visitors to the exhibition were interested in discussing the ideas of the work in person and a small number also completed a short questionnaire. In discussion, most people felt that the term amateur automatically connects with terms such as unskilled, non-professional and inexperienced, reflecting the concerns of this association with some members of the MQB. However, there was also a recognition of the effort that often goes into such activities: '[amateur refers to] someone who passionately engages in producing work outside of the constraints of accepted "professional practice". Usually unpaid and doing something as a hobby. Not recognised in an academic or business context' (Ibid).

When considering the communal making aspect of the exhibition, the overarching thoughts were on the connection you can have with other people. Of those who had engaged in this approach to making, most had only experienced it as a short one hour or half-day day moment; the idea that people had worked together over months and years on

one quilt was something that people had not experienced themselves. One visitor recognised the connection through storytelling and the lived lives of the makers as being a key, appealing factor: 'I find the experiences and stories of the members as the most interesting part of community making' (Ibid). A further visitor who had experienced communal making themselves on several occasions as a child, and later as an adult, drew attention to the self-improvement that occurs when making alongside others: 'I love the openness and the opportunity to work together without barriers, the inexperienced don't have barriers and make you break down limitations that you may have perceived' (Ibid).

This understanding of the benefits of communal making reflected comments from a previous discussion with MQB members. Several of the quilters had recalled how, after the making of MQB 3, they had felt far more confident in approaching creative activities outside of the group. Having always been concerned about doing things wrong, to the extent that they never took chances, they now felt perfectly at ease tackling a more advanced project. They no longer recognised things as being right or wrong creatively, pushing themselves to take risks and perhaps more importantly, enjoying the process as the fear of failure had dissipated.

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7

Conclusion

As research, a combination of practice-led and practice-based methods have been used alongside participant observation. This triangulation of insights has enabled the longitudinal development and understanding of autonomous actions within communal activities, with specific reference to quilt making as a form of textile craft.

The nature of this case study has provided alternative understandings of communal and/or amateur making practices to that of studies in similar fields. Of note is the work of Stephen Knott and Fiona Hackney, who have provided a thorough grounding in terms of understanding why people may engage in such work, but this research finds other understandings due to its longitudinal nature. Essentially, what I understood at three months and at the one-year point of the research, mirrored Knott and Hackney, but thereafter, there were differences – particularly in the creation of a new voice and identity through the consensual quietude of the individual and, in turn, a collective sense of empowerment and creative autonomy. Despite the decision to not focus on textile making as a fundamental provider of wellbeing, it would be remis of me to not also point to the acts of care, mindfulness and connection that emerged as a result of a communal approach to making quilts.

The key findings in this research are:

1. The amateur, in a communal making environment is not a static position. The longitudinal nature of this research provides an understanding that the amateur is never fixed, it is always on a journey towards expertise.

2. Co-creation and co-production, when explored through communal quilting has unique properties. The process of

quilting around a frame together lends itself towards the development of a truly collaborative voice and vision that is sustainable not only over time but in part, because of time.

3. There is little current research into the home as a site for amateur communal making to the extent that it was noted as an area for future research in the AHRC report *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture* (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). This research contributes to this field and its longitudinal nature certainly creates a new conversation.

4. Individual autonomy can be observed and celebrated within a communal making environment while also striving to develop a collegiate and collaborative singular voice.

Shifts

The landscape for communal craft making, specifically when its starting position encompasses the amateur and a need for basic skill building, is one that continuously shifts. This shift is multidirectional and flexible, allowing changes and dialogue to spiral, move back and forth and take sidesteps. The spiralling that occurs has a very specific role, one that creates a non-hierarchical framework through which a multitude of voices can be heard, haptic knowing can evolve and the making itself becomes informative.

These shifts have been observed by others. For example, Culturescape (Kouhia, 2016), Temporal Zone (Knott, 2011) and Fabriculture (Bratich & Brush, 2011) are terms that describe these shifts in making but they have not been considered in direct relation to the communal making of craft or as a means to flatten any sense of a hierarchical system.

A network of elements contributes to this understanding including site, method, skill and status. In Table 8 you can see how these shifts can evolve and merge into varying aspects of, in this case, the Meltham Quilting Bee [MQB]. For example, if we consider *skill*, which entails elements of the workmanship of risk (Pye, 2010) and bricolage (Lévi Strauss, 1962), we move through an initial phase of [instructive] learning onto a stage that enables *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Initially, flow can be recognised in individuals, but over time flow can be recognised as a group experience. This then progresses into a process of spiralling (Gilchrist et al., 2015) during which, all makers contribute to both the learning and the designing of the work that is being made as a *method* of communal making which, avoids hierarchies in practice.

Table 8 Shifting grounds of a communal making practice [MQB]

Re-imagining the home as a site for making work communally disrupts the normative experience and understanding of the home. As we

know, the home is conditioned to be recognised as a site of unpaid labour and oppression for women in particular. Any making that occurs within this space is pejoratively referred to as women's work but the making of work [which in this case is recognised as co-researching] and the re-appropriation of the home at will, for a space of craft making [a feminist move], shifts the making of quilts in the home from the passive to the empowered. Contemporary feminist thinking recognises that historically women rejected domesticity and making craft in the home, in a move towards greater equality, and we can see more recent pushes [1990's onwards] towards reclaiming not just the home but crafts as well (Cameron, 2018; Grady, 2018). A particular example of this can be seen in the Craftivist movement, for which environmental, sustainable and freedom from exploitation are a driving force for making quiet political interventions (Buck, 2016; Corbett, 2013; Greer, 2014). This in turn re-engages with an agenda for making, up-cycling, mending, re-cycling and improvements for mental health and re-engages us with the need to return to craft based skills and using the home [or public spaces] as sites for production (Newmeyer, 2008).

The quilting group first came together to learn about the skills of hand quilting and to experience quilting communally. This initial phase dominated the sessions during the simultaneous making of MQB 1&2, but the skills and ambition of the group grew over time. For subsequent quilts the need to learn new skills moved beyond the most obvious towards more embedded and transformative experiences. The group researched and developed designs for quilts, questioned the merits of processes, critiqued the use of materials, applied greater levels of democracy, and indirectly questioned the narrative of the home [for women] while building a shared identity: 'the conservative

image and practice of crafting is being turned on its head and infused with subversive messages that communicate dissent and protest' (Newmeyer, 2008, p. 440).

Methods for quilting can require regimented ways of working, this approach of rules i.e., stitch sizes, stitching methods and precise piecing can enable people to work together but, this may not empower or value the contribution of the individual. A non-binary understanding of quilt making can afford that value be attributed to the individual and the many voices that go into a quilts production. Specifically, the singular voice as represented on the on the top side of the quilt, highlights a multitude of attitudes and approaches on the reverse. Celebrating such differences creates a situation where we can understand how people maintain autonomy and freedom yet clearly relish the opportunity to make work communally.

The status of individuals and the MQB group shifted consistently. As was discussed previously, there was a level of discontent with the term amateur as individuals shifted into a position where the term quilt maker would be recognised as more appropriate. For the MQB, we transformed from a group of women, intrigued to learn about quilting to a communal unit of quilters who chose to work towards goals of its own (Knott, 2011). As a result of a fluid or spiralling method of discussion, decision making and ambition, all members of the group became recognised as co-designers and developers of not only the quilts but of this research itself. In its early formation, the MQB would more appropriately be described as a community of people with a common interest in quilting, being led by myself as the instigator of the group. This status, however, shifted to a communal group of quilters with a flattened, rhizomatic understanding of hierarchy.

In the movement of site from the Church Hall to the homes of the quilters, we can see a distinct shift in the identity of the MQB as a communal making practice. When we look to the research that currently exists about group and/or amateur making environments, which despite being quite sparse, it is clear to see that a particular angle of understanding is taken. Most studies look to or focus on the learning that takes place or the sense of well-being that occurs with a focus on the individual [even when in a group]. Hackney et al observed a discontent that is aired through debates around skill [aspirational and actual], particularly when older and younger people work together in groups (Hackney et al., 2016). For Knott, he concluded that there is a reliance on the kit or pattern for the amateur, which in turn leads to a lack of authenticity (Knott, 2011), while other bodies of research draw our attention to the mindful aspects of making either as an individual (Kouhia, 2016) or for the group (Maidment & Macfarlene, 2009). All these understandings come from a result of short-term studies, and while I would agree that these mirrored the key observations of the MQB in the first stage, and arguably up to the first year of meeting, after this time, other observations became more dominant.

Due to the longitudinal nature of the case study, it was possible to see an identity of the group emerge that differed to the narratives of other research. Over this period, while there were clearly individuals within the group, these voices became quieter and a new, confident communal voice emerged that moves beyond an understanding of a group that is centred around learning. Authenticity, adaptive [that occurred both overtly and as a natural progression] and a conviction in the making. As a result, for the individual there were moments of

transformation and as a group, we were changing the narrative of the home, from a site of women's alienated labour to that of a temporary, communal maker studio.

As quilters, we would observe the work of others. Although we were not so direct as to copy or use a kit, we did, for one quilt use a pattern. As a step into quilting as a communal group [as opposed to being led], this afforded us the freedom to spend nearly two years discussing, debating and forming an identity as a group of makers; we found out what we each liked and disliked, we developed our own goals and a shared set of standards in quality. The next quilt took a sharp turn left as we embarked on 'making something that resembled a quilt' with no rules or prior knowledge of work that existed in a similar realm. As a result, the following quilt [and arguably the next quilt/s] emerged with a voice that speaks of the group rather than individuals. We employed our skills of craftiness and the capitalist bricoleur [working, by choice with items that we have to hand or freely available], we pulled on our group knowledge and experience to develop a design based on a concept we had seen elsewhere and we re-appropriated to make our own version (Certeau, 1988). In return, this provided an experience of authenticity where originality in experience is the primary concern over an innovative output.

When communal making is established, dialogue amongst quilters and questioning of our making creates opportunities to develop new identities, both individually and as a group (Kester, 2011). We adapt to the maker space and evolve through our practice, fresh understandings can emerge as we establish common ground (Hackney et al., 2016) and we push against or exploit our conditions of unfreedom (Adamson, 2010; Knott, 2011). Micro practices and

adaptions within the group emerge (Newmeyer, 2008), such as the physical adjustments we make when working in close confines or the adaptation of individual ideas that are patchworked together to create one whole. Yet it is not that we adapt to *make do*, adaptation has become a signature and identity of the group.

A sense of ownership of our approach to quilting has evolved over the years in the MQB. From an initial position of vague interest and perhaps distance when learning, the outcomes grew to become the focus points and the group has developed an empowered conviction in what we do. This could be both seen and heard in the actions that took place during the *Quilting Together* exhibition, with members of the group critiquing the work and demonstrating skills with members of the public as well as invigilating when I was not available. While we do still giggle amongst ourselves when we consider choices or actions we have made, we have all come to recognise niggles in quality or approaches to design as being part of a bigger whole. In effect, the experience takes precedence over the outcome. Initially, all the participants were concerned about doing things right and not making mistakes, however, over time, this was dropped as a concern and is welcomed in the quilter's other practices outside of the MQB.

As an academic who teaches all levels of degree studies, this can be recognised as one of the biggest hurdles most design-based students have to overcome, so that they may move from creating work that is arguably stunted to work that can be innovative, questioning and authentic. This recognition of acceptance to fail, occasionally emerges in the second year of study but from experience, a true embracing of this approach mostly happens in the final year, following a year's industry placement. I am recognising this same attitude and conviction

within the MQB group and despite only meeting twice a month, it was after two to three years, that this understanding started to emerge around the quilting frame.

Communal Voice

Creating a space in which a group can develop a quilt making practice without formal structures or hierarchies was a key factor in developing moments of autonomy for individuals and for the group. Creating a shared space, both physically and mentally, created an environment that Paul Gilchrist et al would recognise as a Collaborative Stories Spiral [CSS] which allows for sharing and the development of new narratives in which there are no leaders (Gilchrist et al., 2015).

One of the focal points in this research was to observe and make work as an amateur within a communal making environment, but a core observation, and perhaps highlight of this work is the development of a new, communal voice that speaks for the group as opposed to the individuals, so how can there be autonomy? In this instance it can be seen in actions that we are not expected to do [through conditioning] and doing this by choice. For example, the embracing of a flattened approach to the organisation and decision making of the group, while we are tied to economic forces and incomes that come out of capitalist forms of labour, we reject their traditional structures of management. This, I recognise as moments of group autonomy as participants set their own group agenda and alter the parameters of this research.

But these autonomous instances spread beyond the group. While we have developed one voice as a collective, we each take this experience

into our own practices external to the group. The freedom of not worrying about doing something wrong has already been raised but this extends to trying something new that makers found inaccessible previously as it was considered too difficult. But we also see prime examples of participants rejecting the rules of patterns or kits and either adapting what they see or creating something that does not come with instructions. Micro-actions take place in the unravelling of half completed knit projects that have weighed heavy on the mind of the maker for years as it sat in the basket at the side of the sofa, this unravelling and rewinding back into balls of yarn created a sense of relief as they took control of a situation. These are autonomous actions happening as a result of creating personal structures of what can be achieved with one's own time.

As a group, we developed an ongoing critique of the quilts we were making, our practices outside the group and of the work of others as they became embedded in our daily or weekly routines. This can be recognised as emergent modes of political activity (Ratto & Boler, 2014) and this mode of discussion would lead into being critical of our own conditions and those of others outside of making (Hackney, 2013).

The choice to create a more democratic approach to quilting through using our homes, recycling of materials and donating the quilts to women's shelters demonstrates a diverse economy model (Gibson-Graham, 2008) through which monetary value is no longer the sole marker for economic value, social significance or professionalism.

Through this research, we can see the changing identity of the amateur through the communal making of craft. For some, it

challenged their identity as a maker and no longer represented the knowledge and skill they had worked hard to develop. For others, they preferred to hold on to the 'title' of amateur, almost as a badge of honour as it represented moments doing *stuff* without the rigour of rules and structures. The temporal nature and shifting understanding of the amateur pushes against binary understandings of the term; dissolving the walls that confine us and the making of networks, to the development of a creative practice that works for the individual, marks the amateur as an inclusive, enquiring and connected proposition.

Upon reflection, my own troubled relationship with how I might describe my practice and observe its merits has shaped and unconsciously pushed a narrative of flattened hierarchies and the search for autonomy. I recognise myself as an *artist maker* in its simplest terms, I am inextricably linked to academia and therefore research. This very particular position while unsettling at times, creates a distinct narrative thread in this research which is to celebrate and drive towards people with differing levels of skill, and processes that are deemed of lower value, to have an equal standing, be heard and to be acknowledged.

Evaluation of methods used

A downfall of this research is directly tied to its strength, that is the longitudinal study. The breadth or number of case studies is minimal and this in turn can lead to a narrow frame of reference. Where other researchers have observed a greater number of makers, either as amateurs or in a group context, their input has been utilised in the building of a framework for understanding in this work.

What has been observed as a result of this research, does differ to that of most other research in which the encounters or data has been drawn from short term studies. This opens an avenue of investigation for further research in which the knowledge that has emerged in this body of work i.e., not just learning or well-being, can be used to observe and engage with other groups who have engaged with social-making, amateur as an identity and autonomous experiences over a longer period, specifically from two years onwards.

Further understanding of long-term communal making would benefit from a continued use of thinking through practice as the investigator. Within this research, I was embedded in the case study as well as being a participant observer; using methods of analysis through the process of painting, drawing and making, an additional strand to this field of study may benefit or provide alternative insights if I were to observe as an outsider.

The use of Gee's Bend documentary videos and historical archives; to understand a method of communal working [making around a frame], can be understood as Arts Based Research [ABR] through which answers and directions may emerge. One such revelation was to work in a way not normally associated with current UK quilting groups [around a frame], the other was to adopt a simple piecing approach in the initial quilts until the group started to develop a visual handwriting and aesthetic of its own. ABR, with its recognition that human experience is everchanging (S. McNiff, 2018) provides a clear way of recognising the adaptive nature of communal amateur making (Leavy, 2018). The process of quilting around a frame together sat outside mainstream rules or practices of group quilting in the UK, this

practice creates a space that required physical closeness, adaptability and close observation of each other's process. These characteristics push towards a communal method of working and a negotiation of the self to lean towards true co-production of not 'just some quilts' but of the research itself.

Contribution to knowledge

This research has evolved out of a dual approach; practice-led and practice-based, through which a new approach to making work has emerged within my own artist and makers practice.

The practice-led strand of this research has provided a fresh perspective of the amateur as a result of a longitudinal study. The amateur is multi-faceted and equates differently to individuals, often connected and considered as a reflection of a skill level, once we move beyond a focus on the learning that an amateur undertakes, we can understand the term to be provocative, liberating and progressive. For those who consider the concept to remain attached to a derogatory comment on one's ability, there is a sliding scale of terms that can be adopted; quilter, maker, designer-maker, after all, this is an empowering endeavour in which the maker is able to act with autonomy and choose a title that they deem more appropriate.

A practice-based element has demonstrated or uncovered an approach to quilting that is unique in the UK amongst contemporary quilting groups. With a distinct lack of information available publicly on 'how to quilt as a group', I developed a method of quilting that was very similar to the quilters of Gee's Bend. From the frame to the

passing of the needle we engaged in the communal making of quilts, which, as it turns out is not generally practiced in the UK. A more traditional method of a group making a quilt in the UK is for individuals to have responsibility for one element i.e., design, blocks, piecing, making the sandwich, quilting or the binding. Further to this, as these types of quilts are usually made for charity, they are almost always made with a sewing machine as opposed to by hand.

The research method I used to start the MQB, unknowingly [to start with], re-introduced a method of quilting that is believed to have not been used in the UK for at least 50 years, if not longer. In part, this will be due to the shrinking of craft, due to changes in society, particularly during the second wave of feminism when such acts were marginalised and, due to the rise of accessible items being available commercially, i.e., clothing and interior products. However, with the re-framing of craft as a mode of making through [women's] free choice, a developing global understanding of the impact of capitalism and a return to social making emerged in a different format; that of individuals making their own items in the company of others, usually in public spaces or through online communities. For the MQB, making quilts is a truly communal method and within the home provides a new narrative of understanding and innovation in social making.

Throughout the MQB case study I have pleasingly observed moments of individual autonomy. Upon reflection, the times when individuals have stopped and questioned a design direction or the language of the amateur, presents the communal quilting experience as a 'stitched manifestation of democracy'. This democracy can also be spotted as it extends its way into my painting practice where numerous visual

ideas and languages shift alongside each other: all given a chance to speak up and contribute to the wider conversation.

The specificity of patchwork as part of the wider quilting process can and should be recognised as a social practice that can enhance communal interaction. Negotiation, compromise, rethinking, adjustments and decision making are not confined to choices of cloth, the space they take up or methods of connecting; these are mirrored in the manner through which effective communal creativity evolves as social practice. Essentially patchwork is a methodology of thinking through doing. Within the group, democratic communication takes shape and form through interaction and as a critical tool for questioning how cultural value is made, experienced, used and understood in, and through an amateur practice.

The AHRC Cultural Value project has provided a clear framework of 'how culture happens' in the UK. Of note is a recognition of the role the amateur plays, not only in terms of its financial contribution but also as a necessary part of the cycle of *big* culture. As mentioned earlier, the report highlights a lack of research, insight and engagement into the role the home plays in a nations culture. This research can add further insight and gravitas to the ongoing debate, in particular, an understanding of how the home or domestic setting affords space, growth and empowerment to the amateur, specifically as a communal venture.

The third practice element within this thesis is my own work. It has been used as a method for understanding and engaging with the experience of communal making, it has endeavoured to represent the pulling together of individual voices that have, over time, harmonised

into one and it has been visually, aesthetically affected by this very special encounter. While it had been decades since I shed the cloak of concern over making mistakes or doing something wrong, I had developed a very singular voice in each body of work. While these voices may evolve and jump to new concepts, the work would always be visually focused. This experience and narration has enabled work to develop that aesthetically clashes and purposefully hacks together multiple visions and identities, a blueprint has emerged for an expansive body of work that is eager to launch into a contemporary, cultural field that crosses traditional boundaries of what is acceptable rather than sitting statically in pre-conditioned schools of thought.

Fiona Hackney argues that while we continue to think of amateur activities or hobbies as a middle-class past-time; we simply close the doors on recognising the experience and outputs of such activities (Hackney, 2013). Hackney is not wrong, for some members of the MQB, they engage with activities relating to quilting in their own time [trialling other design ideas in practice and on paper], and all seek out opportunities to learn [reading, visiting exhibitions, doing workshops, attending talks, undertaking research online]. These quilters are actively looking for cultural opportunities, are contextually savvy, innovative, complex, creative, reflective and skilful (Adamson, 2007; Hackney, 2013; Hackney et al., 2016; Knott, 2015).

In addition to a renewed understanding of this group of amateurs, there is a recognition that we are developing our own designs or hacking the designs of others so that we may make work together. By developing work that is *not off the shelf* is an empowering and quietly political act: 'maker cultures are seen as strategic processes through

which people reclaim power in their everyday lives' (Ratto & Boler, 2014, p. 104).

The combination of the self-motivation to learn and pushing one's skills beyond the pattern books as tools to reclaim power within everyday lives, clearly demonstrates the importance of looking beyond the overly familiar understanding of the amateur maker as that of *just* a middle-class past time.

Research such as this is important as it distinctly takes what we know about the possibilities of communal making beyond the shorter term understanding of learning and wellbeing. While these are clearly important factors, understanding that there are further, equally valuable experiences to be gained when an environment is created with a flattened sense of hierarchies and some low-cost approaches to creativity.

For the researcher, this insight propels the discussion beyond shorter term studies and contributes to a wider discussion of the impact long term investment of time and engagement with making for the amateur can have. In an expanded field, looking to all marginalised groups within society; communal making practices could provide opportunities for authentic interactions, empowerment and companionship.

Dissemination of this research into the amateur can happen in several ways. Emma Shercliff and Amy Twigger-Holroyd have already created a platform and started a big conversation through *Stitching Together* (Shercliff & Twigger-Holroyd, 2021b). The longitudinal case study in this PhD certainly adds to the discussion and provides a valuable

insight into amateur craft making over time. There are further opportunities for communal making engagements through events such as WOVEN in Kirklees and the British Textile Biennial. As for the MQB, I am certain that the shift will continue to evolve, particularly following the Covid enforced break.

Quilting, in the context of long-term communal making creates a space in which open discussion, debate and dialogue emerge. The 'forced' closeness of individuals around the frame creates an environment of trust, inclusion and human contact – this as we have all come to know and experience during Covid isolation is a powerful act. Not only is it clearly visible to record and analyse the processes of the group as well as the individual but, the observation of the quilt in a non-binary manner, metaphorically records and opens the proposition of multiple complex ideas, concerns and direction.

The research methods used in this thesis such as ABR and practice-based have become patchworked into the quilts themselves. The piecing together of seemingly disparate concepts and concerns, such as individual autonomy within a group, to the status of the amateur. The quilt provides a visible representation of allowing thinking to emerge and reveal itself [ABR] and it was *only* through the physical making of the quilts rather than as a theoretical proposition, that we can reimagine the process of communal quilting in the UK [as practice-based research]. Essentially quilting and the quilts themselves become *critical tools*. The quilts question what we understand as cultural value in that they recognise the significance of the amateur maker, they challenge representation by putting women front and centre of a conversation about autonomous actions within communal production of craft. This problematising and questioning of the quilt as a critical

tool, recognises the transformation of identity for the individual maker which, seems to be clearer when undertaken as a collaborative journey.

As we pass the point of one year of battling Covid-19, the memories of times spent in the homes of our friends around a quilting frame; chatting face to face, bumping hands and sharing in the making of a quilt simultaneously highlights the loss and importance of companionship, human touch and compassion.

This research and all the quilters who acted as co-producers or, from a distance as the remarkable quilters of Gee's Bend, reflect care and provocation, connection and empowerment, kindness and autonomy through the communal making of the humble quilt.

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Appendix

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