

Women, Craft and Protest: Yesterday and Today

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ABSTRACT: This article surveys the use of their craft skills by women since c.1840 to register protest and to alert the world to massive and condoned harassment. While the focus is particularly on the United Kingdom and the United States there are many telling comments on this style of successful protest as in India, or Australia. An appraisal is made of the links between head and hand, as well as the most powerful—and informative—‘passive resistance.

Recently, the Melbourne Craft Collective (MCC) was filmed on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s *Sunday Arts* program offering community workshops for men and women to learn how to knit or crochet explosives.¹ While the workshops have lapsed, the MCC’s website still offers instructions alongside the proposed deployment of textile weapons, along with encouragement for the advanced crafters to undertake ‘the more challenging’ full-body explosive pack.² And the MCC is not alone. Rather, the first decade of the 2000s has delivered a groundswell of (mostly) women who craft in protest. But there are as many differences in practice as rationales for protest. This present study seeks to tease out several strands of narrative within yesterday’s and today’s craft-related protestations, even as it offers insight on the rising popularity as craft as a means to change.

Overview of Women and Protest—The Earliest Campaigns

The first movement for women’s rights in the mid-to-late 1800s, or ‘first-wave feminism’, began with protests in support of the Abolition of Slavery in the United Kingdom and the United States and subsequently turned to the enfranchisement of women to vote. Other issues arose during these groundswells of popular protest, including: the treatment of men, women and children in factories; the abuse of alcohol; and overall, the rights of the poor and disadvantaged. Julia Ward Howe, after her authorship of the American Civil War’s most stirring anthem, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, also established Mother’s Day in the United States

¹ See the Craft Cartel’s launch of the crocheted explosives called ‘Bang! Knit! Purl! KaPOW!’ at <<http://craftcartel.com>>

² See the crochet grenades tutorial offered by Katrina Sweatman, op. cit.

as ‘Mother’s Day for Peace’ when she called on mothers everywhere to ‘rise up and oppose war in all its forms.’³ Her call for world peace contrasts sharply with today’s sentimental messages printed on Mother’s Day greeting cards. Ward Howe’s mission for peace did certainly capture the attention of the American public. As noted, the intertwined narratives of peace and justice invited women to participate in the forums of public debate about important matters of the day. The Abolitionist message culminated in the American Civil War of 1860-64, and both the British Parliament and the American Congress outlawed slavery in the 1864.

Thereafter, the role of women and their participation in the struggle, was greatly diminished. Even so, Ward Howe carried her campaign of peace forward to oppose the Franco-Prussian War in Europe in the 1870s.⁴ Some women organised ‘knit for peace’ circles while other women knitted to support their men in combat.⁵ Clearly, these protests fueled the Women’s Suffragette movements in the UK and the USA from the 1850s to the 1920s.

Following this model for Abolitionist movements, women’s protests became organised campaigns to underscore injustices faced by those in underprivileged categories such as African Americans and women. The assemblage of protesters, marching and singing, were joined with other, more poignant spectacles. Women chained themselves to gates and railings outside of the British House of Commons and also in the United States at the Capitol Building where they were jeered at by unsympathetic spectators. Often, they were cut free by police and taken off to jail. Once in jail, women pursued hunger strikes, although force-feeding was introduced to combat public hysteria over women’s starvation which was assumed to deprive their husbands and children of proper care.⁶

The first-wave feminist campaigns demanded recognition of women’s equal rights—to equal access to positions of power and representation, to equal pay, to allow choice in reproduction and sexual lifestyles—and were later revived across the USA, the UK, Europe, Australia and New Zealand through the ‘second wave’ feminist movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Second-wave feminism became codified through the formation of organisations such as the United Nations’ ‘Year of the Woman’, the National Organisation for Women (NOW), the publication

³ The text of Ward Howe’s ‘Mother’s Day Proclamation’ is available at <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/howejwriting/a/mothers_day.htm>

⁴ <<http://womenshistory.about.com/od/howejwriting/a/.htm>>

⁵ See Chapter 1, ‘Knit Your Bit: A History of Wartime Knitting’, *Knitting for Peace: Make the World a Better Place One Stitch at a Time* by B. Christiansen (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2006).

⁶ Husted, I. Harper, (ed.), *History of Women’s Suffrage*, vol. 5 (New York: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1922).

of *Ms.* magazine⁷ and many, many others. But other authors suggest that the links between the narratives of protest and its relationship to feminism have been severed.⁸

Formal and grassroots support for women's causes have been viewed as 'hijacked' by the media. Currently, general concerns with women's issues are now tightly focussed into the specific—through pervasive and persuasive campaigns—for example, campaigns that target women's (and men's) breast cancers. It could be argued that a single-target medical campaign, glowing with the colour pink, misses out a great deal of (neglected) terrain in the larger arena of women's rights. Two examples prove the case: in the U.S. Senate only seventeen women sit among the 100 senators, while Australia has only recently designated its first female Prime Minister in over 100 years of parliamentary government. The contemporary campaigns for breast cancer awareness, Barbara Ehrenreich suggests, lean on a 'Pollyanna' view as a solution to the large rise in women's cancers instead of politicising the issue to insist on equal funds for women's medical research.⁹

In brief—this section has reviewed the conceptual framework that arises from the keywords 'women' and 'protest'. It establishes the precedents for women's participation in protest and shows that craft can be linked to protest as a potential mode of expression. Today's protest campaigns may contain legacies from previous generations, while some employ ideas and practices that are quite new. For example, essayists recently considering contemporary American women's experimental writing made direct links between the women's writing and transformative political activity. The collection's editors, Hinton and Hogue, saw such experimental practice as rooted in 'abolitionist, pacifist, populist, labor, women's and civil rights movements.'¹⁰ In many forms, these legacies live on.

Three Waves

Women's protests have evolved throughout the three waves of feminism—the first-wave feminism from the 1860s—1900s (suffrage); second-wave from the 1960s – 1970s (women's liberation), and the third-

⁷ Steinhem, G., Editor-in-Chief, *Ms.* magazine, founded 1971.

⁸ Walter, N., *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, (London: Virago, 2010); and Neill, R., 'Feminists in Anti-Raunch-Culture Revolt' [an interview with Mia Freedman], *The Weekend Australian*, 13-14 March 2010.

⁹ Ehrenreich, B., *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009).

¹⁰ See the Introduction, 'Oppositions and Astonishing Contiguities', *We Who Love to be Astonished: Experimental Women's Writing and Performance Poetics*, ed. by L. Hinton and C. Hogue (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

wave, which has been named post-feminism.¹¹ It is worth noting that third-wave feminism coincides with other movements of social unrest, including the environmental and anti-globalization movements of the late 1990s. How the nature of protest evolved through these generational waves, and how protest is expressed through craft steers the rest of this discussion.

Resistance and Struggle

Quilts and the Underground Railroad

Women's 'knitting for peace circles' had flagged the injustice of war and promoted libertarian ideals in one way. On another level, an episode from American Civil War history shows how craftwork could directly aid and abet the liberty of others.

In the US, many northerners felt sympathetic to the enslaved African American population, and a grassroots movement emerged to assist slaves to escape from the southern American states to northern ones where slavery was abolished. There were a variety of subtle mechanisms in place to help the northward travel of slaves. Some directions were included in the lyrics of standard gospel tunes, e.g., the lyric '*follow the drinking gourd*' refers to the constellation of the Big Dipper, where the handle of the 'gourd' points to the North Star.¹² Also, lamps were put behind coloured window glass to indicate a sympathetic house where a slave could eat, sleep, and perhaps be smuggled north in a wagonload of goods.¹³

The conception of quilt-making as a strict necessity for pioneer wives changed in the mid-1800s. While the quilt-making of dedicated religious communities, such as the Amish,¹⁴ continued in a traditional manner, the nature of patchwork changed in the middle-to-upper classes. With increasing trade and prosperity with England and Europe, women in cities had exciting new materials at their disposal, as well as more leisure time. In the American patchwork quilt these Victorian-era matrons had located a way to express certain individual aspirations for themselves as well as for their families.¹⁵

¹¹ *Feminism in Popular Culture*, ed. by J. Hollows and R. Moseley (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

¹² Tobin, J., R.G. Dobard, and M.S. Wahlman, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor, 1998).

¹³ *Op. cit.*

¹⁴ Haders, P., *Sunshine and Shadow: The Amish and Their Quilts* (New York: Universe Books, 1976).

¹⁵ Gordon, B. *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890–1940* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

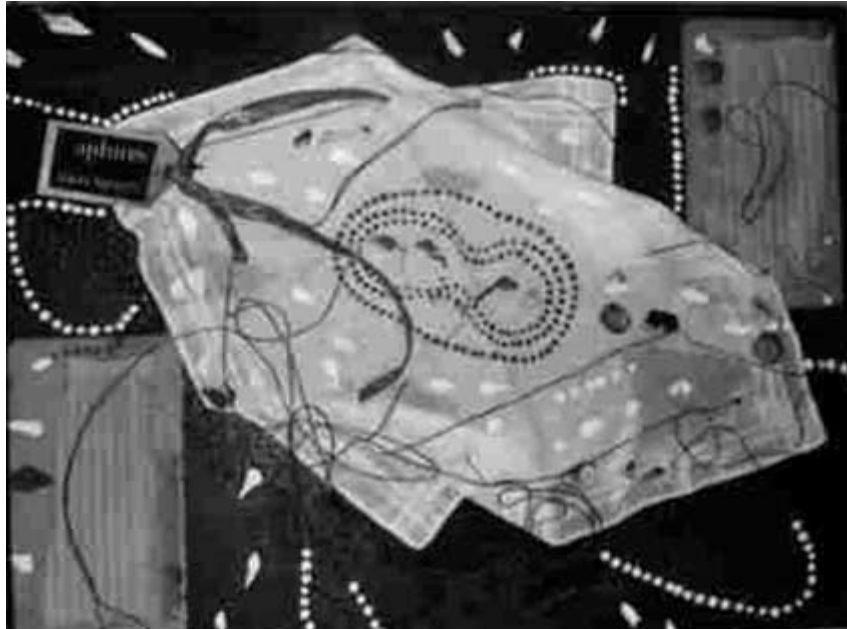


Figure 1. I hope it has the desired effect —Penny Evans' contribution to the international 'Hankie Project', Alstonville NSW, June 2010.

In contrast to the relative openness of the 'knit for peace' circles, the secret messages in the American Civil War era quilts lay dormant for over a century until they were unpicked by a researcher and anthropologist, delivering new theories regarding women and their uses of quilt-making.¹⁶

These messages were quite basic, but when these patterns were felt in the dark, the quilt could be oriented towards the north as indicated by an embroidered star. They offered a tactile 'map' to those who might need assistance, and included stars, the sun, mountains and rivers to cross—an entire roadmap to freedom.¹⁷ The full story of quilting as protest before the American Civil War was not published until the late 1990s although, through a serendipitous moment in the 1980s, the quilt again became a mascot for protest (see the following section: 'From the Local to the Global').

Finally, there are other links to world protest and craft, notably Mohandas Gandhi and his spinning wheel.¹⁸ But Gandhi's movement,

¹⁶ Tobin, J., R.G. Dobard, and M.S. Wahlman, op. cit.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Chakrabarti, M., *The Gandhian Philosophy of Spinning-Wheel* (New Dehli: Concept Publishing, 2000).

however popular, did not find an outlet for craftwork as a political *artifact*, rather it was the *activity* of spinning that presented the fact of Indian nationalism. Gandhi's continual spindle-spinning of cotton during his campaign served to remind protestors of how British factory-based cheap Indian cottons had destroyed the ingenuity and resourcefulness of Indian people to provide for themselves.

Resistance in Aboriginal Arts and Crafts

Just recently, Aboriginal artists have used craft to record and articulate the hardships endured as a result of social inequities over the past 100 years of European settlement in Australia. In particular, many of the younger generation of Aboriginal artists view their work from a conceptual framework based on resistance. An initial standpoint is to resist and refuse the distinction between 'high art' as a construct of European ethos from 'craft' as a lesser prestigious endeavor. For example, the Canadian craft artist Janet Morton addresses the postmodern necessity to remove distinctions between 'high' and 'low' within culture. Her piece titled *Memorial* presents an ordinary object, a single hand-knitted sock, but of gigantic dimensions. In one installation, Morton's sixteen-foot hand-knitted Canadian work sock was draped over a cast bronze statue of Queen Victoria.¹⁹ Morton wished to illustrate the collapse of hierarchies between status of colonizers and the representations of the working class through their ordinary clothes. This insistence on the multivalency of the artistic image allows the image to resist a single interpretation, and offer the possibility for resolution within the eye of the viewer.²⁰

One recent example of Aboriginal resistance as a theme is the work of Penny Evans in northern New South Wales. Evans' heritage includes Kamilaroi (Father's) and Gamaroi (Mother's) language groups, to the north west of Bundjalung country in and around Garah and Mungindi, as well as Anglo-Celtic and German heritage. She works in multiple media (ceramics, painting, print-making and weaving).²¹ Evans suggests that all art and craftwork from Aboriginal people comes from the reality of a

¹⁹ Janet Morton's work dates from the early 1990s to the present, includes *Memorial* (Canadian Work Sock; 1992), a 16-foot long knitted sock that asks viewers to consider the nature of work and the types of labour society values. See D. O'Rourke, 'Janet Morton: Mme. Defarge Eat Your Heart Out', *Artword*, Spring 1995.

²⁰ Cosgrove, S., 'Reading for Peace? Literature as Activism: An Investigation Into New Literary Ethics and the Novel', ed. by R. Garbutt, *Activating Human Rights and Peace: Proceedings of the Universal Responsibility Conference* (Lismore: Southern Cross University, 2008).

²¹ See 'Profile' <<http://www.pennyevansart.com.au/about/>>

‘lived politics’ that, at its core, must continually struggle with European ideologies of ownership and domination.²²

Her recent contribution to the international ‘Hankie Project’—also known as the ‘Objects of the Dead’ and curated by Julie Barrett of the Barrett Gallery in northern New South Wales—provides a significant case in point.²³ First, while some Aboriginal language groups avoid picturing the dead, Penny Evans used the Hankie Project as an opportunity to highlight the injustice of colonial practices in her multimedia piece entitled: *I hope it has the desired effect* (see Figure 1).

The placard next to Evan’s artwork explains:

[My work] is about germ warfare and a smallpox infected hankie that was deliberately given to the Shawnee, Mingo and Delaware Indians surrounding Fort Pitt in western Pennsylvania. One of the men responsible said in his diary at the time ‘we gave them two blankets and a handkerchief from the smallpox hospital, I hope it will have the desired effect.’²⁴ There are connections between these men and some that came out on the First Fleet here. It has been established through the diary of Watkin Tench that samples of smallpox were brought here with the First Fleet. Countless Aboriginal people died from smallpox here in the Eora/Sydney area and beyond. Whole populations were wiped out.

So this is an historical work about death.

Through the use of ‘humble materials’ including paper plates, labels, bits of newspaper, plant materials such as straws, grasses, stones and bits of castoff timber, supplemented with objects she has collected from op shops, Evans makes her point that the use of everyday objects and simple craft techniques such as plaiting and twisting drink straws are just as important as her work in other more ‘artistic’ materials, including potter’s clay. Others have argued for the affective capacity of objects and the everyday. Evans focuses on the natural environment, or explores the shop shelves of her local supermarket to find objects that will help to communicate her avowed political intent. Kathleen Stewart, a theorist of the power of the ordinary, writes that the ordinary is in fact ‘a world of affinities and impacts’.²⁵

Evans’ decision-making process includes the importance of traditional methods learned from her elders alongside more humble materials. As

²² Evans, P., Personal Communication, 13 July 2010.

²³ ‘The Hankie Project’ exhibit opened on 18 June 2010. See <<http://objectsofthedeath.blogspot.com/>>

²⁴ Mayor, A., ‘The Nessus Shirt in the New World: Smallpox Blankets in History and Legend’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 108, (1995), 54-77.

²⁵ Stewart, K., *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Evans notes, ‘it all has a place in protesting the wrongs fostered on my people from the overseas colonizers.’²⁶ As she works with other Aborigines and people of colour in the Northern Rivers region, she emphasizes the need for their art and craft to express *both heart and politics*. Throughout Evans work, and that of many other Aboriginal artists, the 1960s slogan has come to life again, as the personal *is* the political.

Protests as Memorials

The Irish Orphan Girls Exhibit

Recently, various types of memorials have been celebrated by both academics and artists as a means of expression.²⁷ As well as the individual efforts of Aboriginal artists as mentioned above, there are opportunities for public memorials to document injustices of the past. For museums, craftwork becomes an highly accessible way for the public to connect with many exhibits and installations, particularly those who memorialize a historical moment of injustice. Several recent projects come to mind.

As every schoolchild knows, the settlement of Australia was driven by the British system of transportation. In many aspects, the full cruelty of this system is hard to believe, and besides the transportation of convicts and indentured servants, there were many other schemes. In 2009, the *Irish Orphan Girls* exhibit opened in the Hyde Park Barracks Museum in Sydney.²⁸ The exhibition highlighted the plight of an ‘ill-fated orphan scheme’ of 1848-1850 which saw more than 4,000 Irish girls sent from Ireland on at least 20 ships that arrived in Sydney, Port Phillip, Moreton Bay and Adelaide. More than 2,500 of these girls, mostly teenagers, were held in the Hyde Park Barracks until they could ‘be distributed’ to householders who had applied for servants. Those not picked for service in town were sent to outlying depots, where ‘servants and wives were more in demand.’²⁹

The exhibition included photographs, old bonnets, and a few spare belongings—one was a pin cushion found under the floorboards at the barracks. The plight of the girls as human cargo was illustrated by a series of newly-made canvas sacks, with the names of individual girls printed on the side, along with the station names where they were sent.

²⁶ Evans, P., Personal Communication, 13 July 2010.

²⁷ Smith, R.J., ‘Roadside Memorial’: A Lecture to Open ‘*Extreme Speed*’ from Robyn Cerretti, Lismore Regional Gallery (Lismore, New South Wales, 16 July 2010).

²⁸ Crockett, G., ‘Irish Orphan Girls’, *Textile Fibre Forum*, 28.1, no. 93 (2009), p. 39.

²⁹ Op. cit.



A calico bonnet made by Enid Taylor representing her ancestor, Ann Pugh, who arrived in Sydney Cove, 12 June 1801, on the Earl Cornwallis. Part of the Roses from the Heart project,

The sacks hang from the ceiling as ‘faceless baggage’ to be sent off as colonial administrators desired.³⁰

This *Irish Orphan Girls* exhibit highlights the links between the crafting of objects of specific cultural heritage (the baggage sacks) and our now framing those objects within a landscape of twenty-first century critique. The display of materials, especially those for needle crafts, is made poignant by the fate of transported women. Once assigned as a servant or wife, they would then make household goods of all kinds.

Christina Henri and Roses from the Heart

A similar, but much larger project also deals with the legacy of Australia’s convict past. The artist, and PhD student, Cristina Henri, has designed her project to memorialize convict women who served in the

³⁰ Crockett, G., op. cit.

Female Factory System in Hobart, Tasmania (then Van Dieman's Land).³¹ This ten-year project is only possible through collaboration with many others, with much support especially from England and Australia. All those wanting to participate in *Roses from the Heart* are sent an email with a pattern for a calico bonnet that is accurately reproduced from preserved museum garments. Those with convict ancestry are encouraged to make a calico bonnet that includes a family history, while those without convict ancestry can be allocated a name from the roll of 25,000 women.

In 2009, part of the Project traveled to Birmingham, and to the Jersey Museum at the Channel Isles in England. The Project plans to take 13,000 bonnets affixed to a large sail that represents the sea passage to the 'Festival of Quilts' in Birmingham. An initial display of 12,000 bonnets was offered in Hobart in an installation that Henri named *The Heart Garden*. Each bonnet has individualised embroidered details that include a rose, the name of the female convict, and the name of the sewer inside the bonnet.³² Similar exhibitions have been mounted in other parts of Australia, including Saint John's Cathedral in Parramatta, NSW.

Enid Taylor, a long-time member of the Lismore Branch of The Embroiders' Guild of New South Wales chose to participate in the *Roses from the Heart* project by making a bonnet that represents one of her ancestors (see Figure 2). Here, she tells the story in her own words:

These are the circumstances under which my Great Great Great Grandmother Ann Pugh came to Australia.

Ann Pugh arrived in Sydney Cove on board *Earl Cornwallis* on 12 June 1801, after a journey of 201 days. She has embarked along with 297 convicts from England on 18 November 1800. Ann had been tried on 16 July 1799 at the Herefordshire Summer Assizes of stealing goods to the value of 2 pounds, twelve shillings and 2 pence, from Hester Edward a widow of Lyonshall, Hereford. The items she was convicted of stealing are the following: one stuff petticoat, one flannel petticoat, one linen apron, one flaxen shift, one pair of leather shoes, one cotton gown, two woollen cloaks, one check apron, one linen shift, one pair of woollen stockings, three cotton handkerchiefs, one linen handkerchief, one pair of plated iron buckles and one piece of silver coin.

Ann was found guilty and sentenced to 7 years transportation.

³¹ See Henri, C., 'Roses From the Heart' <<http://www.femalefactory.com.au/exhibit.htm#Roses>>
³² Op. cit.

World Support

While Henri's project is organized from Australia, *Roses from the Heart* is a truly international effort. While the project was designed by Christina Henri, it is the work from the many sewers around the world, with their names in pen on the inside of each bonnet, that comprise the artwork. In this way, the craftwork belongs to the many unknown participants who feel some empathy with the convict women of the past, and are willing to sew an item to participate in the process, as well as the outcome. Their work honours the convict past of Australia, as well as the traditions of sewing and embroidery that continue unbroken from the British and Australian colonial pasts.

The discussion now turns to this particular modality of large craftworks, where local issues signal and invite a global response—from the Local to the Global.

The AIDS Quilt

The quilt, composed as a craftwork that embodies the necessity for struggle and resistance, became the perfect message board for those in quite another struggle: the fight for awareness of AIDS. By 1985, the paranoia and misunderstanding about HIV and AIDS was rife, and candlelight marches were held in San Francisco to protest against the persecution of gay men and lesbians, especially following the 1978 shooting of San Francisco Supervisor, Harvey Milk.³³ Activist Cleve Jones suggested that those involved carry a placard to friends and lovers already dead of AIDS. Finally, the placards were taped onto the walls of the San Francisco Federal Building.³⁴

This colourful array of placards inspired Jones and others to consider two issues, 1) how to best memorialize those already gone, and 2) how to raise awareness about the disease, in particular, to insist on reducing homophobia that had swept the United States in response to the AIDS epidemic. A patchwork quilt would preserve the messages, allow for more to be sewn into place, and be more easily transportable as a memorial than painted and printed panels. Volunteers provided sewing machines and taught others to sew. The culmination of the *AIDS Quilt Project* came to the National Mall in Washington, D.C. on October 11, 1987. The AIDS quilt covered the size of an athletic field and comprised 1,920 panels, and over half a million visitors saw the quilt on display during the March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights. But the quilt had just begun. Subsequent viewings of the quilt were organized around the United States and in 1996 it returned to Washington, D.C. and

³³ See <www.aidsquilt.org/history/htm>
³⁴ Op. cit.

included 8,288 panels. The names of the dead were also read aloud by lovers, friends and families. It is clear that the *AIDS Quilt Project*³⁵ accomplished many of its goals. The research on HIV and AIDS became prioritised for government funding. Today, support comes from government and also many private foundations to educate others about the prevention and treatment of this disease, particularly in the developing world.³⁶

From this point forward, craftwork became available as a vehicle for social change in the 20th century. The overwhelming success of the *AIDS Quilt Project* demonstrated the power when craftwork moves beyond its activities as a charity *for others*. Then, craftwork becomes a successful vehicle for global outreach when it addresses the needs of a particular community, rather than acting for those less fortunate.

Many more examples could be cited here, but the discussion now turns to the recent phenomena of activism that has solidified the conceptual frameworks for craft and protest.

Craft as Community Building

At the end of the 1990s women began to reclaim the domestic handicrafts. Activities in the domestic sphere had been eschewed by second-wave feminists as they became part of conservative movements, *i.e.*, 'a woman's place is in the home',³⁷ which was promoted by the commercial success of style divas such as Martha Stewart.³⁸

In contrast, third-wave feminists decided that they should open their options to include the domestic arts especially as they connect with a new ethos that breaks down the constraints of public/private life. As Joanne Turney, in her influential book, *The Culture of Knitting*, points out:

Post-feminism or third-wave feminism is distinct from second-wave feminism as it understands gender as fluid, moving away from the binaries of male and female into an arena that is largely characterized by bricolage and identity formation ...³⁹

³⁵ The project is now titled 'The NAMES Project Foundation: AIDS Memorial Quilt' and it has branch chapters in both Australia and New Zealand, as well as most countries in the world.

³⁶ Among others, The Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation has made substantial donations to AIDS education and prevention in Africa. See <<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/hivaids/Pages/default.aspx>>

³⁷ Turney, J., *The Culture of Knitting* (Oxford: Berg, 2008).

³⁸ Rall, D.N., 'Spinning Around in a Martha Stewart World: Craft in the Age of the Internet', *Australian Folklore*, 22 (2007), 198-212.

³⁹ Turney, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

. . . this [new emphasis on the hand-knitted item] can be viewed as a means of uncovering hidden histories, previously deemed part of a folk culture, domestic and inherently feminine ... [m]aking provides meaning for the women [in these books] as well as supplying the means through which their problems are communicated, worked through, and overcome.

This wave represents a turnaround for narratives of women and domesticity, as noted above in the work of Janet Morton—in particular, to remove distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ and between ‘craft’ and ‘art.’ A display that presents the new cultural position of knitting comes from the Knitting Room in Hobart, Tasmania.⁴⁰ It is a knitted re-creation of a 1950s house, complete with old Bakelite telephones and Iced Vo Vo biscuits as well as a knitted Elvis Presley items. Most of the knitters participate in the project from various aged-care homes in Tasmania. Several comments can be taken from the video. As Robyn Carney notes, ‘knitting is a useful skill, but it brings people together ... to discuss things and create things that bring back memories ... it seems like [just] knitting, but it is actually community building.’ And Angela Barrington, of Regional Arts Tasmania comments, ‘knitting ... is a really accessible way of engaging with art.’

Joanne Turney concludes: ‘Knitting becomes both a metaphor for daily life, an indicator of life narratives, but also a tool for making space, making special things and for making friends and communities, activities and ideals otherwise hidden, forgotten or lost.’⁴¹ It is clear that craft is not simply ‘women’s work’, but also a way to remember as well as participate usefully in one’s community, even when located in aged care. Taking the Knitting Room on tour has allowed for workshops, with the idea that younger women (and men) could become usefully involved with their own conceptions of community, art and craft.

Craft + Activism = Craftivism

This discussion opened with the Melbourne Craft Cartel and the message to ‘crochet your own hand grenade.’ With third-wave feminism and an emphasis on craft and protest came the movement now known as ‘craftivism.’ The term ‘craftivism’ was coined in 2003 by writer Betsy Greer in order to join the separate spheres of craft and activism. Her favorite self-created definition of the term states, ‘craftivism is a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your

⁴⁰ <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/stories/s3008735.htm>
⁴¹ Turney, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

voice stronger, your compassion deeper & your quest for justice more infinite.⁴²

Craft had been integrated before with movements of resistance, as established in the above discussion. However, this time around the movement had another tool for dissemination, that is, online communication. The rise of craftivism was dated from Betsy Greer's website, *craftivism.com*. The previous rise in domestic skills that began with third-wave feminism could then be another way to harness personal creativity to promote political viewpoints. The classic domestic skills—sewing, knitting, crocheting and weaving could now be easily shared via the internet. Groups sprang up all over the world that promoted craftivism to achieve certain objectives, with heavy participation from North America, Great Britain, Europe, and Australia/New Zealand. Today, most craftivists are organized through their use of the internet and social networking, that allows for the two basic advantages of online communication—'speed and reach'⁴³ Today, it is no longer significant *where* one is located, but being connected to the internet is key. There are many projects that have harnessed a broadly-based international contribution, particularly in the area of environmental protest. Two of the most noteworthy projects are noted below.

The Coral Reef Project

The *Coral Reef Project* demonstrates the work of two sisters, Christine and Margaret Wertheim, and their discovery of a simple crochet technique that produced hyperbolic curves.⁴⁴ This technique was originally devised as a teaching device for introducing principles of higher mathematics. But these curves, once finished, bore a remarkable resemblance to undersea life found on coral reefs. The Wertheim's teaching techniques then traveled around the world to be worked in other countries, where the resulting reefs became known as 'Satellites'. The Sydney satellite, the *Sydney Hyperbolic Crochet Reef* was a collaborative installation curated by the *In Stitches Collective* (artists Claire Conway, Michela Davies and Charlotte Haywood) with support from over 350 contributors. The *Reef's* exhibition took place at the Powerhouse Museum during Ultimo Science festival from the 21st to the 30th of August 2009.⁴⁵

Crafters were invited to workshops for eleven months to learn the techniques and pass them along to friends and other interested

⁴² See Greer, Betsy's definition of 'craftivism', *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007).

⁴³ Gurak, L., *Cyberliteracy* (Cambridge, MA: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁴⁴ See the Wertheims' website: <<http://crochetcoralreef.org/>>

⁴⁵ Their weblog of the project: <<http://sydneyreef.blogspot.com/>>

participants. While most contributors used wool, it was important to the global message delivered in the *Coral Reef Project* to use as many recycled materials as possible, including string, wire, ribbons, netting, or even plastic bags and telephone cords in the final project. Coral reefs are rapidly disappearing due to environmental problems, such as climate change. The Coral Reef Project maintains its ongoing educational services through the Institute for Figuring in Los Angeles, California.⁴⁶

The NIKE Blanket Petition

One of the most well-known craftivists, Cat Mazza, founded microRevolt in 2003. Her organization, now based in Rhode Island, offers a very different type of environmental protest through their artworks, as presented on their website, <http://www.microrevolt.org>. Its anti-consumerism stance is clear: ‘microRevolt projects investigate the dawn of sweatshops in early industrial capitalism to inform the current crisis of global expansion and the feminization of labor.’⁴⁷ Some of microRevolt’s projects utilise knitpro—a piece of software that re-works corporate logos into knit and crochet patterns for craftivists to download and incorporate into their own clothing. These protesters

not only evade sweatshop labour through making garments themselves, they also undermine the corporate brand and identity through hijacking its image.⁴⁸

The largest microRevolt project (to date) is the NIKE Blanket Petition, which lasted from 2003-2008. The NIKE Blanket Petition, a 15-foot wide hand knit/hand crocheted red blanket of 4 inch x 4 inch (6 cm x 6 cm) squares that reveal the NIKE ‘swoosh’ symbol in stark white yarn. It is then edged with a border of highly coloured squares. In November 2007, these border squares were then knitted into the border of the Blanket at Garanti Gallery in Istanbul Turkey, next to a NIKE store. The blanket was completed in 2008.

In the end, contributions came from crafters in over thirty countries. The most interesting part of the Blanket’s presentation is virtual: as one clicks on the blanket, each square appears with a tag of the protesters name and country of origin. Further, on the webpage, one can choose a country, and all participants from that country are highlighted on the blanket showing the crafter’s name.⁴⁹

In 2009 the artwork toured with the show *Judy Chicago in Thread* as part of the exhibition offered at the Textile Museum of Canada, and later,

⁴⁶ See the <<http://theiff.org/>>

⁴⁷ See their website, <<http://www.microrevolt.org/mission.htm>>

⁴⁸ See the webpage, <<http://www.microrevolt.org/knitPro.htm>>

⁴⁹ See the webpage, <<http://www.microrevolt.org/web/blanket.htm>>

in Toronto and the Art Gallery of Calgary to January 2010. Further, a video about the project as well as the folded object is on view in the study center at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon from January-June 2010. It seems clear that the NIKE Blanket will continue its global perambulation, in both real and cyberspace, reminding viewers to think about the workplace conditions that produce luxury and sports goods. The point is well-taken that most of the participants were female, and both women and children are the biggest losers in illegal sweatshops around the world.⁵⁰

Conclusion

This discussion has evolved through its consideration of the three waves of feminism—suffrage, liberation, and post-feminism, as a way to ‘unpick’ the many connecting threads between women, craft and protest. Within all three movements, there remain a set of underlying themes that influence how women shape protest and how the multiple modalities of art and protest continue to shape the identity of women. Other issues arise, such as to privilege the domestic instead of the corporate, and how to explore the boundaries of the connections between creativity and social action generally.

Emily Howes has explored the vital link between the creation of the object, and how that engenders the subjective feeling of creativity in her study of the sustainability of independent craftwork.⁵¹ She notes, citing Hazel Clark, that women’s need to produce both art and craft could be labeled as ‘a sensibility learned in the making’, whereby the craft processes cultivate a sense of kinship and value for the materials involved and how to manage it with sensitivity ... [also] the time spent crafting an object enhances emotional input and endows it with the spirit of the maker.⁵² Clearly, the process of making art or craft, if undertaken with sensitivity, links the handwork with the materials from which it is fashioned. It is also the emotional input and the connection with the artwork that fuels the process of creativity.

Wendy Wheeler describes creativity as a process of intersubjective world-changing and making. Wheeler suggests that a ‘focus on human creativity ... doesn’t get us directly to mainstream political action’, but as she argues, ‘it gets us to the distal conditions (the emergent structure

⁵⁰ See chapter 9, ‘Faux Amis’, in Thomas, D., *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost its Luster* (London: Penguin, 2007), 270-295.

⁵¹ Howes, E., ‘Make Your Own Ark: The Sustainable Imperative of Indie Craft’, *Making Futures*, 1 (2009), 150-157.

⁵² Clark, H. ‘SLOW + FASHION: An Oxymoron, or a Promise for the Future...?’, *Fashion Theory*, 12.4 (2008), 427-46.

of feeling) under which the conditions might be formulated and enacted.⁵³

It is this vital connection between craft and creativity that makes women using craft to protest a most meaningful exercise in a world full of impersonal manufactured goods.

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*Further General Reading (in addition to the above footnote references):
'Knit lit' - Fiction*

Monica Ferris' mysteries feature needlecraft store-owner, Betsy Devonshire. Betsy has a knack for needlework and a talent for unraveling crime. Many books include a free knitting or sewing pattern. Here are several titles in the genre:

- Ferris, Monica, *Blackwork* (New York: Berkley True Crime, 2010).
 Ferris, Monica, *Crewel Yule* (New York: Berkley True Crime, 2005).
 Ferris, Monica, *Knitting Bones* (New York: Berkley True Crime, 2008).
 Ferris, Monica, *Sew Far, So Good* (New York: Berkley True Crime, 2009).
 Ferris, Monica, *Sins and Needles* (New York: Berkley True Crime, 2006).
 Jacobs, Kate, *Knit Two* (New York: Berkley Trade, 2009).
 Jacobs, Kate, *The Friday Night Knitting Club* (London: Penguin, 2007).
 Kruger, Mary, *Died in the Wool* (New York: Pocket Books, 2005).
 Kruger, Mary, *Knit Fast Die Young* (New York: Pocket Books, 2007).
 Sefton, Maggie, *A Deadly Yarn* (New York: Berkley True Crime, 2006).

Nonfiction

- Aris, Sharon, *It's My Party and I'll Knit if I Want To!* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003).
 Bartlett, Anne, *Knitting* (London: Penguin Books, 2005).
 Christianson, Barbara, *Knitting for Peace: Make the World a Better Place One Stitch at a Time* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2006).
 Hosegood, Betsy, *Not Tonight Darling, I'm Knitting* (David and Charles, 2006).
 Lydon, Susan Gordon, *The Knitting Sutra: Craft as a Spiritual Practice* (New York: HarperOne, 1998).
 Miller, F.P., A.F. Vandome, and J. McBrewster (Eds) *Craftivism* (Alphascript Publishing, 2010).
 Murphy, Bernadette, *Zen and the Art of Knitting* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2002).
 Pearl-McPhee, Stephanie, *Yarn Harlot: The Secret Life of a Knitter* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2005).

⁵³ Wheeler, W., *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2006).

How-To Books

- Greer, Betsy, *Knitting for Good!: A Guide to Creating Personal, Social, and Political Change—Stitch by Stitch* (Boston, MA: Trumpeter Books, 2008).
- Seiff, Joanne, *Knit Green: 20 Projects and Ideas for Sustainability* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2009).
- Stoller, Debbie, *Stitch 'N Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2006).
- Stoller, Debbie, *Stitch 'n Bitch Nation* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2004).
- Stoller, Debbie, *Stitch 'N Bitch: The Knitter's Handbook*, New York: Workman Publishing, 2003).
- Wasinger, Susan, *Eco Craft*, (New York, London: Lark Books, 2009).
- White, Betz, *Sewing Green*, (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2009).

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American Folklore Society — Keeping Folklorists Connected

The Society's 2011 annual meeting (its 123rd such gathering) will be held on October 12-15 at the Biddle Hotel and Conference Center in the Indiana Memorial Union complex on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington.

The theme for the meeting, on which presentations will be encouraged but not required, is 'Peace, War, Folklore.' Our local host is Indiana University's Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. This year, we welcome proposals in two new presentation formats: Diamond presentations and research poster exhibitions. On <http://www.afsnet.org/?page=2011AM> you will find links for:

- The Invitation for Participation: information about submitting presentation proposals. When you are ready to submit your proposal, start with one of the paths below. All proposals for the annual meeting program are due by March 31.
- Checklists for submitting individual diamond presentations, papers and posters, or organized forums, diamond or paper sessions, and media sessions.
- Local information about the meeting site, Indiana University, and Bloomington
- AFS annual meeting presentation policies
- An overview of annual meeting deadlines and important dates.