Crafting Identity, Queering Space: An Examination of How Craft Can Aid the Expression of Queer Identities and Experiences.

Jasmine Dunning

Dissertation Submitted For:

BA (Hons) History of Decorative Arts and Crafts

2017

9900 words.
Synopsis

This dissertation is a study of contemporary crafts role within queer theory discourses. It seeks to unravel why craft has become an important medium for artists exploring queer subject matter or their own queer identities. It will also highlight and discuss any relevant themes that have emerged throughout the research and development of this dissertation.

In order to fully interrogate why it is that craft holds a place in these discussions, the research will firstly examine definitions of the term *queer*, it’s meanings and how they have developed. Prominent critics and theorists of queer discourses will be consulted in order to provide these definitions and their context. This will be followed by a history of relevant events or persons to the foundations of queer theory as well as relevant artists who have chosen craft as their medium of expression and whose contributions have shaped and inspired contemporary queer artists.

In order to then provide a penetrative analysis of queer themes and discourses within contemporary craft, this study will then develop into two sections. The first section will be a study of how communities and community groups use craft as a means to express sentiments regarding their own queer identities or communities. The communities featured are not limited to physical locality but also include online communities, as such community’s contributions to this field have been significant. The second part will then go onto discuss how craft and queerness are presented within gallery or arts institutions.
and how such pieces may be similar or differ from the work of artists within community settings. The conclusion will then summarise and consider the findings that have arisen from the research presented and consider their relevance and importance to contemporary craft discourses and contemporary queer discourses.
Table of Contents

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 6
Methodology ....................................................................................................................... 7
Chapter 1 - Context and Definitions .................................................................................. 11
Chapter 2 - Know Your History ......................................................................................... 15
Chapter 3 – Crafting Community ....................................................................................... 30
Chapter 4 – Queering the Gallery ...................................................................................... 45
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 65
Bibliography ...................................................................................................................... 68
Appendix ................................................................................................................................ 74

Table of Figures

FIGURE 1: HARMONY HAMMOND, FLOORPIECE VI, 1973. CLOTH, ACRYLIC. 65"
DIAMETER.......................................................................................................................... 18
MIXED-MEDIA INSTALLATION. 48FT X48FT X 48FT. ELIZABETH A. SACKLER CENTRE FOR
FEMINIST ART; COLLECTION OF THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART. ................................. 21
FIGURE 3: SHEILA PEPE, JOSEPHINE, 2000, CROCHETED YARN, SHADOWS, WALL
DRAWINGS. THREAD WAXING SPACE, NEW YORK, NY. ..................................................... 24
FIGURE 4: ALLEN PORTER, UNTITLED, CA. 1955, WOOL ON COTTON, 27 X 33", LESLIE-
LOHMAN COLLECTION, GIFT OF TIMOTHY STUART WARNER. ........................................... 29
FIGURE 5: BADGES BY HEBE PHILLIPS, 2016. PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE AUTHOR.
12TH JULY 2016. .................................................................................................................. 33
FIGURE 6: SCREEN COVERED WITH BADGES IN THE SECOND FLOOR BATHROOM OF THE
LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVE, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK CITY. LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVE
VIRTUAL TOUR. 2ND MAR 2017.
HTTP://WWW.LESBIANHERSTORYARCHIVE.ORG/TOURFLOOR.HTML. JPEG FILE.............. 35
FIGURE 7: LANE PATRIQUIN, EMBROIDERY 2014; QUOTE FROM OLLIE RENEE SCHMINKEY.
30. APR 2014. HTTP://LANEPATRIQUIN.COM/POST/84332401872/EMBROIDERY-APRIL-
2014-QUOTE-FROM-OLLI-RENEE. JPEG FILE. .................................................................. 37
FIGURE 8: JAMES BASS. RUTH BATTERSBY-TOOKE, CURATOR OF THE GREAT YARMOUTH
COSTUME AND TEXTILE COLLECTION LOOKING AT LORINA BULWER’S EMBROIDERED
LETTERS. DISPLAYED AT THE TIME & TIDE MUSEUM IN GREAT YARMOUTH. 4 APR 2015. 40

FIGURE 10: CAITLIN ROSE SWEET, Snake in the Grass (Installation View). Shown at the Academic Gallery, Queens, New York City. 16 Mar. 2016.......................55


FIGURE 12: LJ ROBERTS. Badges from The Queer Houses of Brooklyn and the Three Towns of Boswyck, Breukeleen and Midwout in the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era Installation at the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art. 1" pins. 2011. ................................................................................................................62
Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to explore current uses of craft to express queer or non-conforming gender identities and histories. It will explore why it is that craft used within a queer context has specific meanings and why craft is the chosen medium for particular practitioners. I hope to gain this insight by looking at two major facets of craft users. I first examine how communities and community groups use craft and how and why craft is intersecting with queer identities. The second facet I explore is the realm of museums, arts institutions and galleries. I assess why it is that artists practicing craft in a queer context choose craft as their medium, how it adds to or supports their works and how they are using craft to make marginalised identities visible. I will first define and discuss the meanings behind the term ‘Queer’ and Queer theory, how the term emerged in the mainstream and who or what it encompasses. I then examining the history of craft and gender roles, in order to contextualise the following works. The intention is to lend a critical understanding of Queer Theory and Queer histories that the pieces and communities examined have emerged from.
Methodology

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the intersections of craft and queer theory, it has been necessary to use a wide range of sources and research methods. These methods allowed for a close examination of two complex, fluid terms (craft and queer) whilst considering the many different ways in which these two terms intersect.

In order to approach the subject matter I first saw it useful to break apart ‘queer craft’ as a term and focus on the meanings of the individual terms ‘queer’ and ‘craft’. The research undertaken for this dissertation first began with a detailed examination of the term ‘queer’. In order to define and explore this term, I used the research of respected theorists in the field such as Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in order to gain a base understanding of gender and sexuality and how Queer theory developed out of such discourses. I wanted to gain a deep understanding of Queer theory and ‘queerness’ before approaching ‘craft’ discourses as I felt that applying the knowledge I had gained, in this way, would then allow me to better approach ‘craft’ from a queer viewpoint.

The works of critics such as Glenn Adamson have been extensively used in this dissertation, in order to explore craft’s image or perceptions within the arts world and beyond. Adamson’s contributions to the field have been highly influential and had a great impact on craft discourses over the past decade. To explore how this relates to queer theory, I was surprised to encounter illuminating academic writings by some of
the artists I will be going on to discuss, such as Matt Smith and LJ Roberts. I found the fact that these artists were so acutely aware of queer histories and were producing writings alongside their work to be interesting and engaging, allowing for a very clear picture of theory and practice to emerge.

I have also referenced the work of critics such as Rozsika Parker and her seminal text *The Subversive Stitch* as well as some wider readings and theories on feminist art and those who sought early on to address the gender binary and crafts relationship to it.

In order to penetrate why people who identify as Queer are using craft as their medium of choice, I decided again, perhaps ironically, to *binarize*. It is not simply ‘working’ artists and those whose works are shown in major galleries that are interesting to this subject matter. In order to gain wider perspectives, I saw great value in studying those who use craft in a community setting, be that in physical space or online, as much of this work is. Much of my initial research into the subject, even simple search engine queries, highlighted how prevalent crafts usage was in online Queer communities, which led me to question how this may influence working artists and vice versa and wonder whether they shared similar motivations. I decided to engage with a number of online communities on social networking sites such as Tumblr, Facebook and Instagram. This engagement ranged from simply observing the works being produced and what was the most common or popular to direct interaction and questions to point my research in certain directions. From this research I also noticed that geographical queer
communities, such as those based around LGBT\(^1\) centres and hubs for those marginalised for their sexuality or gender identity, also used craft extensively for events and community engagement. From here, I decided to proceed with an analysis of both areas in order to fully understand motivations for those who are queer and practice craft and of craft’s usage within queer settings. I decide to conduct an interview with a ‘community artist’ who used craft within such spheres to inspire conversation and debate within young LGBTQ+\(^2\) communities. This interview, in chapter 2, Crafting Community, has afforded me a glance into the purposes and motivations of crafts application in this way. I have also made use of statistics and data within mental health research and LGBTQ+ communities to aid a thorough analysis of the underlying reasons behind crafts success in this area.

Following on from this, in Chapter 4, I will be going onto analyse and discuss the work of three artists, all of whom identify as queer, or use queer themes within their work and have been exhibited by major galleries and arts institutions. I will be examining important pieces and exhibitions they have featured in, as well as the writings and insightful statements made by them. I will be applying the knowledge gained from the previous section as well as previous research and those whose literature I have studied to unlock insight into the motivations of said artists as well as undertaking stylistic analysis of their work. Together these elements combine to support my argument that the queer community is a tight knit one and that whilst there are differences between

---

\(^1\) Lesbian Gay, Bisexual, Trans.
\(^2\) The plus here indicates an inclusiveness of other marginalized identities surrounding gender and sexuality.
community and institutional practice, there are interesting themes that emerge, regardless of setting.
Chapter 1 - Context and Definitions

‘Queer’ is a contested term with a rich history. The word has both positive and negative connotations, having different meanings for different people in different places. However, it is probably best known as an umbrella term used, to comment on a person’s sexuality or gender identity, often in a derogatory manner. To many, in a 21st century Euro-American context, it is a term reclaimed, to celebrate sexual and gender minorities or those that are not cisgender or heterosexual. This includes, homosexual people, trans people, non-gender specific people, intersex people and those who face subjugation for their sexual or gender identity.

The specific definitions of the word and whom it refers to are still somewhat debated. David Halperin, an American theorist in gender studies, queer theory and visual culture, states,

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence.\(^3\)

---

This sentiment is also expressed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a theorist whose work has been instrumental in the foundations of Queer theory. In her essay Queer and Now, Kosofsky Sedgwick states,

That’s one of the things that “queer” can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.\(^4\)

Adding,

the most exciting recent work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity fracturing discourses, for example.\(^5\)

These definitions are both useful and cause issues for this study. Firstly they are useful as they stress the fluidity of the term, which allows for a more nuanced debate and wider choice of pieces to analyse. Secondly, they allow for an intersectional approach to Queer theory, allowing discourses of racism, classism, ableism, xenophobia etc. to penetrate the dialogue. This widening of the dialogue and definition makes for a fuller debate and allows for a deeper analysis of queer works and artists. However the term

\(^5\) [IBID] 9.
queer, is one that is misunderstood and misrepresented by many due to its complexity and the changing dialogues around the term itself. This means it can be hard to pin down.

Like the term *queer*, the term *craft* can be hard to solidify. The word conjures connotations of or is perhaps stereotyped as amateur or homely. Or, perhaps is categorized by its usage of certain materials such as, glass, ceramics, needlework etc. However due to the plethora of materials that could be, and often are, covered under the term ‘craft’ this does not go far in clarifying craft’s identity. Perhaps, then, it is useful to take a different approach; one rooted less in the product or physicality of the work.

Glenn Adamson, the former Director of the Museum of Art and Design, discusses this in his book *Thinking Through Craft*. He gives an interesting and useful definition, defining craft as,

> [...] most usefully conceived as a process. Rather than presenting craft as a fixed set of things - pots, rather than paintings [...] Craft only exists in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people. It is also multiple: an amalgamation of interrelated core principles, which are put into relation with one another through the overarching idea of “craft”.  

---

Adamson’s definition is useful, similar to the definitions of Queer that have been mentioned; it is fluid. It is about a set of core principles and way of doing, working and thinking. Rather than a focus on material, it becomes a mindset. This allows for expansions within craft practice and discourse by confronting normative attitudes. Adamson discusses how craft’s “supplementary” status can be its strength as its occupation of this space allows it to critique and question normative views. It’s space on the periphery allows it to tackle and address issues via a different pathway, adding new, interesting perspectives.

So what then is queer craft? Must work be explicitly labelled queer in order for us to identify it as such? No, but those that seek to subvert the notion of femininity, for example, can be classified as queer or *queering*. I will be referencing art that seeks to question or add layers to the discourse surrounding traditional gender roles, the gender binary and gender identity. As ‘Queer Theory’ is a relatively new addition to academic discourses, some of these works may often be labelled as ‘feminist’ art. However, I will be focussing on how they ‘queer’ or subvert normative notions of gender and sexuality. Firstly, however it can be useful to understand the gendered history from which queer theory was born and how it is that craft has become such an important mechanism for the subversion of heteronormativity.

I would also like to acknowledge that this is a study of Western perspectives and most of the artists I have studied are British or American.
The past decade has seen resurgence in feminist and gender studies discourses, within the arts world and beyond. In 2005 the Museum of Modern Art formed the Modern Women Project to address the gender imbalance in their collections and curating as a result the Brooklyn Museum now hosts the Elizabeth A. Sackler Centre for Feminist Art. Museums, galleries and arts spaces have begun the process of addressing such issues and women’s roles in the arts world are becoming ever more balanced. In May 2011, the New York State Board of Regents recognised the excellence of the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, and importance of collecting such work, awarding the museum official status, making it the “first gay art museum in the world” \(^7\). Examinations into gender and sexuality have become increasingly popular and serve of vital importance to contemporary debates on feminist and gender discourses.

Such discourses centre on the expansions of thought that grew as the foundations of second-wave feminism, whilst still seeking to critique and further expand such fields of thought. At the same time crafts tightly bound status as a lesser art form was beginning to unravel, as feminist discourses encouraged women to examine their relationship with craft. This process, however, was complex.

The expansions and increased awareness of feminist theories in the latter half of the 20th century brought about new alternatives to the rigid, binaries of the hetero-patriarchy. However, within the arts world the connection between gender binaries and the art/craft divide began to emerge. Craft has historically been considered a ‘lesser’ art, insignificant in comparison to ‘fine’ arts such as sculpture or painting. It has connotations of ‘kitsch’ or ‘amateur’ based on its dismissal as ‘women’s work’ or handicraft for the home, belonging to the domestic sphere, the polar opposite to masculine norms.

However before the ‘feminist awakening’ of the 60’s and 70’s questioning of craft’s negated reputation, heavily bound by its gender associations, was not something that had gone uncontested. For example at the Bauhaus in the 1930s the weaving workshops fostered an atmosphere of discontent with the rigid gender divisions. Günta Stolzl contested her neglected status, staging a coup in order to become ‘Meister’ subsequently transforming it into one of the most successful and productive workshops within the Bauhaus. In addition, Stolzl’s choice of the masculine pronoun shows a distinct stance against women’s treatment, image and gender divisions.

The 1950s and 1960s saw artists such as Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse making extensive usage of craft materials and techniques in non-traditional, minimalist/post minimalist ways.

---

8 A socio-political system based upon the supremacy of normative masculinity and heterosexual expression.
This connection drawn between the masculine/feminine divide and the art/craft divide, was followed by an examination of Harmony Hammond in the 1970’s. Julia Bryan-Wilson highlights the queerness of Hammond’s textiles in her essay “Queerly Made: Harmony Hammonds Floorpieces”. Bryan-Wilson states,

The making of the Floorpieces, coinciding with Hammond coming out, and their spiralling, braided form is suggested of both lesbian erotic’s and traditions of women’s handicraft. Hammond’s work challenges many of the binary oppositions that continue to structure conversations of craft - high/low, masculine/feminine, functional/ decorative.\(^\text{11}\)

Figure 1: Harmony Hammond, Floorpiece VI, 1973. Cloth, acrylic. 65" diameter.
The queerness of Hammonds work during this period is particularly relevant to this thesis. In the 1970's, the work of Michel Foucault, whom is considered of great importance to early queer theorists, began publishing his series *The History of Sexuality*, a study of sexuality, society, power and repression. It is particularly relevant to queer theory and its development as Foucault provides a framework to contest and understand normativity. Foucault approaches gender and sexuality as societal constructions, rooted in power structures driven by cultural phenomena, clashing strongly with the prominent essentialist view of sexuality as simply a biological experience. Its emergence in the 1970’s coincided with the development of feminist discourses surrounding the gendered divide between art and craft and the dignifying of traditionally ‘feminine’ labour.  

In 1979 Judy Chicago debuted her piece *The Dinner Party*, depicting a 48ft dinner table formed in a triangle, at which there are 39 place settings, each for a women of distinction from throughout (predominantly) Western history. *The Dinner Party* is detailed and complex. Every element was handmade by Chicago and her team prominently featuring textile, needle and embroidery work mixed with ceramics. Chicago worked with a team of over 400 people, mimicking traditional sewing circles and vast tapestries worked on by multiple women. The usage of craft employed by Chicago, Hesse and Harmony Hammond appropriated the image of craft being a lesser status art

---

form due to its connotations with femininity and ‘women’s work’, deploying it as a weapon against both the gender binary and the divide between art and craft.
Figure 2: Judy Chicago. Detail, Wing 1 of The Dinner Party. C. 1974-1979. Mixed-media installation. 48ft x48ft x 48ft. Elizabeth A. Sackler Centre for Feminist Art; Collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art.
In 1984 Rozsika Parker released *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and The Making of the Feminine*. The Subversive Stitch, one of the seminal texts with regards to craft and the way in which it is viewed. Parker laid out a clear, concise path plotting the development of the art and craft divide and the gender binary and unpicked their interwoven paths. Parker states,

> When women embroider, it is seen not as art, but as entirely the expression of femininity. And, crucially, it is categorised as craft… The development of an ideology of femininity coincided with the emergence of a clearly defined separation of art and craft.\(^{13}\)

However in the 1990’s, developing from the work of theorists such as Parker, the advent of ‘Third Wave’ Feminism saw women’s relationships to craft take a sharp turn. During the 1960’s and 1970’s, women still commonly used handcraft and artists such as Hesse, Hammond and Chicago embraced this. However in the late 80’s and 90’s, women began to show their rejection of traditional gender roles through a rejection of craft itself. Such practices were perceived as ‘menial’. Annin Barrett, an artist and academic, stated in her paper\(^{14}\), *A Stitch in Time: New Embroidery, Old Fabric, Changing Values* that women had a changing relationship with craft. She states that,

---


“This rupture in the relationship between embroidery and women set the stage for a different aesthetic tradition to emerge.”

Whilst most professional artists had rejected craft, Barrett states that some working women artists, potentially stirred by activist movements’ adoption of craft, began to dissect gender constructs and craft increasingly within their work. Artists such as Sheila Pepe for example, explored this in the 1990s. Figure 3, Josephine, is a vast, complex web like structure that casts intricate shadows on the white, polished walls. It was exhibited in 2000 and as can be seen Pepe uses domestic materials to create imposing installations referencing feminist and craft traditions.

---

Figure 3: Sheila Pepe, *Josephine*, 2000, Crocheted yarn, shadows, wall drawings. Thread Waxing Space, New York, NY.
The work of critics such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, emerging in this period, developed a more penetrative analysis of gender. Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* published in 1990, explored the theory that gender is performative and fluid. From this emerged current ideas that gender is a spectrum, rather than a binary.

Butler's theories relate to the Foucauldian assertions that understand gender, “as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts”\(^{16}\) or a social construct that is determined by social conditioning rather than being innate and as such is fluid with the ability to change dependant upon environment, context and circumstance, stating, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”\(^{17}\) Butler goes on to discuss what she perceives as a fatal flaw within feminist movements, that of division. Butler asserts that the belief that women and men belong to separate, distinct groups was not only incorrect but ultimately damaged messages of equality. That approach, Butler said, performed 'an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations'\(^{18}\) narrowing possibilities for people to choose and sculpt their own identities. Whilst outwardly feminists rejected Freud’s assertion that ‘anatomy is destiny’ by upholding and subscribing to gender divisions, she argued that the patriarchal concepts that view masculinity as belonging to male bodies and femininity to female bodies are simply reinforced. That same year the term, Teresa de Lauretis, first brought

\(^{17}\) [IBID] 25.
\(^{18}\) [IBID]12.
“Queer theory”, into academic discourses\textsuperscript{19}, as the title of a conference de Lauretis held in February 1990, where it quickly gained traction.

In the 1990’s it became possible for artists, fine and conceptual, to utilize craft that drew on and also subverted these complex histories. Artists, for example Tracey Emin explored themes such as gender in pieces such as \textit{Everyone I Have Ever Slept With – 1963-1995}. Emin’s use of craft and the traditional notions of femininity engrained within the eyes of society and the viewer brought about a very rich subject matter. Emin herself has stated "That's why I use a lot of embroidery…I take this craft but I don't treat it like a craft, but like high art."\textsuperscript{20} This elevation of craft combined with Emin’s consistent challenging of gender roles, divisions and binaries within her body of work shows influences from artists and theorists such as Parker and Chicago.

It is important to mention the historic trajectory of the artists above and their contributions to the field as it is through this lens we can begin to look at contemporary artists and communities navigating the usage of craft and gender within today’s society. Not only do such artist’s works subvert but they also highlight how interconnected craft and gender have become. Barrett, in regards to this new advent of craft, states “Much of this work is concerned with its placement in art history, often asserting its own importance with irony, humour and subversive wit.”\textsuperscript{21} However, outside of academia,

\textsuperscript{19} Professor Emerita of the History of Consciousness at the University of California.
with the advent of Craftivism and an increasing political awareness particularly amongst younger members of society, craft is once again being mobilised as a weapon of choice.

However, it is important to note that whilst these artists, discussed above, were subjugated for their medium and gender, they were still able to publicly display their works. The history briefly discussed above does not account for those whose works were not considered ‘fit for public consumption’. Figure 4 was created by Allen Porter in the 1950s. It was shown in the 2013 exhibition held by the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, entitled *Queer Threads: Crafting Identity and Community*. Porter was a contemporary and friend of the artist Paul Cadmus and the piece is highly reminiscent both thematically and stylistically of Cadmus’s work. Whilst Cadmus’s work attracted much controversy, his work was still widely exhibited. However, although visually similar in many ways, the appropriation of a traditionally feminine art form, needlework, somehow renders this piece less acceptable and it seems to never have been exhibited until the exhibition.  

Queer history, although often not well documented has clearly had an impact on Western art and culture, particularly craft, in the 20th century. Theorists and artist have had to find new ways and perspectives with which to highlight queer histories, much of which has been accomplished through the study of material culture and art. Crafts place here is especially important due to its heavily gendered image, the subversion or

---

queering of which, through pieces such as Allen Porter’s, adds vital information to queer history during time of heavy repression. Contemporary queer artists, whilst still facing repression, are much more able to embrace overtly queer themes within their work and craft seems to have become a large part this. The next part of this study will go onto analyse the different ways in which queer artists within a community context and queer artists operating within galleries and arts institutions, choose to use craft as a medium with which to express queerness.
Figure 4: Allen Porter, *Untitled*, ca. 1955, Wool on cotton, 27 x 33", Leslie-Lohman Collection, Gift of Timothy Stuart Warner.
Chapter 3 – Crafting Community

With the rise of the Craftivist movement, due to a growing political awareness amongst the youth of today combined with the rapid speed that information travels in the digital age, craft now occupies a quirky throne within many activist communities. In particular, feminist and queer communities have adopted craft as a way to facilitate self-expression, self-care and to physically solidify their identities.

The intersection of craft as a community activity and queer and feminist theory, whilst prevalent, is complex. In order to examine this area carefully, it would be wise to first discuss the term ‘community’ and its boundaries. Although the term ‘community’ conjures ideas of one's physical locality, the intended sense for this chapter refers to a collectivisation of those who identify as Queer or adopt queer philosophies. Whilst some of the communities discussed relate to a person's physical locality, there is a thriving online community of Queer people, activists and allies who engage with or practice craft in order to express queer thought or identity in a number of ways.

Hebe Phillips is an activist and community artist involved with a number of organisations that contribute towards the advancement of LGBTQ people. Hebe’s role within many of these organisations is to support and facilitate discussion between these individuals and her tool of choice is craft.

In the basement or what is affectionately known as ‘The Bunker’ in the Plan B Housing Co-operative in Rusholme, Manchester, Phillips discussed her experiences using craft
as a method for community engagement. The space is used for community and activist groups to meet in a ‘safe-space’ environment. The space contains a bathroom, a kitchen, several sofas and comfortable chairs and a shelf full of left-wing activist literature, leaflets and ‘zines.

When asked about craft in particular is Phillips’ tool of choice, she expresses a great dissatisfaction with preconceived notions of craft,

I think, I choose craft because it’s quite visual, it takes up space, it annoys people… [Laughs]... Some people really hate craft, don’t they? They think ‘Grrrr’ and it’s kind of seen as being this quite weak and like feminine thing obviously because a lot of women’s oppression is actually connected to craft.24

Hebe’s assertion regarding space echoes the ideas of theorists such as Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock. This awareness of such ideas seems to be very influential to Phillips’s choice of the medium and is important in dissecting her motivations and inspirations for adopting craft. If from this statement we can understand that it is not only theorists or professional fine artists that are paying attention to the relationship between gender and craft, we can perhaps also begin to understand the climate into which people are creating. Phillips’ statement is also interesting as it also echoes a key area of contemporary feminist and queer analysis, that of space. A prevalent contemporary discourse within feminist analysis focuses on the construction and performance of

gender in relation to the occupation of social space. This analysis is concerned with the separation of spheres or the domestic/public dichotomy. Feminist analysis criticises the gendering of space, identifying and criticising the public sphere as masculine and the private sphere to the feminine.\textsuperscript{25} Feminist and Queer theory seeks to disrupt this divide and challenge the heteronormative power structures underpinning it. Diane Richardson, a sociologist and gender theorist, discusses this issue in \textit{Rethinking Sexuality}, stating that this concern with space is particularly prominent in Queer discourses as it seeks to increase visibility for queer people and queer spaces, whilst also highlighting the ‘straightness’ of public spaces, which can alienate those who are non conforming.\textsuperscript{26}

Phillips states that she prefers to use craft over other artistic media as she feels it is accessible. Hebe related this to the DIY nature of craft and people perhaps having more experience with craft because of this,

Some people are maybe more likely to have like, a craft box in their house. You can kind of pull things together a little bit, you can cut up… you can like cut up old clothes… if you want to do something like screen printing… you can find a way to do it with like minimal materials or things that you could just like buy from a usual shop.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{27} Hebe Phillips, Personal Interview.
Figure 5: Badges by Hebe Phillips, 2016. Personal Photography by the Author. 12th July 2016
Whilst much of this practice is based on trying to move gender and craft associations’ forwards and try and bring about new associations with them, the past is perhaps just as important. Within Queer communities knowing your past and the people who fought for such ideas before you is very important. Much work produced that relates to queer theory has a firm fixture within the past. This can also be seen through pieces that Hebe creates both thematically and stylistically. Phillips states that she chooses badges as medium, due to their ease and immediacy however, badges also have the ability to spread a message. Badge making is a long standing traditions within feminist and queer communities and organising. Their usage has played an important role in community organising and communication as well as lending a DIY aesthetic to the movement.
Fig 6 is of the bathroom of the Lesbian Herstory Archive, which houses part of its badge collection. The collection serves as historical documentation to the issues and themes running throughout the queer history. Although in the singular a badge is small and often dismissed as lacking in artistic merit, collections can highlight concerns of communities as effectively as any other art form. Their survival within such communities and their reliance still on them, as witnessed by Phillips’ work, indicates this. Stylistically these pieces have not changed drastically and their chosen purposes do not seem to have either. Particularly in a time where the spread of information is now so instantaneous, badges almost seem an archaic tool for the dissemination of information. Considering the focus and importance upon history often expressed within queer and LGBTQ+ communities, perhaps this is part of its appeal.
However, queer communities have been some of the most adaptable in regards to new technologies. In fact it seems that the Internet can be attributed as a key component in their growth and ability to thrive. As queer peoples are often in the minority in their geographical location, many find connections within online communities. It seems that craft has become a significant part of many of these online communities with people taking to it to express ideas and sentiments that perhaps they would not feel comfortable expressing verbally in their geographical communities. A great example of this is the piece shown in Figure 7, which is a felt and embroidery piece by Lane Patriquin. The piece uses a quote from Ollie Schminkey a “non-binary transgender poet/activist/musician/artist”\(^{28}\) from their poem ‘Boobs’\(^ {29}\) which went viral in 2014. As illustrated by the quote, it discusses a transgender person's experience of their body and how societies perceptions of it contribute to gender dysphoria.\(^ {30}\) The piece created by Patriquin is raw, featuring roughly cut, fraying edges and uneven stitch work. It embraces amateurism, which in fact can be seen as part of its message, in that it is not a polished, finely tuned piece of work in the conventional sense, it is intentionally imperfect. The dark green tones, symbolic of nature, could be seen as symbolizing growth from the revelation of the statement. It could also be seen as a way to embrace ‘naturalness’ in this case a natural body, as it is only others perceptions of it that make it problematic. However, what can be seen as most important about the piece is its


\(^{30}\) Gender Dysphoria is distress caused by a person's gender identity not coinciding with their biological sex.
simple, truthful nature. It can be seen as reminiscent of pieces such as those by Lorina Bulwer and Elizabeth Parker, through its raw, confessional usage of needlework to communicate messages one might not feel comfortable or safe doing in their immediate surroundings.
Figure 8: James Bass. *Ruth Battersby-Tooke, Curator of the Great Yarmouth Costume and Textile Collection Looking at Lorina Bulwer’s Embroidered Letters*. Displayed at the Time & Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth. 4 Apr 2015.
Like the sentiments issued by Hebe previously, it offers a therapeutic aspect and the ability to then share this with an online community with similar interests, identities etc. facilitates a discourse and community.

Another example of online queer communities adaptation of craft is from the website Black Girl Dangerous\(^{31}\), run by Mia McKenzie, known for addressing issues faced by Queer and Trans People of Colour. In 2015 the website, via youtube, developed a web series called *Qraftish*. Its description states it is an insight into the mind of Christal,

> [...] an 18 year-old Black queerling, who ponders events and ideas pertaining to race, queerness, gender, feminism, awkwardness, etc., while making crafts\(^{32}\).

In the series, the protagonist, Christal often discusses their fears and worries surrounding speaking up and challenging discrimination they face or witness. In the series Christal uses cross stitch as a way to express their thought and opinions on such matters, as they do not always feel able to vocalise them. Comments on the video such as,

> These videos are incredible. Using crafting and discussing intersectional social justice in a non "have had to read certain theorists kind of way" is awesome.

> These videos, for me, seemed really accessible. Thank you.\(^{33}\)

\(^{31}\) Black Girl Dangerous, https://www.bgdblog.org/

Comments such as this illustrate the need for accessible ways to facilitate such discourses, particularly in oppressed communities, with more barriers to higher education, as much of the knowledge or literature surrounding liberation comes from academia. This can make such subjects isolating, whereas the usage of craft can open such subjects and make them approachable.

The therapeutic aspect of craft within these communities is also supported by current research into mental health. For instance a 2016 study conducted by Otago University, New Zealand, monitored 658 students emotional states over 13 days, found that knitting and crochet, had a significant, positive impact on the participants mental health.34 Stonewall states that almost half35 of Trans people under 26 had attempted suicide, whilst 59% experienced suicidal thoughts and had considered suicide.36 Whilst the LGBT foundation states that LGB people are two to three times more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to suffer with depression.37 The therapeutic aspect that craft can offer to people, who are of significantly higher risk of debilitating mental health problems, could be a lifeline. This can put into perspective the high numbers of Queer people using craft in online communities to express themselves, engage in creativity and gain a vital sense of community.

33 [IBID]
35 48%.
This focus on self-care and mental health issues within the queer community can be witnessed extensively online. Another useful case study is an online community called Crafty Queers\textsuperscript{38}, which operates on Facebook. The group currently has 244 members and upon joining simply asks for an introduction and for newcomers to state their preferred pronouns.

From observing the group over the course of around 11 months, what was seen was not works that sought to be perceived as overtly ‘Queer’\textsuperscript{38}. The pieces being created and shared by members of the group were often utility and decorative items for instance clothing or works being produced for a therapeutic purpose. Works referencing gender or sexuality are greatly in the minority. Whilst it may be expected that the group might focus on subversive and political works, it functions as more of a safe space representing the fact that those who identify as Queer could also identify as an artists or crafter. Identities and people are multifaceted. Although the politicization of objects is an important practice within queer communities, marginalization within society and the much higher prevalence of mental health issues means that many queer spaces are necessarily designated or become focussed towards therapeutic practices.

This is comparable with the experiences and sentiments that were expressed by Phillips previously and indeed there are distinct themes that emerge within craft practice in queer communities. Craft, in this context, seems to serve a therapeutic purpose, rather than an overtly queer one. Yes, the issues are still queer issues or ones that

\textsuperscript{38} Crafty Queers, https://www.facebook.com/groups/477361545722231/
disproportionately affect the queer community, however they are not always seeking to specifically portray queerness. In this context craft becomes an accessible art form that facilitates queerness and the struggles of being queer rather than being used to portray it explicitly. How then does this translate to those whose works are designed not simply for personal development or healing but for public consumption? Do working artists whose pieces are designed to be seen by hundreds or thousands of people still relate the same facets of queerness and queer life to craft?
Chapter 4 – Queering the Gallery

Although the intersection of queer identities and craft can be observed on a community level, many working artists have brought these ideas and concepts surrounding gender and identity into the gallery space using craft as their medium of choice. Not only can this be witnessed in smaller, more specialised galleries such as the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, it can also be seen as an emerging theme within larger galleries and the pieces they chose to exhibit. This could be, in part, due to artists such as Grayson Perry, who since winning the Turner Prize in 2003, has developed widespread appeal.

This wider emergence of gender roles, identities and the penetration of queer theory into everyday language within society can be exemplified through the embracement of such artists and their work. Within such pieces queer identities are not often secondary characteristics or simply part of the biography of the artists, they seek to overtly address such issues in bold and groundbreaking ways. This chapter explores the work of three artists who explore queer themes within their work and exhibit in galleries or arts institutions, in order to analyse how queerness and craft intersect within their work.

Matt Smith is an artist, curator and historian whose practice often engages in the use of craft to highlight and uncover Queer histories. Smith’s practice affords institutions new perspectives on their collections and power structures within their collecting practice. Smith states,
Using craft, with its connotations of the amateur, accessibility and gender and exploiting its place in the art world, the work celebrates the mainstream and also unsettles it, taking objects from their intended roles and repurposing them in alternative situations and narratives.39

Whilst Smith also engages with textiles, much of his practice is based upon ceramics and earthenware, which is of particular significance for Smith. Although textiles are seen as particularly significant for the queer community due to their gendered history, Smith states that clay can be significant in a similar manner. Smith relates ceramics significance to its ‘archival ability’ and importance within archaeology and anthropology, in providing information about communities throughout history. When fired, clay moves from a transformative state to a fixed state. Smith sees this “as a mirroring of queer, which has moved from an activity people engaged in into an identity.”40

Another interesting facet of Smith’s work is engagement with curatorial practice. Smith has worked extensively to curate and ‘re-curate’, gallery and arts spaces. Smith’s intent on many of these occasions has been to reveal, bring forward or illuminate queer histories or perspectives in existing collections. This reflects a trend within the Queer and feminist art world of constructively critiquing arts institutions and they way in which their collections are curated and displayed or the choices they make in collecting. In the

1980’s, for example, the Guerrilla Girls gained notoriety for their highly public posters, pieces and demonstrations criticising the lack of women artists displayed at major New York institutions such as The Met.

This tradition of reworking art history continues today and has become an important part of Queer and feminist art discourses. However the choice of craft as the medium for this reworking is of great importance. The reworking of mainly ‘fine’ art pieces historically considered superior, into a form historically considered inferior, can be seen as reflective of the lives and places within the societal hierarchies said artists would have faced. Smith states,

> It has been argued that there are few objects that uniquely link to individuals who identify as LGBT, so the representation of LGBT lives in museums – which rely on material culture to represent groups of people – can be problematic [...] The reliance on the association between objects and lives lived in order for objects to have queer relevance creates a fragile interrelationship that is easily broken. Without explicit interpretation, heteronormativity erodes queer ties with objects.\(^{41}\)

In figure 9, Reflection, part of Smith’s 2010 *Queering the Museum* installation at the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, is a perfect example of Smith’s re-coding of a collection and display. Rather than changing the content of the museums collections, Smith adds to them, placing another layer as part of the objects continuing history. By

\(^{41}\) [IBID] 12.
using the original object, rather than exchanging it for perhaps a more ‘overtly queer’
one, Smith can be seen to suggest that adding queer perspectives does not change
history. These voices have always been within collections however heteronormativity
masks them. The mimicry of the original, central object, via the mirrored surface
surrounding its mount, can be seen as representative of these hidden perspectives
always being there. Save for Smith’s use of colour for the figures at the base, these
objects would not look out of place in any classical ceramics collection. However, the
use of colour is a very clear indicator of its subject matter due to connotations with the
rainbow flag, popularized as a symbol of LGBT pride design by artist Gilbert Baker in
1978.\(^\text{42}\)

Smith’s work can also be seen to relate to Butler’s theories of performativity, the notion
that our actions, speech, movement etc. shape, ‘perform’ or create, rather than being a
symptom of, identity. Smith’s artistic intervention within museum collections and
displays and the assertion that these now highlighted histories have always remained in
these collections is reminiscent of the theory of performativity. In this case however, it is
the institutions that have deployed or performed these objects in ways that wash over
their queer elements and identities. Whereas Smith is performing or displaying them in
ways that recover these histories and bring queerness into their collections. This
exchange or flip in the way the objects have been displayed and interpreted could be
seen as a comment on performativity, in that Smith’s intervention shows that there is no
fixed way in which such objects can be interpreted. This is an essential facet of Queer

theory as it suggests that gender, as part of an identity, is not simply biological or even fixed. It is a performance, witnessed through our actions and learnt through the actions of others. If gender is a social construct, rather than a biological essence, then our gender can theoretically be any we choose, however societal constraints often restrict or dictate how we perform it. In this particular display the use of colour can again be seen as very important as Smith has chosen it, in order to 'perform' the objects in a queer manner.
This recoding or adaptation of culture is a recurrent theme within queer craft. Another interesting example is the work of Caitlin Rose Sweet, an artist from Brooklyn, NY whose works have been displayed internationally. Sweet’s work is bold and spectacular exploring the intersections of queerness, craft and pop-culture.\footnote{“BIO.” CaitlinRoseSweet. 6 Nov. 2016. Web. 1 Feb. 2017.} Sweet’s recent installation \textit{Snake in the Grass}, on display in the Academic Gallery in Queens, NY\footnote{“Snake in the grass.” Academic Gallery, Queens, NY, 11 Dec. 2016. Web. 27 Jan. 2017. \url{https://academicnyc.com/snake-in-the-grass}.}, also seeks to unveil a Queer reading of art history, adding another, previously erased, layer or approach. In this instance Sweet is reinterpreting Hieronymus Bosch’s \textit{The Garden of Earth Delights}, with a queer reading, using craft as a mechanism with which to achieve this. As can be seen in Fig 10, the piece is vast and almost architectural, stretching across the gallery using fibre and ceramics, creating small subsections that the viewer has to navigate, with no fixed pathway. The colours in the piece are important due to their symbolic nature, with a heavy usage of pink subverting the idea of gendered colours. This subversion can be seen through the almost gruesome nature of some of the elements of the piece and the idea of femininity as representing innocence or softness. For example as can be seen in the lower right hand corner of Fig 10, Sweet has created long, disjointed hand-like shapes, chains with a single finger attached and what appears to be explosives using lipsticks, another symbol of femininity, to create its distinctive shape. This gruesomeness can also be seen as glamorized through the use of lipstick imagery and associations as well as striking metallics and jewels and pearls.
that can be seen in sections. Although the elements of the piece are distinctive, their exact forms are never quite clear.

The lack of clarity and the ambiguity of the piece can be seen to relate to the work of the renowned Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, mentioned previously. Kosofsky Sedgwick worked extensively in the 1970s and 1980s on drawing out hidden socio-sexual subplots in canonical literature, and is credited as being an early contributor to queer theory, informs Sweet's approach. In 1991, Kosofsky Sedgwick published *Queer and Now*, an essay discussing and examining insights into Queer people's lives and psyches. Under the subheading *Promising, Reading, Smuggling, Overreading*, discussing the impact of the marginalisation and negation of Queer identities, Kosofsky Sedgwick asserts,

I think that for many of us in childhood the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us became a prime resource for survival. We needed there to be sites where the meanings didn’t line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest in those sites with fascination and love.45

Kosofsky Sedgwick’s assertion regarding meanings that don’t ‘line up tidily’ is reminiscent of the untidy, unclear, uncertainty of *Snake in the Grass*. This idea of

---

attachment to items of high or popular culture expressed and their relationship to uncertain or oblique meanings can also aid further understanding of *Snake in the Grass*. It can be seen that this is exactly what Sweet has done by re-coding *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, something of ‘high’ culture and bringing forward potential queerness but also its ambiguity and ability to have different meanings to different people. Sweet herself expressed similar intent towards her works and presses upon the importance of re-coding popular culture, stating,

> Queer folks have a long history of consuming and re-coding pop culture to form spaces for us to exist. I see my work as queer craft feminist camp [...] 

This idea of space or a ‘queer craft feminist camp’ is an important element of the piece. Sweet’s work is often large and imposing, almost structural, similar in this way to the work of artists such as Sheila Pepe in the late 1990s. Sweet has worked with a varied media including ceramics and reclaimed or found textiles in order to create the many components of the piece. The multiple sections or ‘ecosystems’ as one critic described them[^46], allow the viewer to take their own path through the piece, much like one must when viewing *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, due to its density. Sweet describes herself as a ‘queer world maker’[^47]. This and the idea of a ‘queer feminist craft camp’ certainly could explain the choice of isolated islands as the geography of the installation. This immersiveness can be again seen as a theme within craft practice and perhaps

explains its attraction to Queer communities, able to create their own worlds within crafts bounds. Sweet states,

2D work frustrates me. I want to touch it, move it, and dive into the world. I make work that engages people on a visceral level. The way I make installations forces people to move through the space.48

---

Figure 10: Caitlin Rose Sweet, *Snake in the Grass* (Installation View). Shown at the Academic Gallery, Queens, New York City. 16 Mar. 2016.
This almost interactive element, which Sweet has explored before⁴⁹, echoes sentiments similar to those who use craft, as discussed earlier, as a way to facilitate interactivity, discussion and expression, on a community level, due to its accessibility. It also relates to the idea of space. By allowing the viewer to navigate their own way around this ‘ecosystem’ or ‘queer world’ affords them agency that they may not have in the ‘real’ world due to stigmatization.

Sweet’s work is a useful example of the ability of craft to create space. It’s tactile nature and versatility allows for it to be worked into entire ‘ecosystems’ if desired and afford the artist and audience a space and grounding, when meanings may be confusing or uncertain. This idea of creating a space, whilst in this case physically, can relate to the ability of craft as seen in chapter 3, to create emotional space and a place where self-expression can create something unique and physical which takes up space.

Figure 11: LJ Roberts, *The Queer Houses of Brooklyn and the Three Towns of Boswyck, Breukelen and Midwout in the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era*. Crank-Knit Yarn, fabric, thread, sequins, poly-fil, 1" pins. 9' x 9' x 14. 2011.
Another artist whose work is bold, vast and not afraid to take up space is LJ Roberts. A great example of Roberts work is the piece, *The Queer Houses of Brooklyn and the Three Towns of Boswyck, Breukelen and Midwout in the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era*, displayed as part of the exhibition, *Queer Threads*. The piece is large and substantial, its weight is apparent even without holding it. It dominates an entire wall, flowing outwards to the floor where and at the end there is a sea of scattered 1" buttons the visitor is encouraged to take. Roberts embroiders the names of current queer collective houses on a map of gold fabric in the centre of the piece. The colours are bold and striking and its structural and solid physicality is surprising considering it’s made from yarn and fabric. The piece relays community, even being a tangible, physical representation of this. Roberts, who also produces academic essays on craft states in *Craft, Queerness and Guerilla Tactics: An Extended Maker’s Statement*,

For me, knitting is the queerest media there is. Knitting complicates the linear and the two needles activate a third space illustrated by materiality created by knitting. Just when you think you’ve pinned knitting down someone, something, finds a new way to queer it…. Knitting one stitch at a time is a pain-staking process, but using this technique to create a large, interactive installation was a challenge I wanted to take on.  

---

Similarly to other artists mentioned previously, the piece also focuses on history, recreating a part of a key moment in Queer and social history. Roberts emphasises this aspect of community, through the participatory element of the display via the accompaniment of small badges, shown in detail in Fig 12, that viewers are encouraged to take. When asked about the badges in an interview, John Chiach, the curator of *Queer Threads* stated,

> Conceptually and even politically, the buttons convey a kind of queer democracy and generosity by giving the viewer something they can take with them for free. When worn, the buttons also extend the visibility of the queer houses and queerness in general. The textures of LJ’s *The Queer Houses of Brooklyn*…, and all of the work in Queer Threads, make it so tempting to the touch, so I know viewers appreciate having something they can not only touch but also take, wear, and celebrate.\(^1\)

The badges are very easily compared to those created by Hebe Phillips and those displayed at the Lesbian Herstory Archive, mentioned earlier both stylistically and via their appeal. As Chiach suggests, their appeal too seems to be rooted in accessibility. In a gallery space where barriers separate works and people, both physically or conventionally, badges bridge the divide. They transform a piece of institutionalised art, only privately available to the wealthy collector, into an experience that can be shared.

After all, the roots of the piece lie in community. To ensure this continuation into the gallery space, through a traditional route for the spread of information and community that Queer history is founded upon, seems appropriate.

LJ Roberts on her website, states that the piece is inspired by or a homage to the potent imagery of Queer activist movements such as the Stonewall Riots, DIY and Punk sentiments but also the imagery of the AIDS quilt and Gran Fury, the activist art collective who were created by members of ACT UP! Roberts listed inspirations, relied heavily upon the spread of their messages and art via such media as badges. The of badges in this instance could be showing a dedication not only to art, but also to aiding the spread of Roberts messages, information and the facilitation and importance of community that often thrives in marginalised peoples.

A connection to community can afford people a connection to an identity. Whilst marginalised within society, Queer identities are often simultaneously under the microscope. In Roberts essay, “Put Your Thing Down Flip it and Reverse It: Reimagining Craft Identities Using Tactics of Queer Theory” Roberts discusses an identity crisis prevalent in contemporary craft. Roberts credits this crisis to crafts’ marginalised position in the contemporary arts world, with examples such as prominent institutions, such as the changing of the American Craft Museum in New York to the Museum of Arts and Design in 2002, dropping ‘Craft’ from their names and instead

---

choosing to reside with simply ‘art’ or ‘design’. Roberts discusses how craft has a certain ‘image’, one that labels it amateur or hobbyist. She asserts that this may partly be due to the lack of critical theory within craft. However, Roberts states that using tactics of Queer Theory could be part of the solution,

The tactics of reclamation, reappropriation, and disidentification used in queer theory and praxis give non-normative identities agency as well as question the seemingly stable systems that render them as other. These tactics acknowledge stereotypes, transpose them, and then subvert them to form new models of identity.

When queer tactics are applied to or merged with craft, the result is a two-fold approach to addressing stereotypes and taking back control of an identity that has been exploited, misinterpreted and de-valued. These tactics are also fluid, allowing for change and revaluation. It is interesting or perhaps purposeful then that Roberts chose a medium, that is so open to change and reworking itself.

Figure 12: LJ Roberts. Badges from The Queer Houses of Brooklyn and the Three Towns of Boswyck, Breukelen and Midwout in the 41st Year of the Stonewall Era Installation at the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art. 1" pins. 2011.
Their ‘low art’ status, most likely placed even lower on a creative hierarchy, than for instance textiles and fibre art and is inspired by ‘camp’ or ‘kitsch’ aesthetics that have come to be a theme recurrent in Queer visuals. As discussed previously, a large factor in craft is its process, much of which is collaborative. Although Roberts crafted the piece, it was a collaborative effort, based on a drawing by Daniel Rosza Lang/Levitsky and featuring illustrations by Buzz Slutzky, unfortunately neither is available publicly. This process of collaboration then continues with the interactive addition of badges to the overall display, as those who take them can then also be seen as part of not only the ‘art’ but also the activist collective itself strives to capture.

The piece also focuses on the element of space and alike the work of Matt Smith and Caitlin Rose Sweet see earlier seeks to document and solidify the importance of space within Queer communities. This relates to sentiments expressed by Hebe Phillips and the work she undertakes with community groups to fight against heteronormativity and as Phillips herself puts it ‘take up space’. The very mapping of this space by Roberts makes it significance and visible, identifying it as a legitimate community and ground fought hard to gain and occupy. The inclusion of this, within a piece that is itself large, imposing, bright and loud solidifies its sense of community and acts as a celebration of this. Whilst bright, vibrant colours can be seen as part of a thematic *queer aesthetic*, in this instance the colours aid the piece in taking up space and illustrate the colour that the queer community contributes to the landscape.
All three artists mentioned in this section, have sought to create pieces that are designed to occupy space and be noticed. Where it is not available they have sought to carve it out, interrupting normative display or content, to demand to be seen and heard.
Conclusion

Although in this study, Queer craft is practiced in different contexts and spaces, a theme emerges. Both within communities and within arts institutions, craft is specifically used not only as a means of expression of identity but to tackle and solve issues faced by its respective communities. Within the communities and community groups mentioned previously, craft acts as a device to aid conversation, providing a therapeutic outlet for those whose identity is perceived as against normative attitudes. Crafts has a naturally therapeutic quality, measured by studies that examine its impact on mental health and evidenced by the masses who choose it as a tool with which to access difficult emotions. It’s neglected status and position on the margins make it an ideal medium for communities who themselves feel outside of the ‘mainstream’. Both also demonstrate a great importance put upon history. Whether it be referring those whose work and lives have added to queer discourses and fought for queer liberation or re-coding popular culture to make those histories hidden by heteronormativity finally visible and appreciated. This focus upon history however is not surprising for communities whose very existence has been denied or denigrated so long. Artists, through their visual medium, are able to provide a form of retrospective visual documentation or proof of said histories where it may have been destroyed, not recorded or simply hidden amongst other varied histories.

Perhaps the most surprising comparison between craft practiced in a queer community context vs. a gallery context is how aware and involved parties concerned are in theory
or praxis. This is perhaps less surprising for those exhibiting in major institutions and galleries, as any formal training undertaken and their work may necessitate a knowledge of this, although the depth to which this occurs is certainly notable. However, the awareness shown by those practicing in a community context is remarkable. What can be witnessed from the studies discussed previously, is a generation deeply in tune with discourses surrounding queer and craft theory both within geographical communities and online communities.

A query that emerged during research, that unfortunately it was beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss, was rooted in the connection between domesticity and craft. Why it is that crafts association with the domestic may seem appealing to queer audiences? Do queer artists knowingly subverts and deconstruct notions of domesticity within craft and contemporary practice? Considering the high numbers of those whose queer identity can alienate them from family or whom face barriers to a ‘traditional’ domesticated lifestyle, if that is their wish, domesticity, home and a sense of belonging is undoubtedly an emotive and interesting subjects. Pieces such as The Queer Houses of Brooklyn, and perhaps even Snake in the Grass, can be seen to touch upon this subject, however a more penetrative analysis of the subject is needed. As queer identities become increasingly invisible, their interpretations of the domestic and barriers they face to carve out spaces within it, may elicit interesting insights into the fight for liberation and acceptance.
Whilst the arts world is sometimes viewed as a sphere located slightly westward of most people's everyday experiences and realities, it seems that the queer art world is perhaps much more in touch with the concerns and interests of the wider queer communities.
Bibliography


10. Design, Production and Gender at the Bauhaus. – Charlotte Niklas


Appendix

Transcription of Interview with Hebe Phillips - 16th July 2016.

I am interviewing Hebe in the basement or what is affectionately known as ‘The Bunker’ in the Plan B Housing Co-operative in Rusholme, Manchester. The space is used for community and activist groups to meet in a ‘safe-space’ environment. The space contains a bathroom, a kitchen, several sofas and comfortable chairs and a shelf full of left-wing activist literature, leaflets and ‘zines.

Jasmine: Okay, we’re recording. So, the first question is, what is your background in craft?

Hebe: So, I suppose I’ve always kind of been a little bit crafty, even when I was younger. I just had a mum who was an artist so, she always really encouraged me to do crafty things. Erm, I think for me, it’s always been a little bit of like an escape…

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: … to be quite immersed in… just creative things really but I think I maybe started doing more like, conscious crafts, erm, when I started going to the LGBT centre in Manchester as like a young person. Erm, so they kinda recognised lots of different days like International Day Against Homophobia, like World Mental Health day. There was always something that was a little bit crafty about that or kind of (mumbles) So like we always had a float at Pride…

Jasmine: Yeah.
Hebe: … so it was just little bits of stuff to get involved in. So, I think being involved in the LGBT centre in particular and the Young Women’s Health Project, which was a project for young bisexual, lesbian women with kind of very strong feminist undertones and very much overtones as well…

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: …erm, so I think that was definitely kind of, yeah, made me want to make things, just all the time...

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: ……..rather than just on particular days.

Jasmine: Yeah. Okay, so erm, what, well, the second question is what is your connection to craft and activism, I suppose we’ve probably kind of covered it. Erm, had you had any formal craft or art training?

Hebe: So, I have not had any formal craft training but I do have an art degree which I guess, maybe people would count that. Erm, but on my art degree, they kind of didn’t really acknowledge how craft could be kind of important. If it was kind of a subversive way, they kind of liked that a little bit more, so I made a lot of badges on my degree. They kind of liked those. Erm, just stuff like making banners for protests, they didn’t see that as like, being, in big inverted commas proper art because it was conceptual, it wasn’t just kind of an empty room, with like a wanky paragraph…

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … written, written with it. Yeah, so I do have some formal art training but actually I don’t think that is the thing that has cultivated my interest in craft.

Jasmine: So, do you think that that’s, actually pretty… Do you think that that’s actually quite unrelated but maybe just the fact that you have an artistic kinda side is…

Hebe: Yeah, I feel like, it cultivated the artistic side of my life and my personality but I do feel like if I’d not gone to uni, I probably still would have done…

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: … probably would have done stuff but I guess it gave me like access to some, some resources, I suppose… but again I got like most of my, even like craft material and stuff like that, I always got it from the LGBT centre… [Laughs]
Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … anyway. Like maybe like, bought some glitter card from the shop from like the MMU shop like once or twice but you just kind of take over, erm some of the spaces in the student union to do stuff like reclaim the night. Other than that there was nothing really like pushing people really to like make political work. So, yeah like a lot of that was done outside of uni.

Jasmine: Did you, so, the LGBT centre, did they have quite a lot of resources available?

Hebe: Not really. I mean like I am making it sound like they are dead rich…

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … but they're not…

Jasmine: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah.

Hebe: They’ve just got like the little, well its like, I kind of live in this little art cupboard that they’ve got erm, in the, in the backroom. A lot of stuff is just donated or just kind of accumulated over time. So, its like erm, when we make stuff for Pride we always end up buying more, more stuff than we need so it just gets like, used throughout the year or sometimes groups use the space and they just leave things. So, I run a group at the moment called Creative Café. Erm, and they’re was just this like, little cupboard that was locked but then someone broke the lock off and there was a group that used to meet there, which went into liquidation. There was just all this craft stuff there, so there was this giant tub of like paper and like glue guns. Again, so like a lot of resources and stuff they kind of have in the LGBT centre either kind of come in to our possession by accident or like sneakily putting things into funding bids.

Jasmine: So, it’s very DIY?

Hebe: Yeah, we got a badge maker and, I wont say what funding it was but…

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: …you can’t run this event if we don’t have a badge maker, so… and then one arrived. And then we accidentally got sent another one… [Laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … so then we had two. So not a lot of, not a lot of resources in some ways but you know, we make quite good use of what we have.
Jasmine: Hmm.. okay. So… well, maybe covered it but why do you use slash why do you choose craft?

Hebe: Hmm… that’s an interesting question. I think, I choose craft because its quite visual, it takes up space, it annoys people… [Laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … some people really hate craft, don’t they? They think [imitates irritated/angry growl] and it’s kind of seen as being this quite weak and like feminine thing obviously because a lot of women’s oppression is actually connected to…

Jasmine: to craft?

Hebe: … to craft. So, so yeah. In some ways it is, I don’t know, there are definitely problems with craft… [laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … for that, that reason. I think that even when women make these kind of, you make like a giant subversive tapestry, someone will be like [lowers voice] “Uh, bet it didn’t even take you that long” like there is still not a value in the time or, or, the skill. Erm, [mumbles] but yeah, so I use it because it is visual and I am a very visual person. I think it is quite an accessible way for people to maybe introduce their ideas or even just like creating slogans. The main reason I really love craft is because it’s a little bit of a, so if you are running a workshop, it’s a little bit of a third party between you and the other people.

Jasmine: Okay.

Hebe: So, its like a bridge….

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: …between them. So, like, the amount of times I have made badges with people and just like conversations just happen because there is something in the middle and that craft activity or whatever it is, it could just be an object, that object is just kind of facilitating that conversation [Sniffs] to happen. You’re much more likely in that setting, obviously it would be different in like a therapy setting but you’re much more likely to have a conversation with someone that’s quite meaningful, if there is that, something else there. Rather than if you just sat someone down and said [intensifies voice] “Tell me” about your life but if there is something else there it is like a little skill to learn. Yeah, sometimes that can just take away a little bit of that anxiety or a little bit of that awkwardness that people might feel and yeah, how well people… kind of feel… like how good, how, how, blurgh… [grimaces] …how good, again, in inverted commas, people feel they
are at craft, is also a pretty good conversation to have. People like might say, ‘Oh, I might do it wrong. I’m crap, I’m rubbish” so you can kind of try to subvert and kind of question those ideas of what is good, what is bad. What is rubbish art? So, does it have to be aesthetically pleasing? Obviously, a lot of craft is about kind of a finished product but can it have a lot of meaning, it might look a bit scruffy but does, does that matter?

Jasmine: Do you think people see it as more, as more accessible as people tend to have more experience in maybe of craft than of sculpture? Of painting? Of the fine…

Hebe: Yeah. I think its because you are maybe, some people maybe are maybe more likely to have like, a craft box in their house. You can kind of pull things together a little bit, you can cut up… you can like cut up old clothes… if you want to do something like screen printing… you can find a way to do it with like minimal materials or things that you could just like buy from a usual shop. Erm, so I quite, I prefer to do things that way, rather than being like, [softens and intensifies voice] oh I need this special craft glue ‘cause it’s got to be this way. Sometimes you have to use certain materials…

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: … like when I’ve done screen-printing for example, I’ve just used like an embroidery hoop, a bit of old curtain and then, yeah, just kind of worked around it. So, it doesn’t always look as good but yeah… A bit like, I don’t know, just like, it’s more accessible if you just want to have fun but I think there is an increased pressure of making things look good as well. Or even things like Pinterest…

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: … it’s like nine times out of ten, I would say those people have just bought those things or like someone has been paid quite a lot of money… or actually, not a lot of money, to make, to make them and someone’s like [makes voice higher] “Oh I just made this in ten minutes” and you’re like how?! [Laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: [mumbles] some of those posts. I’ve seen them on the internet where someone’s made, [Laughs] or has tried to make one of those Pinterest things and it’s just… [voice trails off into laughter]

Jasmine: They go wrong.

Hebe: and it just doesn’t look the same, it’s just, it’s not attainable, it’s, at all. [Laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs]
Hebe: So yeah, I think there are a lot of different sides to craft. I think sometimes people can use it in a bit of an elitist way. Or, you know... I don't know, it's a bit complicated. People can use it in an elitist way, to kind of say like, oh you're not good so you can't contribute to this. Or, we only want it to look this way. Or, if I am an artist, I only want people to just basically re-create my work, don't want to hear other peoples opinions or, or they're thoughts, or how they think it might... actually reach more people... [Trails off] You're more likely to have a craft box tucked away in the corner. I don't know about anyone else but I just acquire things.

Jasmine: From some random places?

Hebe: Yeah, I've just got so many like weird little bits of fabric and this really old erm, tin, of like embroidery thread, which just arrived... I don't even remember where it came from but...

Jasmine: Do you tend to share quite a lot then...

Hebe: Yeah.

Jasmine: like is there a lot of exchange?

Hebe: Yeah, so I might like swap things or kind of say, y'know, like is that... [trails off] Yeah, sharing or seeing if... someone else has something that you need. You can swap that around or... I guess what's really nice is just like trading crafts.

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: Just like making something for someone else or they might make you something too.

Jasmine: I feel like at this point I should ask you, what, what kinds of craft do you make, kind of, fairly often?

Hebe: So, most often I make, like, badges. For various different things. Sometimes just like, for pure, pure, just for pleasure but if something has kind of happened in the world then erm, usually we'll make badges about it or kind of, in response to it. Erm, recently I've done, I guess like, more screen-printing or like, kind of stencilling, so I guess that's kind of the craft, kind of the craft side of what I do. So it makes, like I draw and make illustrations and stuff like that but it's mainly like badges, screen-printing and then maybe, I guess like designing things... for like designing posters for things. Maybe that's a bit more loosely what someone would put under like that kind of craft umbrella...

Jasmine: Do you do much kind of needlework, embroidery? You said you did embroidery hoops sometimes?
Hebe: Yeah, so that was just erm, that was just to use for screen-printing because I didn’t have a screen...

Jasmine: Oh, okay.

Hebe: … erm and because I couldn’t find a frame that was sturdy enough to kind of stretch the fabric over so I just put it in a circular embroidery hoop but it meant that I could just get loads of those from charity shops and I ran a workshop with young people. Then it meant that actually, they could feasibly do that rather than have like a really amazing like screen-printing thing. That said, I have bought an actual screen now so [Laughs]

Jasmine: [laughs]

Hebe: erm, because it did take a long time… [Laughs]

Jasmine: Yeah. [Laughs]

Hebe: … to use the embroidery hoop. Though sometimes I think, I have done a few little bits of stitch but I am just a little bit impatient. So, I think, big respect for people who do needlework really… [Laughs]

Jasmine: [laughs]

Hebe: ‘cause just, I think I am too anxious and impatient.

Jasmine: Do you think there is a kind of craft for everyone?

Hebe: I think so.

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: Why not?

Jasmine: That’s nice! [Laughs]

Hebe: Even if it’s just laminating things!

Jasmine: So, how long on average does it take you to make, erm, a badge and maybe in comparison in how long it takes to do a screen-print, or erm…

Hebe: Erm, badges, badges are so quick to make. Erm, I think just like the process of making the badge with the badge maker, that can take honestly, maybe about 20 seconds. Erm, depends if I’ve got something in my head already. So, usually try, usually I will kind of be sitting
down and I will think of something and think right, I need to make that. Erm, [Clicks tongue] what I usually do is just gather all my materials all around and be like right, what can I use?

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: So, when I was making this badge, for example…

Jasmine: This one? This is the badge that says ‘Relent-lessly…

Hebe: Unapologetic.

Jasmine: Unapologetic’…

Hebe: So that, I think it was last year? Maybe it was actually the year before? I’m not actually sure, I’m not very good at time. [Laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: I’ll look back and I can give you some proper dates but er, that was just in response to, there was this really, like silly news story, that… So, it turned out to be a hoax but it still just really made me laugh. There was this women in America and she had some rainbow jars in her garden and, what she claimed, was that someone had put a note through her door, saying that they disliked her relentlessly gay garden… [Trails off into laughter]

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … and she was not erm, not a gay woman but she was like, oh, I am an ally…

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: … and someone’s posted this through my door, so obviously it went viral. I was like, that is amazing so I made loads of, erm, I made other ones as well, I made these badges that said ‘Relentlessly gay’ ‘Relentlessly Bi’…

Jasmine: Oh Cool.

Hebe: …and other ones. And then I just gave them away to people and some people kind of bought them from me and asked me to make them…

Jasmine: Yeah.
Hebe: ... erm, and then just donated the money from that to the LGBT centre. But with these, I, they didn’t take very long at all because I just had loads of crayons and then some glitter and erm, I just started making them.

Jasmine: Do you like kind of, the immediacy of it because you wanna...

Hebe: It's just dead quick.

Jasmine: ...react to something and then like, I can spend a minute and have like, five reactions.

Hebe: But yeah, sometimes things can take a bit longer. When I have done some screen-printing before erm, usually have to use like, a craft knife and erm, cut a stencil out and so those, those kind of crafts require a bit more care really. I think, they are accessible in some ways but actually they, so if you’re not very dextrous, you don't have a lot of dexterity in your hands, that would be quite a difficult thing to do. So I think they’re quite good to do with someone else because someone else can just take over for a bit or especially with screen-printing, even just having someone to hold down screens. They take a bit longer, so yeah, I think it would be like a couple of hours with screenprinting really. It might take a bit more time to dream up what it is and if like, I need to buy a T-shirt. So, I might spend a little bit longer on it but if it’s a badge then I think, okay, if it looks a bit weird then I can just write over it or stick something else over it. Like with the relentlessly badges it was just a bit random. So we had the type writer out and we were all typing out different letters and different words and trying to squash them into this tiny little space. But this is what I like about the badges, they are such a small area to fit everything you want to say in...

Jasmine: Yeah...

Hebe:... that I think it does, helps you think, right, what do I actually want to say here? What’s going to have the most impact...

Jasmine: Yeah, be, like, concise.

Hebe: ... you can’t be wordy with a badge...

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: ... unless it’s really small. You kind of just squash everything in.

Jasmine: Or a lot of them!

Hebe: Yeah, just loads of them! [Laughs] Do a whole series.
Jasmine: Yeah! [Laughs] So, erm, what are the names of any organisations or groups, erm, that meet regularly that engage with craft and activism. They don’t have to be about craft and activism but, but use it. I know you do a lot of youth work, I don’t know if you use it there?

Hebe: Yeah so, erm, I run a group called Creative Café. So, they meet twice a month at the LGBT centre. So, that’s kind of a project that’s in it’s second year. Last year we were meeting every week but because of funding… always because of funding…

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … erm, we only meet twice a month now but all the sessions are themed. So, a lot of them end up being about Craftivism or they have erm, a kind of crafty edge to them. Or, I will very deliberately try and start conversations about maybe things that have been happening or things that might be, might be, that might be relevant. So, I guess that all the youth groups at the Powell Trust, which is where erm, where I work. Erm but in particular over Pride… we always have a float. Erm, so it's always quite nice and glittery and fun but always a kind of political side to it. So usually like, half of the float is like, fun and then literally the other side is political… [Laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe:… erm so I think that we try to embrace both, both of those things so think yeah. Oh, god. All the themes for Pride were always rubbish but I think the theme was like [softens voice] ‘love’. So we had one side that was just like ‘To Russia with Love’ and that was like things that we loved. So, someone dressed as, they made a giant heart and erm, so it was like one of those sandwich boards…

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: … but it was a giant heart with like a cat in the middle of it…

Jasmine: Aww!

Hebe: I love cats, so I dressed as my love of cats! Erm but then on the other side we had all these, we made all these anti-Putin banners and erm, someone had donated, again someone had donated all of these like blankets that someone had knitted so someone had knitted all these little squares. So, we made them into like Pussy Riot balaclavas… [Laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: … and wore them in the parade so I think it was erm, always a nice contrast! [Laughs] Erm, yeah but I think people kind of expect to see that kind of thing…
Jasmine: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hebe: ... ‘Oh right, god they’re here’ but yeah [Laughs] it’s a nice way to engage with people in talking about things, so making like slogans and making banners and getting people really to think about, y’know, Pride and really why, why it existed in the first place. So, really trying to steer them away from the kind of commercial side but really trying to say ‘You can enjoy that but also acknowledge where you’ve, where we’ve come…

Jasmine: … Do you think that craft is a really good juxtaposition to that…

Hebe: Yeah, [Makes noises indicating agreement]

Jasmine: …because obviously craft’s so DIY and like, yeah.

Hebe: And just craft is just like, when you make things that are like, big, it’s just quite like, in your face and erm, I think a lot of important conversations can happen when you are crafting. It’s a shame if those conversations get a little bit lost in kind of the final, product but… Erm, yeah, I just love what comes out of peoples minds, erm. If you just literally give someone a paintbrush and you are like right, let’s make some signs. So like recently there was the Black Lives Matter march and erm, in Manchester. So, they met in Alexandra Park but before hand there was a little banner making session and lots of people just kind of sat there staring at like blank pieces of paper… [Laugh]

Jasmine: Where was the session?

Hebe: Hmm?

Jasmine: Where was it?

Hebe: It was at, it was at erm, the Manchester University students union. So it was just upstairs. So, you didn’t have to be a student. Erm, and there were all these materials. Some people just got the biggest piece of fabric and straight away they, knew what they were writing…

Jasmine: Yeah [Laughs]

Hebe: … but then lots of other people were quite carefully like researching like, ‘oh, what should I do’ and I know some people were like searching for peoples names or just kind of yeah, using they’re phones to search for words and like, checking the spelling, checking the spelling of things. So I think yeah there is definitely different kinds of crafters as well. Some people are just quite bold and like brazen and don’t really care. It’s like ‘right, I’ve got something to say and I just want to do like the biggest bit possible!’

Jasmine: [Laughs]
Hebe: Then someone might make something quite small, that’s still just as important. So, it might not be the banner that you see in the pictures of the march but it’s still important.

Jasmine: Definitely. So, I think, erm, I am going to move on a bit to like the art/craft divide. Obviously art or fine art, sculpture, painting, they’re all seen as being better essentially than craft…

Hebe: Yeah, better or like proper.

Jasmine: Yeah, more proper, more respected…

Hebe: Professional.

Jasmine: More professional, yeah. Erm so, first question but I think, I think erm we might have already answered it, do you think that craft is a negated art form?

Hebe: I think it is. Again, like I said before, its seen as something that’s like feminine or like just not as good or a bit kind of like… [Sighs…] I feel a bit like especially, so, I say, I mean women. So maybe they make crafts because they like them, its seen as being like a tacky thing to do or just like ‘Oh, god. You’re making crafts!” I am trying to find the word…

Jasmine: Do you think it’s seen as amateur?

Hebe: Amateur, or just a bit like, whimsical, like ‘Oh yeah, this is just something I do in like, my spare time’ and actually can’t just value it as what it is, it doesn’t have to be like… Well, [Higher pitched voice] ‘Oh yeah, it’s just a hobby” [Normal voice] rather than, ‘Yeah, its my hobby but its important.’ It’s important to me.

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: Erm, so yeah, I think there is a bit of divide. I think a lot of that come from people just being a bit snobby, really. And you know, not all craft is radical, that is true.

Jasmine: Yes! (Laughs)

Hebe: I think sometimes… obviously people making art is important to people as well but I think sometimes with craft people are just trying to cope with existing, erm, and I think people who are a bit more snobby don’t really like that.

Jasmine: Mmm.
Hebe: They are like no! You need to say its for an entire purpose! Rather than just to make someone smile.

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: I think with art there is a lot of the conversation but not a lot of the reality. So lots of people might make work about something but never kind of delve into what the issue is and I think there is a bit of a parallel with that of craft.

Jasmine: Okay.

Hebe: So, are you making lots of patches that say like… ‘feminist’ on it but do you have like a deeper understanding of like what feminism is? Is it important to you in other ways too? No one has any right to interrogate anyone about that, but its saying not instead of but as well as.

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: It’s saying, okay I visually express myself, I make loads of feminist-y things but actually not saying you need to know they theory or have read loads of books but you just need like a general understanding of how feminism is changing or how it does benefit the world, how it does benefit like women who are around you and people who are around you. But I think they people who do craft are asked to justify that a lot more than if someone has made some art about something. It’s like, its immediately profound if you put something in a gallery space, like ‘wow, its just amazing!’ but what if its just like a badge on your bag? Or what if its just in your room?

Jasmine: That relates to the next question. The next question is do you find the functionality of craft more appealing than perhaps sort of the passivity of other art forms…

Hebe: Yeah!

Jasmine: …like painting etc.

Hebe: It’s a bit difficult because part of me is like fine art, because I do like drawing but I guess its just like on my course they hated drawing, I was on like an anti-fine arts course. But it just couldn’t actually accept it was fine art…

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: It just didn’t want to be!

Jasmine: [Laughs] It was too cool for itself?
Hebe: It basically was too cool for itself... and I wasn't cool enough for it... so that was a bit confusing...

Jasmine: [Laughs]

Hebe: Erm, yeah so, the functionality is nice. Sometimes things are wearable or like they are just like a cushion...

Jasmine: It doesn't have to be.... Like... you would use a cushion for comfort but it could be simply decorative but yeah.

Hebe: It could be decorative but political.

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: That's what I kind of quite like but sometimes I like things that are just sometimes a bit pointless. Like, I might not wear it it might just be bunting. I guess, sometimes the functionality of craft might be to sell it for donations or something because people do like it. So maybe more likely to buy that then if you just print out an essay and bind it dead nice. Do you want cake and a badge or do you want this essay that I made? It's in times new roman? This scroll of my thoughts?

Jasmine: [Laughs] So I guess erm, out of interest what nouns would you use to describe craft. So practice, use, perform? Because sometimes people would use different things for art, in inverted commas. Would you say you are a craft artist or that you perform it?

Hebe: I would say I am a community artist. I think that's just what encompasses everything. Sometimes it change with what environment I am in.

Jasmine: How would you define community artist?

Hebe: Ooh its hard! Or facilitator! It can just be anyone who works with groups of people to promote creativity and art as a vehicle for art and expression and dealing with life. Erm, but I think there is definitely a difference between being a fine-artist and a community artist. I think sometimes being a community artist is about being completely flexible but really assertive at the same time. You know really listening and valuing other people’s ideas and contributions but also being assertive in being like okay, we can’t do that but we could do this instead.

Jasmine: Hmm

Hebe: Sometimes people ask me to do workshops with young people and I want you to just make one of your pieces of work but massive. So sometimes people ask you to do that but
sometimes it’s important to not go in with that headspace. You might have ideas but stay quite open and receptive.

Jasmine: Yeah.

Hebe: I’m just kind of rambling on a little bit…

Jasmine: No, please! Ramble!

Hebe: I think community artist is just kind of built into me. And it’s important because I think that some people have experiences of like art teachers being really mean to them and if you can possibly be a tipping point in people thinking, they’re not creative and don’t like art and maybe if they come into contact with people who encourage them, then they can see value in what they have made.

Jasmine: The next question is do you think that craft gives or enables people voices in a way art does not?

Hebe: Yeah, I think so! It can be quite small or quick or enables people to use particularly older women, not all older women, will have skills in needlework and knitting and crochet, but it gives a chance for those women who were kind of forced to learn those skills to use them in a way they want to, rather than just making things they were forced to or out of necessity have to make things. I think quite a lot, like, disability arts you often get some quite interesting things out of projects. I think people who are marginalised or people who can’t speak or communicate in conventional ways, expressing yourself through something like craft can just be like a nice thing and actually it does just, give a space that’s just for you is important.

Jasmine: The next question is about gender and demographics. In your own experience do you think craft, in activism, appeals to any specific demographic?

Hebe: I would say that craft in my experience has definitely appealed to women. I think because of maybe feeling isolated. Like feeling pushed out of meetings because of fear. But sometimes I think those spaces are just aimed at women as there is an assumption that only they will turn up. I would say often its younger people, who are white, who are probably able bodied, probably quite middle class. That’s kind of probably the kind of person I imagine. I think if people do actively challenge that and encourage different people to come along it can be really nice and make really nice spaces. But I think also it shouldn’t be that it just has to be women doing to crafty stuff, like women shouldn’t have to be the ones who run those spaces as well. Sometimes there are men, but usually its women doing all that ‘emotional' work and maybe there is a fear of being masculine and making crafts. You know it could be seen as gay or something else ridiculous like that or it would challenge you masculinity to make crafts.
Jasmine: So, the next question I think is… do you think or do you see a difference between non-activist based craft spaces and activist based craft spaces? Do you see anyways in which people interact differently?

Hebe: Yeah, I suppose like non… it’s hard to say what is like a non-activist craft space, like what is not activist about loads of women, maybe older, getting together for an hour every week, making things together, having really important conversations?

Jasmine: So do you think that maybe this act is itself or in its essence political?

Hebe: So making like horrible gross, things obviously, but I think sometimes just the act can be political. Erm, because yeah, we just aren’t encouraged to get together with people in that way and sometimes people just need to be around other people and tell stories and it can be such a radical act. So if you have a craft space and a sign saying ‘radical craft space’ you might have some different materials on offer or depend on whose running it but actually you could go to like quite a mainstream place or women’s group and some people might not see those spaces as radical but you could go and do something really really radical and go and surprise a lot of people.

Jasmine: Are there any themes within craft and gender that you can see?

Hebe: Hmm.

Jasmine: We have probably answered that slowly over this whole thing…

Hebe: I guess, there are like symbols and images that you might use.

Jasmine: We were saying about purple….

Hebe: Its everywhere! But I love it so I’m not the right person to challenge it. So, maybe the Venus symbol or glitter?

Jasmine: Of course! [Laughs]

Hebe: [Laughs] But with glitter sometimes I think people use it to be subversive so they might just make a patch that says ‘Fuck You’ but it’s really pretty or floral and I think that’s kind of reclaiming a bit of that space. So yeah, I think a lot of craft is trying to be aggressively soft? [Laughs]

Jasmine: [Laughs] That’s going to be the name of the dissertation, ‘Aggressively Soft’

Hebe: There are trends, or a certain way of making things when we have to look so…. You know there are so many people now that do cross-stitch or…. One of themes I think can be
irony or… sometimes people just make craft because it speaks to you, it doesn’t have to be a ‘Fuck You Unicorn’. I think it’s important that people can be serious with craft. I feel like craft hasn’t been like masculinised?

Jasmine: [laughs]

Hebe: Which is surprising because everything else has… I feel like it has kind of stayed in that kind of place but I think that means that maybe if you don’t feel like a feminine women, you think that maybe I… want to knit a fisherman’s jumper. So maybe that keeps some people out.

Jasmine: Okay so my final question is, do you have any final thoughts or is there anything you think I should have asked?

Hebe: No, I was just going to say I will send you some pictures of things, if you want to see pictures of anything.

Jasmine: Thank you! Okay, well, end of interview.