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## STITCHED TOGETHER – COMMUNITY LEARNING, COLLABORATIVE MAKING

EMBROIDERY | DESIGN EDUCATION | CO-CREATION | ETHNOGRAPHY



### ABSTRACT

THIS PAPER REFLECTS ON RESEARCH DRAWN FROM A PRACTICE-BASED PROJECT UNDERTAKEN AS PART OF AN ARTS & HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL (AHRC) FUNDED PROJECT *CO-PRODUCING CARE* (COMMUNITY ASSET-BASED RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE), WHICH EXPLORED HOW CRAFT, AS A PRACTICE AND A METHODOLOGY, CAN PROMOTE CO-CREATIVE LEARNING AND BUILD COMMUNITY ASSETS ([WWW.COCREATINGCARE.WORDPRESS.COM](http://WWW.COCREATINGCARE.WORDPRESS.COM)).

*Making Things Together*, the second phase of the project, involved community groups in Birmingham, Dublin and Falmouth, each of which responded to the CARE aims in different ways. *The Embroidered Ethnography* project in Cornwall was co-created by a group of Falmouth University Mixed Media graduates and staff. It focused on the relationship between embroidery, professional identity, community and education, and stems from the following group concerns:

- 1) The need for a new, real and metaphorical space to support young professional embroiderers, facilitating the step-change from a structured university environment to the independence of being self-employed within the industry.
- 2) An awareness of the demise of specialist teaching of embroidery throughout education, but specifically within higher education, along with a generational decline in knowledge and expertise, and how this impacts both on the profession and the sustainability of groups such as the *Embroiderers' Guild* (Godfrey 2014).

In response to these aims, the group decided to explore how an amateur or home-sewing group might act as a site for knowledge exchange outside the parameters of official education and professional networks, enabling them to consider issues of professional practice in new ways. How the act of making promotes exchange was also a shared concern: is there something distinct about stitch as a means of forging community, whether amateur or professional? Do we communicate differently with one another when we stitch together, and if so how? How does connecting help makers and how does making help us connect? Does stitching together promote a greater awareness of others' and our own identities, and if so does this impact on social relations and what we make?

All sessions were documented using a range of audio, video and photography, and were recorded on the CARE website blog by Hannah Maughan, who led the *Embroidered Ethnography* group. The participants contributed their thoughts and feelings at the end of each session on paper doilies, to be scanned for the project archive and website. Additionally, alluding to how embroidery produced during the sessions might signal the group

experience, snatches of conversation, thoughts and feelings, were later sewn into items used in the session to create a 'Story Sewing Box'.

This paper explores the group dynamics, narratives, material artefacts and experiential affects of making as they evolved throughout the sessions, and proposes a new form of conceptualizing embroidery as a mode of ethnographic practice. Drawing on relevant histories and theories of amateur and professional making, moreover, it offers a new perspective on how professional identities and practices might be reimaged in an amateur setting.

## INTRODUCTION

The structure of the studio-based BA (Hons) Textile Design degree at Falmouth University aims to provide a positive model of community learning, enhanced by cooperative making, which encourages strong bonds to form within an inspiring and nurturing environment. These benefits, however, can often be taken for granted, with graduates only fully recognising them when they face the sometimes harsher realities of the workplace.

Whilst, the professional studio can offer the employed graduate a supportive and congenial environment, life as an independent freelancer can be a lonelier existence, and the transition to a professional identity uneasy. Maughan recalls how working alone after graduation was isolating and impacted on her wellbeing, motivation, creativity and confidence. Moving into a shared studio with other creative practitioners was a lifeline that re-established a much needed social and professional support network, a structured routine, and access to facilities and opportunities for making, sharing and learning co-operatively. Without this she feels that her ambitions as a self-employed textile

designer would have been severely limited. This experience was a key factor motivating the project.

Conversations with mixed media graduates highlighted similar stories. Some were freelancing while working part-time to provide a regular income, others had given up their own work in favour of a full-time job. A few were working full-time with the ambition to become self-employed. Studio space, however, is expensive and difficult to sustain. Recurring barriers and frustrations prevented the graduates from fulfilling their creative ambitions and potential; most common was the lack of community. All expressed a strong desire for company and a collegiate network of individuals with shared interests who understood the challenges faced by the professional embroider. Several graduates had participated in stitch groups, which offered conviviality, but as these were principally aimed at hobbyists who invariably had different agendas, interests and levels of skill, did not entirely meet their needs.

There is a long and significant history of women collectively making, from traditional sewing groups and quilting bees to today's Stitch 'n' Bitch and 'maker' communities (Parker 1984, Minahan & Cox 2007, Levine & Heimerl 2008). Whether initiated by a charity or cause, motivated by the need to keep a skill alive, or simply a desire to enjoy the convivial pleasure of making together, these groups enable like-minded people to come together to chat, share, learn, support one another and sometimes get 'active', even in the quietest of ways (Greer 2008, Hackney 2013a). Community making can operate on many levels (Felcey et al. 2013). Projects have demonstrated how, as a form of community engagement, this form of making can promote intergenerational working, critical thinking or inform



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policy (Voluntary Arts 2013, Hackney 2013b, Tseklevs et al. 2015). Jo Morrison and Anne Marr (2013: 5), for instance, who led the *Threads and Yarns* project in collaboration with the Wellcome Foundation and the Victoria & Albert Museum, showed how community crafting can serve as a means to share very personal accounts of health and wellbeing, acting as a cross-disciplinary research tool for ‘...socio-responsive textile design research practice’.

Drawing on formal and informal evidence, Fiona Hackney, Principal Investigator for CARE, and project researcher Maughan set up the graduate group. The aim was to combine some of the assets of the art and design school: the opportunity to belong to a peer group, knowledge exchange, innovation, access to current discourse, professional networks and technology, whilst maintaining the benefits of the hobby group: conviviality, a relaxed, fun environment that encourages playful experimentation, intimacy and trust within the safe ‘family-style’ atmosphere of domestic crafting (Hackney 2006). The team and their co-research participants were also keen to explore how the process of collaborative making could serve as a means of self-reflexive practice, helping them to foreground and better understand craft affect (Gregg & Seigworth 2010). To this end, group discussion and activities were recorded with the permission of participants, who also contributed thoughts and reflections to the project archive, films and blog. Maughan, who made detailed notes after each session, synthesised the group experience by sewing snatches of conversation, words and phrases into items used during the sessions: a needle case, tape measure, a pin cushion, for instance, to create a ‘Story Sewing Box’ (figure 1). This became a form of embroidered

ethnography that captured and materialised something of the specificity, values, hopes and concerns of the group.

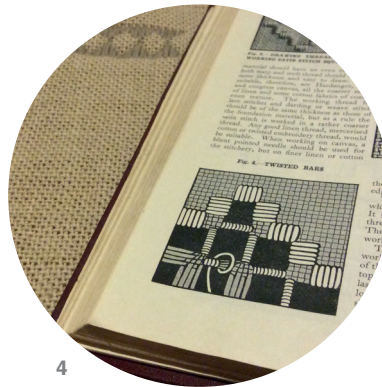
Collective stitching encourages us to work in a concentrated yet empathetic manner, being ‘in the moment’ yet listening actively and attentively (Sennett 2012). As researchers we are aware that making is bound up with communication, belonging and identity, and are interested in exploring how making and associated narrative practices might serve as a distinct methodology. Research practitioners Emma Shercliff (2015) and Amy Twigger-Holroyd (2014) explore related themes such as the dynamics of hand-stitching as embodied knowledge, and the liberating experience of unravelling and reconstructing garments and stories. Geographer Paul Gilchrist (2015) and colleagues, meanwhile, propose a new method of participatory community arts research (the collaborative stories spiral) that connects making, in its broadest sense, with situated, mediated and remediated narrative. No one, however, has considered how the act of sewing might serve as a mode of ethnographic research and, as the workshops progressed, we began increasingly to conflate embroidery with ethnography as equally slow, responsive, immersive and embodied practices. Building on notions of participant observation derived from ethnography and the researcher as embodied subject in auto-ethnographic work (Lassiter 2005, Kouhia 2015), we developed a system whereby, immediately after each workshop participants would record their thoughts, feelings and emotions, mood, bodily state, recalled snippets of conversation, and render them in the form of stitched notes (written and/or visual) or mind-maps, which would be brought to the following session. Each session thereby built iteratively on the other to aid

collective reflection and analysis. We termed these incidental interactions and feelings the ‘small stories’ of making (Gates 2013) with the idea that they would build into a bigger picture as the workshops progressed.

In the event, this methodology proved too ambitious due to participants’ time constraints and Maughan took on the task for the group, utilising embroidery techniques and drawing on data from transcriptions, photographs, her own notes and blog posts. In order to build a sense of rhythm and repetition into the reflection as well as the making, participants responded to the questions ‘What have I shared?’ ‘What have I learnt?’ at the end of each session (figure 4), a framework for reflection that emerged from group discussion in this and other CARE projects (Hackney et al. 2014b). The following sections describe some of the themes and issues that emerged in the sessions, which focused on analogue, digital and freestyle ‘stitch learning styles’.

### BOOKS, ANALOGUE

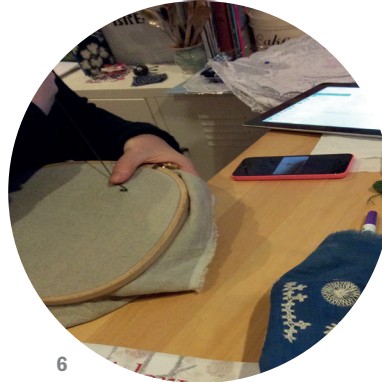
There is a long history of learning by instruction from publications and the group brought along a variety of technical books, which became the focus for the first session. Practitioners with an interest in stitch are often keen collectors, valuing older books because of their broader range of techniques and styles. The group also referred to books, some of them published as long ago as the 1930s, from the collection of Hazel Sims (1923-) a professional nurse and skilled amateur embroiderer, who dedicated her life to stitching, and whose archive was recently donated to Falmouth University. As visual people, the group preferred step-by-step pictorial diagrams to written instructions. They compared the styles of instruction for *Hardanger* – a traditional embroidery stitch using a counted and drawn



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thread technique on an open weave fabric – in various books and collectively worked together to master the technicalities, watching, talking, listening and learning from each other in order to find a way through from book to fabric (figures 5 and 6).

### ON-LINE, DIGITAL

In the second session digital replaced analogue as the group used web-based tools (figure 7). The complex Oyster stitch selected for the session was sourced through the on-line mood board *Pinterest*. Irene Griffin, a group member who is also the Technical Instructor on the Textile Design course, demonstrated the stitch, supplemented with a *YouTube* video tutorial by American embroiderer Mary Corbet (2015). Griffin then ‘stitch-talked’ (combining the physical act of stitching with a vocal description

and commentary) through the various stages, giving one-to-one instruction when required (figure 8). The group noted that although the video was a quick and clear way of absorbing information, they still had to physically work through the stitch to interpret it. All agreed that ‘...nothing beat learning from being shown person to person’ (Maughan 2014).

The phenomenal growth of digital resources and the increased ability to connect and share online is now well established, and has fundamentally changed how we learn and communicate. The group discussed their on-line professional lives, which involved engaging with webinar lectures by industry experts and regular subscriptions to craft and design blogs to keep connected with contemporary practice. Most were obsessed





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with *Pinterest*; 'it's dangerous' one participant commented, highlighting the inherent contradictions of online resources. On the one hand they offer the perceived benefits of an endless supply of visual inspiration, while on the other, they require one to spend endless hours in a virtual world where everything is flattened out: reduced to two-dimensions and de-contextualised (Evans & Hall 1999). Participants discussed how *Pinterest* potentially encourages a desensitised and uncritical approach, and contravenes issues of ownership, intellectual property (IP) and copyright. All agreed, nevertheless, that the accessibility of digital culture is democratising, enabling anyone to participate and contribute, something that shifts the terrain by blurring notions of amateur and professional practice, networks, identities and learning styles, for instance.

#### FREEHAND, FREESTYLE

The third learning style focused on experimental approaches to embroidery, drawing with stitch and 'freehand embroidery' (Morrell 2012: 92). The group collectively agreed to set challenges. The first responded to a still life by stitch-drawing directly into fabric (figure 9), while the second was

stitching text onto ribbon. The tasks were open-ended and individuals interpreted them differently, with no right or wrong way of working. Most of the group had not stitched like this before and there was a certain amount of nervous excitement buzzing around the room. The value of the community group was evident as members encouraged each other, offering support, suggestions and reassurance.

This ad hoc, impromptu approach where nothing was taught encouraged a new dynamic as everyone worked 'freestyle' and according to their own agenda. Maughan opted to concentrate on a freelance commission, Fliss Kemp chose to continue a piece from an earlier session and Becs Williams stitch-doodled (figure 10). 'I'm being random', the latter reflected, '... stitching weird little things. It's nice to rebel and not be on the digital sewing machine' (Maughan 2014). For Williams freestyle stitching, or the 'workmanship of risk' to use the craftsman and educator David Pye's (2007) term, was therapeutic, the perfect antidote to the drudgery of the 'workmanship of certainty' in the form of a large order she had been working on that day.

The sessions provoked reflection about education, the purpose of learning and preferred learning styles. The graduates commented on the positive nature of learning together in a small like-minded, hands-on group: the benefits of the shared experience and the fundamental ways in which learning develops resilience and a sense of 'self'. 'I am not good at learning on my own, I prefer to be shown', one observed; 'It's a nice combination of working within a group, some can use a book or you can look and learn from each other through demonstration.' The freehand session triggered discussion about the relationship between stitching and drawing, educational norms and self-identity. While we know a good deal about what happens during the process of looking at art and design we know relatively little about the experience of making it, and particularly of making it together (Crary 1998, Ingold 2009). Understanding more about experiential processes of making, how we gain proficiency and also discover ourselves and others through it, is an important area for further research that has implications for better understanding learning processes, social health, and wellbeing at work, among other things (BBC Radio 4 2015).

### **'STITCH-TOGETHERS': MAKING CONVERSATION**

*At times there was a companionable and productive silence, as minds focused and hands searched around the physical technicalities of Hardanger. A pause in chatter, replaced by the soft rhythmic pull of thread through fabric, accompanied by the unconscious but audible mutterings of 'inner "making" dialogue.' Then heads up and hands down to query process, share practise and observe others' interpretation, reinforcing the positives of group working and the unavoidable comparing of work, met here with a healthy banter, 'look at Katie's, hers is much better than mine!'*

(Maughan 2014)

In her observational/experiential posts, Maughan aimed to capture something of the character of the group in each session by noting incidental exchanges (the small stories), the relationship between talk and action (making), and individual responses and interactions within the group, as well as her own feelings. The quote above conveys a sense of how the making process structured the nature of interaction and exchange, as collective making 'made space' for inner and outer dialogue within the rhythm of shared silence and chatter. As Hackney observed in session 3, 'The conversation goes in waves up and down the table and then it goes quiet and people get involved in their work.' (Maughan 2014) (figure 11). We noticed how the act of making focused discussion in an easy and companionable way but, in contrast to the stereotype of banal chit chat or idle gossip that defines 'Stitch 'n' Bitch', the conversation always looped back to embroidery and related issues of creativity, skill, and the 'sewing industry'. Conversation about TV, for instance, led onto discussions

about whether viewing while sewing affected how and what we stitch, and whether the stitching experience depends on where we sit (Maughan 2014). Topics covered included: embroidery education, community groups, the relevance of embroidery today in relation to the industry, the practicalities of working freelance, embroidery dreams and ambitions, personal stitch stories, wellbeing, creative encounters, embroidery etiquette, and the difference between embroidering as work and pleasure. The group found that none of them used a thimble, preferring to experience 'the physicality of the needle and the stitching process'; even if painful, they agreed that 'nothing beats feeling what you're doing' (Maughan 2014).

While conventional didactic roles were reinforced when Maughan and Griffin lead in the earlier sessions (figure 12), by the third week things had become more fluid as participants settled into the routine and rhythm of the group. By the fourth session the dynamics of the group had shifted. Maughan no longer felt she needed to officiate or assume responsibility and others took the lead in the freestyle work, suggesting that the open theme coupled with participants' increased confidence encouraged a less hierarchical dynamic. Session five was more informal with a calmer, quieter vibe as the group was smaller and all were feeling relatively tired. By the final session the evenings were lighter, lifting the general ambience.



Several participants continued stitching between sessions, either as work-in-progress or in order to make new work (figure 13). There were a few breakout sessions as members shared the learning with an absentee. Participants collectively reported an eagerness to reconnect with their practice. Kemp remarked that the group 'stitch-togethers' had increased her motivation and creativity levels, helping her to work on a new freelance collection, and others reported similar benefits to their 'work and mind-set'. The group, moreover, provided 'a valuable space for sharing individual practice with like-minded professionals' and building the 'confidence' that enables 'personal and creative growth' in a trusting and respectful environment (Maughan 2014). 'It's a real affirmation of your practice and what makes you tick', Williams stated (figure 14):

*...it is often easy to lose sight of one's own strengths, especially when working alone or in a less creative environment, and having others point out our positive attributes and talents helps us all to review and reconnect to ourselves, giving us an incentive to continue.*

(Maughan 2014)

Although, participants' talk continually referred back to the external professional world, the differential amateur space of the sewing circle where the boundaries between hobbyist and professional become blurred, gave them permission to embroider for pleasure and view the sessions as an antidote to 'work': a space and time to escape and re-imagine it (Knott 2015). Relaxation promoted risk-taking and vice versa. Griffin, whose work is usually highly controlled, was challenged productively by the freestyle session; '...stitching without pre-meditated thought helped me to breakout and be a bit more relaxed', she observed

(Maughan 2014). As participants took risks with their stitching, their talk turned to possible risk-taking in their professional lives:

*Individually we saw these personal goals more as dreams but collectively and with the support and encouragement of the group, these ambitions started to seem achievable and the risk-taking, the need to break the mould and to act on opportunities, seemed more possible.*

(Maughan 2014)

The group regarded the gatherings as 'a bit of therapy': an opportunity to 'air things that we might be struggling with'. For Maughan (2014) this signalled the 'most powerful aspect' of what they had achieved. Others concurred that the sessions became a meaningful marker in the week; 'it's so nice to come here without expectations. It's so enjoyable and you think of the evenings fondly. When I couldn't make it the other week I was really annoyed', one participant reflected.

## RECOGNITION, MUTUALITY & AFFECT: THE SEWING BOX & THE DOILY ARCHIVE

Megan Watkins (2010: 267-271), in her study of pedagogy and accumulative affect, defines pedagogy as a '...process, whereby a sense of self is formed through engagement with the world and others and the affects this generates...', a process that involves '...mutual recognition realized as affective transactions that at one and the same time can cultivate the desire to learn and the desire to teach...'. Affect, as a bodily phenomenon, '...the corporeal instantiation of recognition...' through mutuality and feeling, '...fostering a sense of self-worth...' (Watkins 2010: 273) is, arguably, at the heart of any community group, and particularly a sewing group where the closeness,



12



13



physical and otherwise, coupled with the physicality of making, fosters a heightened sense of bodily connection and being.

Recognition, within a process of differentiation through interaction and intersubjective engagement, moreover, is central to the development of self, as Donald Winnicott's (1965) work on child development demonstrates; subjectivity, he argued, emerges through a series of interchanges mediated by transitional objects. There are clear parallels here with the act of group making. The value of mutual recognition through affective transactions (group reciprocity, sociality, interaction) mediated through 'transitional objects' (sewing samples, samplers and associated equipment) that foster a desire to learn and teach (learn and share), was embedded in our research method, which materialized moments of recognition (of self and other) through an ongoing, iterative process of making, sharing, talking and reflecting. Snatches of conversation, our thoughts and feelings: the 'small', incidental stories of collective making, were sewn into dress tapes, ribbons, buttons and on canvas (figure 15); memorialized as the accumulated affect of experiential learning and stored in our 'community chest': the 'Story Sewing Box'.

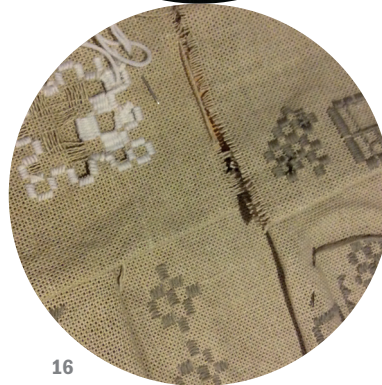
Differences and similarities began to emerge. With the *hardanger* and *oyster* stitch we noted the variety in how we tackled the technicalities of mastering the stitch, both in the physicality of stitching and in interpretation: style, colour, fabric, thread, pattern and scale (figures 16 and 17). The resulting pieces varied from simple repetitive marks to floral and geometric pattern making, although everyone worked at a similar scale, a result perhaps of the domestic location and time limitations. The individual 'hand-writing' of stitch emerged most forcefully in the



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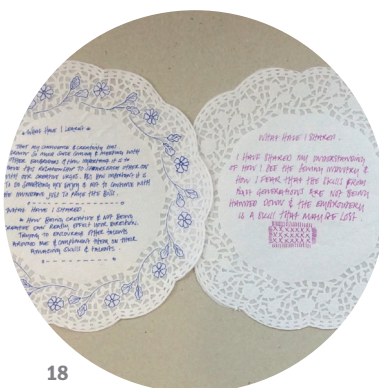
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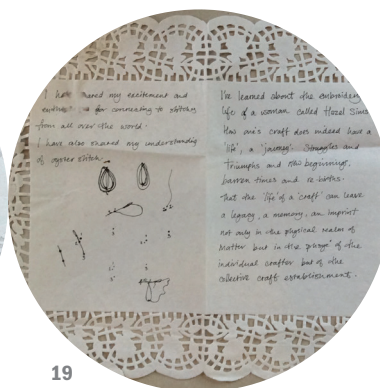
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**IS THERE SOMETHING DISTINCT ABOUT STITCH  
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freehand drawing and writing sessions. 'Everyone has their own signature in stitch as they do in writing', Maughan (2014) reflected. The stitch-act is often aligned with acts of memory (Wilson 2012) and Griffin confessed that the text-on-ribbon challenge brought up old fears from Primary School, which caused her to stitch big simple text onto a large piece of fabric, very different to her normal close-worked style (figure 18).

The light-hearted nature of the meetings, moreover, could be seen as a form of 'dialogic play' (Watkins 2010: 277) or a 'dance of interaction' (Benjamin 1988: 27) as, despite individual inflections, a shared felt sense of mutuality and belonging began to surface. This was evident in the 'doily archive' that the group developed; our version of the impromptu artist's sketch or writer's note. Short 'doily films', meanwhile, allowed reflections to be shared within and across the CARE projects in a form of collective, reflexive auto-ethnography. Common concerns about the current state of the 'sewing industry' and the loss of embroidery skills emerged through group discussion, alongside an awareness of the need to take risks, the importance of maintaining one's creativity, and the

value of mutual support (figure 19). Participants variously embellished their doilies with sketches referencing stitch and, in some cases, with notations recording the process of stitch (figure 20), referencing the rich didactic history of embroidery with its instruction books and teaching aids (Gill 2012). The elision of collective making with identity was captured succinctly and powerfully by Griffin when she wrote: 'Making Makes Me!' 'Sharing Makes Me!'.

Representatives from all the groups involved in *Making Things Together* collectively hosted an exhibition and ran demonstrations, workshops and seminars at the AHRC Connected Communities Festival in Cardiff, 2014, which brought together academics and community partners from across the country. The *Embroidered Ethnography* group was represented by Griffin's 'Story-telling Sewing Circle' that involved people in the experience of collective sewing and story-sharing, and the 'Story Sewing Box' (figure 1), which disseminated the group's collective reflections in material form. As 'objects-in-process' to which elements could be added, taken away or rearranged, both invited and promoted engagement, acting as a 'call to action' for this methodology as a means of community research.

### 'I'VE GOT SEW CLUB!': PROFESSIONALS GO AMATEUR & THE POWER OF PRO-AM

*Whilst we work, we should have knowledge of historical context and concentrate in each stitched mark... The challenge lies in trying to find the balance of technical learning, technical exploration and ownership.* (Hunting 2012: 134)

*Too often designs adapted from familiar styles continue to be repeated long after that decorative period has been superseded by another... It is the idiom which is a living and vital expression of the present which can be sincerely felt and understood.*

(Dean 1968: 27)

James Hunting (2012), in an essay exploring his experience as a professional embroiderer, reflected on the current crisis facing the profession. Identifying the strengths of British innovation, as opposed to the more systematised French industry he, nevertheless, points out the need to 'build on tradition': to understand the '...mechanics and gesture of the stitch rather than focusing on the outcomes' so that students are '... offered the skills and knowledge that





link the rich past of embroidery to the future.' (Hunting 2012: 133, 137). The vital importance of historical knowledge and skill, coupled with the ability to creatively interpret this in a contemporary idiom, was central to the new movement in stitch in the early twentieth century and the work of women such as Constance Howard, Beryl Dean, Kathleen Whyte, Sylvia Green and Margaret Forbes. Dean's work was underpinned by the conviction that creative work is about the expression of ideas and that '... in order to communicate these ideas, work must address the issues of the day and be grounded in the process of making' (Hill 2012: 105).

Hunting and Dean, though working in very different time periods, highlight many of the themes that ran through our group workshops: concerns about maintaining skills, the significance of history, creative interpretation and expression, social relevance, the importance of thinking about process as well as product, threats to the embroidery profession and education. The power of amateurism, as Stephen Knott (2015) argued, drawing on Henri Lefebvre's concept of differential space, is that it is intimately linked to the wider frameworks, products, practices and spaces of society, including the professional world and everyday life, but allows personal, idiosyncratic, unusual or even critical relationships with them. One of the findings of this project is that working, even for a time as an amateur, can provide a vital space for re-imagining what our working lives are, and what they might be. Furthermore, it enables us to do this as a community and on different levels: intellectually but also performatively, through our bodies and emotions.

The potential of amateur sewing groups, which so often are disparaged or maligned, needs to be explored in this wider social, political and situated context, and taken seriously. One member of the group described the surprised reaction of friends and family to her participation because they assumed that sewing clubs were for dabblers and the elderly. Just as knitting has been reclaimed as activism by the Craftivist movement in recent years, this project suggests that much is also to be gained by attending to the wider ramifications of the sewing group.

Like Dean, Sims had been an active and enthusiastic member of the *Embroiderers' Guild*, an organisation established 'to build awareness of stitch and textiles' that works with amateurs and welcomes professionals (Embroiderers' Guild 2015a). Notwithstanding its extensive reach inside and outside the UK, a significant archive, library and collection, popular distance learning and City & Guild validated courses, Guild membership has declined by over 35% in the past few years, and continues to do so despite the renewed interest in textile-related arts and crafts (Embroiderers' Guild 2015b). The Guild is acutely aware of this and is working hard to ensure its future by undertaking a full restructuring and new initiatives such as the *Beryl Dean Teaching Excellence Award* and, with social media supremo Jamie Chalmers (Mr. X Stitch), the *Young Embroiderers*. The Truro branch have been in touch with Maughan and Griffin about possible future collaborations, and two Guild members contributed both to the CARE project and *Craftivist Garden #wellMAKING*, an activist project exploring making for health

(Hackney et al. 2014a, Hackney et al. 2014c). *Embroidered Ethnography* suggests a mutually beneficial model for professional embroiderers to work in the spirit of Dean and develop, re-imagine, and interrogate their work and their industry, in an amateur setting and under the auspices of the *Embroiderers' Guild*.

### AMATEUR AFFECT: FURTHER RESEARCH

As the research project drew to a close it became clear that all participants wanted the group to continue beyond its initial period. Future formats and venues were discussed and, as practice-based co-researchers the group considered future research themes, including:

- More ambitious participatory projects such as 'stitch life drawing', 'wild embroidery' (stitching on location), and stitching on a massive scale, digital embroidery, natural dyeing, and 'stitch consequences' (stitch and pass it on). Linked public engagement events would disseminate the wider community benefits of stitching together.
- Partnering with the *Embroiderers' Guild* to explore how this kind of 'Pro-am' group might operate within their remit to reinvigorate, and attract new talent and ideas to the Guild.
- Working with other universities and external partners to explore the potential of embroidery as an ethnographic research methodology to help us to better understand the experience of making together and how it might, in turn, help us better understand each other and function as a society.
- Map project findings back into the higher education setting to increase



resilience by preparing students for the transition from education to professional life.

- Research to further understand and/or work with online stitch communities.

There is clearly something distinctive about hand stitch that lends itself to collaboration. Increasingly projects are using hand stitch as a means to work with community groups. These are often facilitated by textile professionals such as Lynne Settingington, who has worked with groups in Manchester and nationwide, while Dean's ecclesiastical commissions involved her working with grassroots voluntary stitch groups. Heather Belcher (2012: 56-57), writing about the social aspects of stitch, described how it enables people to '... engage, share common experiences and voice their own stories within a group context', connecting people, literally and metaphorically, through the physical process of stitching together. However, what happens when stitch professionals work co-creatively in an amateur setting, has not been explored. This project demonstrates how enabling participants to work in an environment that references, yet is simultaneously set apart from, the workplace can bring new insights that require us to rethink the value of the 'amateur/professional' divide. Understanding this 'amateur affect' is potentially important for professionals, helping them to build the resilience necessary to withstand the rigours of contemporary working life. As engaged, reflexive co-creators, moreover, the project suggests how making together might help us live more connected, productive and satisfying lives.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research upon which this paper is based was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), grant no. AH/K006789/1: *Co-producing CARE: Community Asset-based Research & Enterprise*. Thanks go to our inspirational stitching buddies: Fliss, Becs, Irene, Katie and Emma and to Bryony Stokes for the film and photography.

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## FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1: The Story Sewing Box, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 2: Group ambiance, Hannah's kitchen, Falmouth. Photograph, Bryony Stokes (2014).

Figure 3: Learning methods; digital, physical and analogue, with wine and chocolate. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 4: Using doilies to reflect and capture individual feedback on session. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 5: Analogue learning methods; books. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 6: Working around Hardanger embroidery stitch. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 7: Digital learning methods; YouTube and Pinterest using iPads and iPhones. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 8: Working though Oyster stitch with Pinterest and printed handout. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 9: Stitched still life, group examples. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 10: Stitch doodling. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 11: Group ambiance, set up for still life stitching challenge. Photograph, Bryony Stokes (2014).

Figure 12: Technical demonstration with sampler. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 13: Oyster stitch sample, worked on during sessions, completed post session. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 14: Group dynamics. Photograph, Bryony Stokes (2014).

Figure 15: Embroidered Ethnography, capturing the 'small stories of making', Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 16: Group examples of oyster stitch. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 17: Group examples of hardanger embroidery technique. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 18: Group examples of stitched text. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 19: Doily refection. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).

Figure 20: Doily refection. Photograph, Hannah Maughan (2014).