

TRANSFORMATION – Effect and Affect of Craft in Society
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Introduction

This essay is a conversation around our making practices and lived experience as mothers, artists, university lecturers, and researchers. Within the wider context of craft in society, we reflect specifically on the domestic environment since this has a particular resonance for both of us, informing and influencing the work that we both make as independent practitioners.

Here, we work conceptually but also technically honing our craft skills, tools and technologies to produce bodies of work whilst considering how 'Traces of Making' becomes a visible and viable way of talking about our 'Aesthetics of Making'. Through our practices, we demonstrate how our lived experience enables us to develop work around this theme and effects how, why and when we make. As Juliet Mitchell suggests,

A life lived creatively comes in many forms, from the day-to-day pleasures taken in the rhythms and changes of inner and outer worlds to the artistically creative person who needs to create and make things as both journey of discovery and a reason for living. (Miller, 2008:3)

Here, the transformative act of creative making itself, is a task which sits along many others in our daily lives, but which is essential to us as practitioners in our journey of discovery as we observe and respond to our environments. Needless to say, in this sense, crafting around domesticity can both evoke and provoke, and activate an affective response. It involves analysing our creative, conceptual and craft methods more closely, so that, digging beneath the surface, we are able to question the way we handle and shape our chosen materials and processes.

Unfolding

Within the domestic space, this productivity often operates around the kitchen table, which resides 'at the heart' of the domestic space. As post structuralist theorist Gilles Deleuze states Things and thoughts advance or grow out from the middle, and that's where you have to get to work, that's where everything unfolds" (Deleuze, 1995: 161). Here, symbolically, represented by the kitchen table, it provides a point of contact; a means to interact with family and others.

In this sense, the kitchen table becomes an important signifier; it is a space where we both independently situate ourselves, since it enables us to pull tactically and expediently from this 'taskscape' (Ingold 1993), amid everyday domestic routine including cooking, eating, conversing, and school/homework.

For example, Cath refers to the mixing of a pancake batter, and this she compares to the mixing of a glaze recipe; both of which are concerned with producing a texture and viscosity that can be baked according to their use in the workshop or domestic environment, which enmesh material knowledge; the transference of craft, home skills and making, which can be compared to that of (Cath's) ceramic techniques aligning with cooking and cleaning, or (Shellie's) textile technique aligning with laundry and home. Here, tacit knowledge from both home and workshop activities are compressed, and materialise through the redundant materials, which impress into her abstract image making process.

In both these examples, conceptual and technical considerations are key to the making process, enabling us to generate pieces, bodies or works in series – as small batch, which are also repetitive markers of time and care, yet they equally demonstrate how incidental or intentional (mundane) domestic procedure, can metamorphosis into creative process, both acknowledging and celebrating the overlooked aspects of daily household chore.

This mediation between daily domestic routine and our art/craft practices, acknowledges the 'ready-to-handedness' of actions and transactions, providing raw material for our contemporary and conceptual making practices, which involves a range of materials and processes, also related to textile and handicraft culture such as stitching as a form of reparation or the making of vessels or containers that are suggestive of nesting and nurture.

As Stephen Monterio suggests,

textile and handicraft culture, [...] often takes place amid other domestic responsibilities and tasks, such as cooking and childcare [...] these activities bear a closer resemblance to [...] gendered labor structures.... (Monteiro, 2017:20).

This resonates for us in our independent practices whilst enabling deeper reflection between us. For the CraftHub conference, we choose an informal conversation to enable us to discuss and address some of these aspects which we consider as part of our process of making and thinking.



Still from Crafthub presentation, OsloMet - Holden & Brown, *Traces of Making*, 27.10.2023

The kitchen/worktable functions as palimpsestic surface impressing inconsequential, random, spontaneous and/ or purposeful acts of daily transactions in its wake. Here, leaving behind physical residues or traces of these activities ultimately represents a daily record of actions or activities that have taken place in and around the kitchen and domestic space hereby enmeshing domestic procedure with the creative act. In our practices, we aim to acknowledge these domestic incidents/actions, so that they inform, rather than illustrate daily life thus embodying traces of making in both the residues but also the repetitive rhythms and rituals of associated domestic procedures, that later inhabit our practices.

As Cath has demonstrated,

‘At this specific time of life, with two young children at home, time to study and balance domestic life with artistic output was challenging. During a frustrating half term, I had planned to produce some drawing and design work, but instead found myself at home, needing to entertain the children. In desperation, I taped a large piece of paper to the kitchen table and decided to draw on to it whenever I was able. This would not only be a record of the daily activities that took place within my domestic space but would also record ‘pockets’ of time throughout the week, expressing the jumbled mix of activities, conversations, repeated behaviours and interactions that took place over my kitchen table. The final drawing became

a busy mix of objects, words, coffee mug stains and playful doodles with the children as the half term week unfolded. This became useful visual material for future glass work. Reflecting on this drawing activity taught me that I was deliberately selecting techniques in making that suited the fragmented lifestyle that I had. It made me reflect on my making processes and I realised that even in my glass processing I was using quick and efficient methods to achieve glass fabrication and avoiding any processes that took a long time'. (Brown: 2023)



Images: Cath's table drawings record the rhythms and rituals of daily domestic life

This perspective is one which both Cath and Shellie like many others, share as they struggle to find head space and actual available time to produce work amid childcare, post graduate study and professional commitments, searching for meaning and finding appropriate forms of expression through 'pockets' of time, whilst also "using quick and efficient methods". (Brown, C: 2023), and which endorses feminist art critic Lucy Lippard's sentiment that

the mixing and matching of fragments is the product of an interrupted life [...] What is popularly seen as 'repetitive,' 'obsessive,' and 'compulsive' in woman's art is in fact a necessity for those whose time comes in small squares (Lippard, 1986: 228).

Cath has demonstrated this through her glass fabrication which has avoided any overly time - consuming processes, whilst Shellie, adopted a process of *Artworking* utilised the office xerographic machine to functions as a procedural and playful piece of apparatus, whilst enabling small amounts of time to be grasped amid home/office duties.

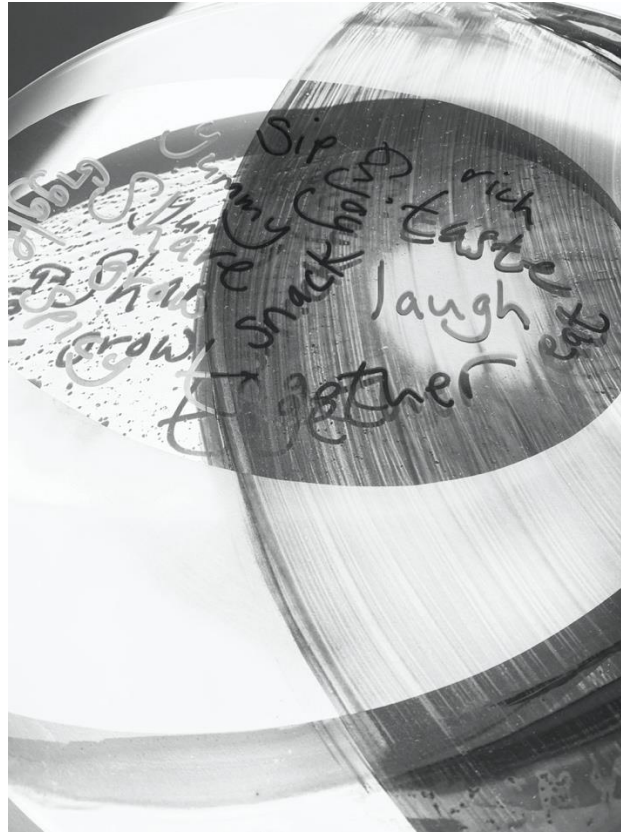
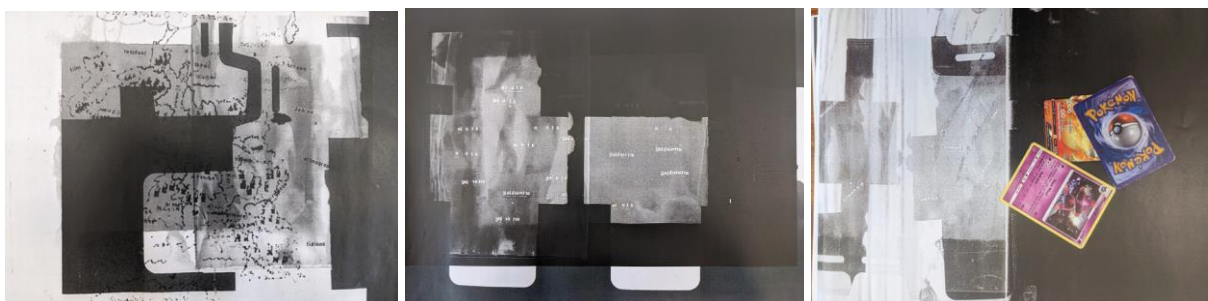


Image: Cath's glass experimentation

Here, in Shellie's work matters of home and work are encapsulated in this instance, by the left - over household paraphernalia, a Pokeman card, a scrap of, or scrupled piece of paper, medicine packing, digital images, research documents, a child's drawing, a shopping list; small discrete elements compressed into the surface, as a replacement to the kitchen table surface.

This has involved replacing, shifting, and rearranging the elements onto the glass copying plate, whilst also feeding paper back through the photocopier to overlay existing imagery with more elements and as a process of retrieval and borderlinking, juxtaposing image and text, digital aspects and analogue pieces.



Images: Shellie's process of *artworking* enables her to enmesh fragments of home life through institutional procedure using the photocopier as creative tool.

Aesthetically this allowed for a multitude of choices to be made, which can be further explored by feeding in different transparencies of paper. The tension here between the limitations of the machine, but also the breadth of different combination - feature, composition, and paper stock creating a wealth of experimentation and demonstrating how this machine can continue to be used for creative production (as it was in the 60's – conceptual art/risograph printing).

Her intention here was to create 'memory boards' that blur the boundaries between the domestic and the professional, low and high cultural, providing points of reference, and anchors to personal identification, interests, activities or functions albeit in an abstract and entangled way, and suggestive of a domestic activism involving textiles as part of a wider discourse around the use of crafting and making skills. They are also suggestive of maps, or architectural plans, bearing that resemblance to a public or private space through this process of transferral. The photocopies serve as a vestige of time enabling fleeting/lasting documents of domestic professional daily life to be captured in a convenient yet disposable way through xerography.

For Cath, glass as a medium is especially useful in describing fragile, yet strong qualities, layered to produce transparent or translucent effects, whilst thread and stitch are utilised as metaphor for fixing or mending (difficult and negative emotions). Coupled together, they signify the contrasting and ambivalent feelings related to family idealism. Her recent work focuses on the shared experience of mealtimes and family gatherings in the creation of large scale 'sharing dishes' which express pockets or bubbles of very busy family time, contrasting with the empty void of time alone as a divorced parent, which equally serves as a reminder of the ritual and repetition of family encounters. Equally, they are a statement about identity, family situation and emotional state as a mother and artist.

"Being brought up in a large family, social gathering and family occasions and regrouping revolved around food and mealtimes. My love of cooking and the need to 'feed' my family and friends as giving to them, is core to my identity." (Brown, 2022)

The kitchen table here serves as centre point bringing together experiences and interactions through the eating and sharing from one large piece. The construction and function of a conceptual glass work enmeshes practical skills in cooking, feeding, and entertaining as 'container' giving agency to the material and situation through transformation and transferral, activating the way in which craft can function in society.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to consider the significance of the domestic space, in relation to our making practices as mothers, artists and lecturers. The home as a space constantly 'in flux' has impressed itself upon us, whilst enmeshing the "rhythms and changes of inner and outer worlds" (Miller, 2008:3); of a struggle but also resilience to express the creative self amid work- life.

Here, the kitchen table represents an essential feature of daily domestic life, which materialises in more abstract ways throughout our practices, as a way to "advance or grow" (Deleuze, 1995: 161), to unfold, for example as drawings in Cath's experimentation, or to be reproduced onto other surfaces, as in Shellie's work, for example.

Each process produces an 'effect' and 'affect' since it provokes a response from us as makers to our domestic situation; an urgency to put life events into action through making/ experimental practice, which in turn creates further encounters with others (through dialogue, studio practice or exhibition). Here, our 'effects' might then be the processes, techniques, or materials that we chose, hereby honing our skills and adapting methods to create distinct nuanced qualities and characteristics. The 'affect' refers most specifically to the emotional responses that these experiments produce in both of us but also others.

The process of transferral as an artistic mechanism, is a political gesture enabling the overlooked structures and processes of home to be represented through making, as a form of activism enabling us to "make sense;" of our situations. It is no coincidence that our working processes require 'broken', 'fragmented' or 'pockets' of time in order to develop our crafts, much like that of maintaining a domestic space. However, conversely, our contemporary making enables this experience it to be 'held in time', as a type of snapshot of compressed events or memories as they materialise (permanently) through physical making.

End

Short Biog

Shellie is a conceptual maker who uses stitch as a theoretical and practical tool to explore aspects of lived experience. She suggests soft activism involves using cloth and textiles as part of a wider discourse around the use of crafting and making skills. The work is produced as part of an ever - evolving assemblage in which materials, concepts and processes are in constant dialogue, both separate and connected.

Short Biog

Catherine works primarily with hard materials, using glass and ceramics, but also sometimes textiles as a contrasting element to the work. Glass is especially useful in describing the fragile, yet strong qualities expressed within her work. Thread and stitch also feature regularly within the work as a metaphor for fixing or mending difficult and negative emotional expression.

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