

Affective materials: a processual, relational, and  
material ethnography of creative making in community  
and primary care groups

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## ABSTRACT

This research concerns neglected affective, relational, material, and processual dimensions of amateur crafts practice in an arts-for-health context. Existing studies on the social impacts of the participatory arts are prone to blur the borders between advocacy and research, and are vulnerable to accusations of 'policy-based evidence making' (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007, p.138). Researchers have relied predominantly on interview material and surveys, and there is a lack of fine-grained, long-term, ethnographic work based on participant observation. The distinctive potentials of making in this context, furthermore, have barely been investigated. This thesis addresses these deficits through a sustained ethnographic study of two wellbeing-oriented crafts groups supported by Arts for Health Cornwall (AFHC). One group was based in the community, the other in primary care.

Observation produces novel understandings of the potential benefits of crafting for health as emergent properties of particular locations, relationships, and practices organized in distinctive ways around creative making. Firstly, as a counterweight to normative views of amateur crafts creativity as soothing and distracting, this study highlights a range of transformative affects including frustration, creative ambition, and enchantment. Secondly, countering an atomistic, stable depiction of such affects, this study describes them as fluid aspects of making processes. Thirdly, these unfolding processes are seen to be inseparable from the intersubjective (peer-to-peer and participant-facilitator) dimensions of creative groups. Lastly, this *in vivo* perspective problematizes a view of materials as an inert substratum upon which makers exercise their creative powers, and highlights the relevance of a 'vital materialism' (Bennett, 2010) for understanding the potential benefits of manual creativity.

Sustained observation also produces a situated, spatial account of the extended networks of community belonging produced by the activities of such groups. Fieldwork is contextualized within a wider field using interviews with nine UK arts for health organizations. Consideration is also given to the influence of contemporary discourses of wellbeing, agency, and creativity on policy making in the area of arts for health. Findings have implications for good practice in the field, and for further research to inform political leadership concerning the role of the arts in health. These implications are drawn out in relation to the potential future contribution of the arts within a UK health economy undergoing rapid, crisis-driven transformation.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents Ann and John, whose lifelong enthusiasm for making ignited my own.

The human skin is an artificial boundary:  
the world wanders into it, and the self wanders out of it,  
traffic is two-way and constant.  
– Bernard Wolfe, *Limbo*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following names and terms have been used in full the first time they occur. Thereafter, unless referring to material in the bibliography, the abbreviation has been used.

ACGB	Arts Council of Great Britain
ACE	Arts Council England
APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
NHS	National Health Service
AFHC	Arts for Health Cornwall
CDA	Collaborative Doctoral Award
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PHE	Public Health England
PR	Participatory Research
TBE	Theory-Based Evaluation
TB2	Time Being 2

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Overview



*Figure 1.1. Rug-hooked textile at the outline stage in the Pendon Crafts Group  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2013)*

This thesis presents an ethnographic study of groups using crafts activities to support psychological wellbeing in community and primary care settings. Investigation was carried out primarily through sustained participant observation as facilitator and volunteer in two such groups. No ‘essential’ characteristics of crafts creativity or group belonging were presumed. Observation was closely focused on the making processes in which participants were involved, and the physical, interpersonal, and community interactions that organized themselves around crafting and crafted artefacts. This *in vivo* account of the material, processual, relational, and situated dimensions of group making was supplemented by interviews with a range of UK arts for health organizations. Findings have distinctive implications for good practice and for further research.

In the UK, work using crafts for wellbeing, where formally organized, exists within the broader field of arts for health. Whilst it is tempting to speak of an arts-for-health ‘movement’ (Staricoff, 2004; Senior, 1997), the unification and common ideals implied in this term are absent in practice. Some projects, for instance, are funded entirely within the health service, and fit comfortably with a medical model of care; others have their roots in radical and community participatory arts, and

may be antagonistic towards conventional service provision or conceptions of wellbeing (Bishop, 2012). In practice, much work using the arts in health is dependent on at least some funding from government-sponsored bodies, including Arts Council England (ACE), the National Health Service (NHS), and the Heritage Lottery fund (HLF), and this funding is often justified on the grounds of the instrumental value of the arts in domains such as health and inclusion (see for instance Arts Council England, 2007). Under conditions of global economic crisis, this funding is increasingly insecure. At the same time, paradoxically, the arts are viewed as central to the development of a UK health service that offers 'more than medicine' (Langford, 2013b).

Under these conditions, a developing academic, policy-making, and funding assemblage supports a research culture urgently concerned to generate an evidence base for the use of arts in health. Arts impact studies suffer from methodological weaknesses common to most social impacts research, and have been accused of 'policy-based evidence making' (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007, p.138) that blurs the borders between research and advocacy. Focus on the development of a standardized arts-for-health evaluation framework and preoccupation with impacts and outcomes result in substantial neglect of the close-at-hand, processual dimensions of work using the arts in health. There is a preference for hit-and-run data collection over ethnographic research using an extended temporal frame. Research focused on the organizational or personal 'success story' or inspiring case study trumps analysis of the role of the arts within contemporary UK economies of health or cultures of creativity. Art forms, moreover, are characteristically lumped together (with some exceptions; see for example Coulton, et al., 2015) as if they were all productive of benefit in the same way. The distinctive features of creative making have hardly been explored. Research also suffers from a methodological individualism heavily reliant on 'an ontology of the mental interior' (Gergen in Gülerce, 1995, p.156). Aspects of creativity not captured in survey and interview data are disregarded. These include situated, processual, relational, and material dimensions of creative activities that are of considerable relevance to their potential benefits.

The current study addresses these deficits by taking a close-up, long-term, fine-grained observational approach to amateur crafts practice in community and primary care settings. My ethnographic approach was enabled by the involvement of Arts for Health Cornwall (AFHC) through a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the Connected Communities programme (Connected Communities, 2014). AFHC's organizational support allowed me to work weekly over a period of 20 months as a volunteer in an established crafts group connected to a GP surgery, and also to establish a community-based crafts group that I facilitated weekly for one year. My professional background as a designer maker, arts facilitator, and psychotherapist is also salient. I have an enduring interest in the potential links between creative making and mental health. As a maker, I am caught up in, and reflect on, the affective reverberations produced in making something by hand. As a developmental psychologist, making interests me as one of the earliest fields in which creative impulses are expressed, nurtured, and thwarted. As a clinician, I see mental health as closely related to life creativity. Alongside my fieldwork, I gained insight into the UK economy of crafts for health through a number of interviews. This study is, nonetheless, rooted in a microgenetic account of the neglected, messy, interpersonal, and material stuff of amateur crafts creativity. Its primary data source is almost 120,000 words of field notes written immediately after the sessions in which I participated. For the most part these concern the ordinary, dusty, jumbled reality of group making; a prosaic and untidy eventscape of irritation, enchantment, challenge, and absorption that is nonetheless a rich vein of information.

My field notes heed Sennett's warning (2008, p.7) that

'material culture' too often, at least in the social sciences, slights cloth, circuit boards, or baked fish as objects worthy of regard in themselves, instead treating the shaping of such physical things as mirrors of social norms, economic interests, religious convictions — the thing in itself is discounted.

Although it was not initially my intention to document the role of materials in crafts creativity, my observational methodology allowed materials to speak up and they insisted upon their inclusion in the account; the important role that they

played as hubs for communication, alternative economic transactions, new learning, and habitual reorientation was constantly in evidence. Sustained observation, moreover, forced examination of the distinctive types of social interaction, both within the group and beyond, that organized themselves around group making activities and materials. It was also conducive to observation of specifics of location and community links that were implicated in the benefits of participation. Over time my initial research questions, which concerned the distinctive or essential affective and experiential characteristics of making, and the potential relationship of these intrinsic features to longer-term benefits for the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, were worn away by the gritty, friable 'onflow' (Pred, 2005) of the 'something/happening' (Whatmore, 2006, p.600) that I observed; they were replaced by curiosity about the characteristics of the ongoing material and interpersonal circuitry that organized itself around, through, and beyond the groups, and about the moment-to-moment, performative dimensions of what transpired. If this study concerns the effects as well as affects of making, then it is a spatial and distributed rather than sequential and intrapersonal account, with pragmatic implications for both practice and research in the field.

## **1.2. Chapter structure**

Chapter 2 provides a background to the project by reviewing literature concerning arts for health, wellbeing, and the culture of craft, and highlights the multiple progressive agendas to which the crafts have been harnessed in the last two or more centuries. In order to avoid a one-track explanatory tack I have taken a highly interdisciplinary approach and refer to literature from a number of overlapping fields including developmental psychology, cultural geography, anthropology, sociology, and material culture studies. Using such a broad range of resources comes with its own challenges. As Barad (2003, p.810) notes, however, 'if we follow disciplinary habits of tracing disciplinary-defined causes through to the corresponding disciplinary-defined effects', we ignore 'all the crucial intra-actions among these forces that fly in the face of any specific set of disciplinary concerns.' As well as pointing to literature that makes links between manual creativity and psychological wellbeing, I suggest reasons for a critical approach to

research and policy concerning wellbeing, happiness, and mental health.

Chapter 3 concerns the distinctive ethnographic approach taken in this study. Whilst participant observation is sometimes used in research into arts for health, it is generally harnessed to provide background detail or to augment participant accounts, whilst interview or survey material takes centre stage. It is unusual for such fieldwork to be included verbatim in completed accounts, and it rarely forms the meat of the analysis. Moreover, fieldwork is almost never used to capture the moment-to-moment onflow of making processes, the diverse and ostensibly inconsequential registers of talk that circulate around them, or the behaviour of the materials at the heart of making activities. In order to justify my much more process- and interaction-based ethnography, I address the limitations of the conventional social science methodologies used in arts impact research, and also explore in detail the potentials as well as the epistemological and ethical challenges of participant observation. The chapter also records in detail how my data were collected, analysed and used to construct the resulting thesis.

Since most of my field notes describe making activities in fine detail from the entangled position of facilitator or volunteer, a broad-brush portrait of the settings in which I worked is required as context. In Chapter 4, therefore, I introduce the two major sites for my fieldwork, describing characteristics of their locations, membership, and activities, before going on to deal with making up close in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

In Chapter 5 I use fieldwork to augment the normative account of crafts creativity reproduced in much survey- and interview-based research. The latter frequently portrays crafting as soothing, relaxing, distracting, and therapeutic. Close observation produces a much more complicated account of the affective dimensions of making. The moods that fluctuate around making projects include tonic and sometimes disturbing affects of excitement, enchantment, frustration, and despair that need to be written into the record. Whilst some of these emotions might seem counterproductive in an activity designed to foster positive states of mind, observation demonstrates that these moments of challenge, epiphany, or

hopelessness are relevant to the potential benefits of creative making in a mental health context. The chapter also analyses qualities of facilitation and group structure that make these affective materials generative and transformative rather than incapacitating.

Disembedding affects from context in order to categorize them risks the production of a static rather than processual account. In Chapters 6 and 7, therefore, I situate these shifting affects within a temporal architecture of creative making. In Chapter 6 I address messy and unpredictable aspects of crafts creativity that required of makers a willingness to collaborate with materials rather than master them. For some participants, the merit of an aesthetics of fortuity that required them to 'go with the flow' was counterintuitive. The chapter explores how makers came to appreciate the pragmatics of playfulness, curiosity, and experimentation in developing and materializing their ideas.

In Chapter 7, I examine making from the perspective of a longer chronological frame stretching from initial conception or plan to completed artefact. This unit of analysis emphasizes the role of a makerly intentionality and agency that was, nonetheless, in constant dialogue with a variety of frustrating or happy accidents. Observations are used to discuss the nature of deliberative creativity in these settings, and to document ways in which the vital materiality of glass, grout, ink, paper, and cloth was tangled up with the volitional agency of makers. I construct, from features of creative making observed again and again, an anatomy of project-based making, and suggest parallels with skills in use more generally in everyday life.

Chapter 8 turns to participants' understandings of the benefits of these groups. Many of these understandings were articulated in informal chat not ostensibly about the impacts of crafting, and they thereby provide a naturalistic account. Some reflection also took place in participant interviews. Rather than treating these views as descriptive of the emotional impacts of group crafting, however, I have chosen to consider their performative dimensions. These groups provided distinctive opportunities to enact creativity, agency, and connection. These can be

thought about as produced in real time and in dialogue and interaction rather than as longer-term modifications to a notional internal landscape. I describe how new perceptions of self-efficacy and competence were constructed around the made object, and articulated and consolidated in a distinctively supportive interpersonal environment. I also describe how particular types of connection within and beyond the groups were enacted through talk and concrete participation in the networks and flows activated around participants. Habit is used as a useful lens through which to view personal change in this context.

Chapter 9 contextualizes my findings within the broader economy of UK crafting for health, using interviews carried out with nine arts-for-health organizations. I draw out the financially precarious and unregulated nature of the field, and the concomitant challenges as well as possibilities produced for organizations and facilitators using the crafts in health. I also discuss the academic and policy assemblage developing around this work, and the role envisaged for the arts within a UK health economy undergoing rapid, crisis-driven transformation. The relevance of this project's ethnographic contribution to good practice in the field, and to further research that might inform political leadership concerning the role of the arts in health, is drawn out in the concluding chapter.

I have emphasized throughout this overview the central role that participant observation played in producing an original contribution to understanding the affective dimensions of making in a mental health context. I remained committed, in my reporting, to recording the grainy, dusty minutiae of making activities, and the successive moments of triumph, pleasure, and disappointment tied up with them. To illustrate the abundance of riches in this mundane, materially grounded, and often messy eventscape, I conclude this introduction with an extract from field notes. This participant is an inexperienced maker who is having a go at lino printing for the first time.

Nadine, who wasn't here last week, returns keen to finish cutting her lino block and to get printing. As with her other projects so far, she works with a very high level of care, going slowly and doing things very well, although today she's frustrated at not seeing very well because she's lost a pair of glasses, which were the optimal ones for this task. She's not sure about how much decoration to

introduce within the larger shapes and asks me my opinion—I try to encourage her to follow her intuition, and suggest that playing about on a bit of spare lino would help. She thinks she'd like to put a few decorative marks into a ring around the middle of the flower. She cuts away steadily and after an hour is ready to get printing. When she shows me the finished block, I enjoy the delicacy and skill of what she's done with the decoration—short lines that spiral diagonally around the centre. She seems positively surprised herself, but at the same time unsure about whether the block is good enough yet. I show NA the correct thickness of ink to roll out, and encourage her to ink up the block herself. She does this very carefully, and [volunteer] Jill offers some helpful advice about looking at the surface of the block to see where more ink is needed. (Jill is also printing today, and achieving some nice results experimenting with coloured paper and glitter—and her presence at the printmaking table seems to offer Nadine some helpful scaffolding.) I'm glad that I've brought a wider selection of papers today, as this will help Nadine get a good print—I suggest that she does the first one on white tissue. She works conscientiously with a roller over the paper, and then is ready to lift her first print off the block. This is always potentially a magical moment, and here expectations are fully gratified as she pulls away a perfect first print. There's a lovely moment as she looks at it astonished, glowing with pleasure. It really is a very successful print—a rich solid black, everything clearly delineated, just the right amount of dappled tone transferred from the rough background that she's cut away, and the lines that she'd identified as inaccurately cut because of her missing glasses adding to the hand-drawn charm of the finished result. After this moment of silence, Nadine exclaims, 'I could never have imagined I'd do something like this! I can't believe it!' Jill, who also witnessed this first print being pulled, says kindly, 'it looks like you're about to cry!' Nadine says, 'I am! I had no idea I could do this!' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 25/11/13)



*Figure 1.2. Nadine (left) taking a first print from her lino block, with my help (Photo: David Lidstone, 2013)*

### **1.3. A note on photographs**

The photographs that accompany this thesis are included in part to bring the account to life for the reader. Occasionally, as in the field note and image above, a photograph fortuitously documents a moment that I later recorded in writing, and this is made clear in its title. Beyond this narrative or illustrative function, however, the photographs record the ongoing, ordinary, generative, alluring,

untidy, dynamic muddle that is characteristic of such settings—exactly the mess that is discarded as inconsequential when participants are interviewed about their experiences in such groups. They serve, thus, as a visual reminder of the entangled nature of interactions between actors, between materials of various types, and between makers and materials, and underline the thinginess (Ingold, 2010a, p.96), embodiment, and connectivity that have been reinstated as significant in this processual and materially grounded ethnography of group making. Images were taken with care to preserve the anonymity of participants, and are used with their consent.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONCEPTUALIZING THE BENEFITS OF THE ARTS, THE MEANING OF WELLBEING, AND THE NATURE OF CRAFTS PRACTICE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature from a range of academic and policy backgrounds relevant to this study. It covers three broad areas. The first is the field of *arts for health*, as the primary context for my research. In sections 2.2 and 2.3 the history and characteristics of the arts-for-health research agenda are outlined, and some critical responses presented. Any discussion of the social impacts of the arts raises questions concerning *the nature of wellbeing* and the determinants of human health and happiness. Sections 2.4 and 2.5, therefore, describe an assemblage of research and policy around the contemporary UK wellbeing agenda, and introduce some work critical of its underlying assumptions. The narrower focus of this project is the area of *crafts practice*, or ‘the satisfactions of manifesting oneself concretely in the world through manual competence’ (Crawford, 2010, p.15). This has until recently been neglected as a topic of historical, sociological, or theoretical interest. Sections 2.6 and 2.7, therefore, will summarize literature on the historical determinants and contemporary characteristics of the UK culture of craft, and its links to a number of progressive agendas including arts for health. In so doing, I will highlight gaps, deficits, and contested areas in the literature, and show how these provide the rationale for the current study of amateur group crafting for wellbeing.

#### **2.2. Researching the health and social impacts of the arts**

##### *Defining arts for health*

The diverse field of contemporary arts-for-health practice resists tidy categorization, as evidenced by the variety of attempts to pin it down (e.g. Clift, et al., 2009; White, 2010; Raw, 2013). Arts Council England (2007, p.5) define ‘arts and health’ straightforwardly as ‘arts-based activities that aim to improve individual and community health and healthcare delivery, and which enhance the

healthcare environment by providing artwork or performances'. Smith (2003, p.9), conversely, cautions:

The search for an agreed definition of arts/health is a red herring. It runs the risk of constraining its evolution. Defining this area before it has developed risks limiting and denying some perspectives. The field is connected by an aim to broaden and deepen ways in which we as a society understand health and seek to improve it. Core to all is an aim to encompass an artistic perspective on the aim of improving health, regardless of which dimension is targeted.

A number of reviews attempt to compartmentalize different areas of practice within the field. Angus (2002, p.42), for instance, identifies five elements: built environment, art in hospitals, medical humanities, art therapy, and community arts. A similarly tidy four-point scheme is proposed by Dose (2006). Other authors have represented the field in ways that acknowledge its construction from a plethora of ill-defined and blurrily intersecting practices. Macnaughton, White and Stacy (2005) for instance, map a variety of arts for health practices onto intersecting 'x' and 'y' axes labelled 'art-health' and 'individual-social'. Raw (2013, p.17) emphasizes that the domain of arts for health 'is not contained within a professional or regulatory framework', and 'has no agreed fundamental principles or delineated boundaries, no recognized title, or training framework to testify to the skills of artists', something that distinguishes it from professionalized domains like occupational or art therapy.

### *Historical background to the research culture*

In order to understand the current UK world of arts for health and its associated research culture, some historical background is required. Belfiore and Bennett (2008) review longstanding traditions of belief in the transformative potential of the arts, pointing out that they have been seen to corrupt and distract as well as to heal, educate, and civilize. Borzello (1987) and Lee (2008) identify conceptualizations of the benefits of culture underpinning UK state funding of the arts since the Second World War. Borzello, for instance, describes how discourses of civilization, education, and prestige were used to justify funding for the arts during two decades following the establishment of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) in 1946. ACGB's rhetoric identified the arts with popular elevation and enrichment: 'We are in the mainstream of a current of activity that flows

irresistibly towards a finer and more splendid life for our own people' (ACGB Annual Report 1962-3, cited in Borzello, 1987, p.133). The arts nonetheless constituted a policy backwater until 1960s. In 1965 the first Minister for the Arts was appointed within the Department of Education, consistent with a continuing perception of the arts as tools for moral betterment. This development coincided with a sharp escalation in funding, directed predominantly towards development of an infrastructure for the performing arts, and underpinned by the belief, as expressed by the chair of ACGB, that 'once young people are captured for the Arts, they are redeemed from any of the dangers that confront them at the moment' (Lord Goodman, cited in Borzello, 1987, p.133).

Gray (2000) documents changes to arts funding under the pressures of rising oil prices, high unemployment and inflation in the 1970s. The year 1975/76 was the first that ACGB's funding diminished in real terms since its 1946 inception, resulting in increased scrutiny regarding how arts funding was to be spent, or if it could be justified at all, for instance at the local authority level where such spending was discretionary. High culture continued to be argued for in terms of its intrinsic merits. In a report on arts funding commissioned by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, for instance, Redcliffe-Maud (1976, p.15), defended state patronage of the arts because without it there would be

no serious theatre, either traditional or new; no opera or dance; no symphony or chamber orchestras; no painting or sculpture except by amateurs (that is, by those who earn most of their livelihood in other ways); no museums or galleries or public libraries; no raising of standards; no innovations; eventually no excellence.

During the seventies and eighties, ACGB was subject to increasing criticism from an expanding grassroots participatory arts movement seeking to resist the didacticism and elitism of the cultural establishment and to reclaim the arts for social empowerment and political transformation (McKay, 2010). The emergence of a broad range of independent community arts initiatives posed the ACGB considerable difficulty; the uncomfortable relationship between high culture and the community arts, and the ACGB's obligations to the latter, were the subject of extended debate within the organization (Wu, 2002; Pick, 1991).

The election of the first Conservative government headed by Margaret Thatcher in 1979, with its new culture of managerial politics, economic efficiency and privatization, produced substantial changes in the rationale for the funding of the arts (Gray, 2007). Policy makers began to frame culture as something of economic value, either concretely through increased tourism and urban regeneration, or indirectly as a cost-effective way of, for instance, increasing social capital, reducing crime, and improving health. This shift of emphasis is evident in an ACGB publication of 1985 entitled *A Great British Success Story: An Invitation to the Nation to Invest in the Arts*. Styled as a corporate prospectus, it lobbied for increased investment in the 'arts industry' on the basis of its 'excellent sales record', 'excellent prospects', and numerous 'customers', in return for 'many dividends' (p.2) in areas such as urban regeneration, education, and 'national well-being' (p.9). These developments stimulated economic research. Myerscough's *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* (1988), for instance, concluded that the arts had a substantial economic impact through tourism and national prestige, employment, urban regeneration, and rural development.

As the nineties progressed, the purely economic rationale supported by Myerscough's research was replaced by a more general perception of the potentials and responsibilities of culture for promoting social inclusion, education, and health. The state sought increasingly 'to use cultural ventures and cultural investments as a means or instrument to attain goals in other than cultural areas' (Vestheim 1994, p.65). With the election of a Labour government under Tony Blair in 1997, these goals were enlarged to include issues of access, diversity, and cultural pluralism. The broadening of the instrumental policy agenda for the arts was conducive to increasing interest in the community and participatory arts, and more specifically in the use of the arts in health, which, rooted in small-scale grassroots initiatives independent of professional affiliation, academic context, or established practice, had initially generated little in the way of research or even documentation (White, 2010). There were exceptions such as the detailed evaluation (Coles, 1981) of Peter Senior's innovative 1974 establishment of the Manchester Hospitals' Arts Project, and a study of participation in the arts in prisons (Peaker and Vincent, 1990); other pioneering work of the 1980s like

Malcolm Rigler's use of arts in primary care, and the collaboration between the poet and performance artist Adrian Henri and Liverpool's Director of Public Health John Ashton, was not documented until later (Ashton, 2002; Rigler and Gardner, 1994). Now, however, there were intensive efforts to establish a sturdier evidence base for the health and social impacts of the participatory arts and culture more generally (Selwood, 2002). Following a call from independent research organization Comedia (Landry, et al., 1993) for a detailed study of a broad range of participatory arts programmes, 'the first large-scale attempt' to document 'social impacts arising from participation in the arts' (p.iv) was undertaken, and reported in *Use or Ornament?* (Matarasso, 1997).

*Use or Ornament?* continues to be widely referred to, both positively and negatively, and exemplifies numerous methodological hazards, as well as rewards, of this research terrain. The study focused on 'active participation of non-professionals' (p.4) in the arts, on the grounds that the community arts were frequently referred to in discussions of positive impact. It was intended to respond to Myerscough's economic analysis, in emphasizing 'the real purpose of the arts, which is not to create wealth but to contribute to a stable, confident and creative society'; and in treating 'economics in its deeper sense as the management of society's resources' (p.6). The project used a participant- and stakeholder-focused social research methodology combining detailed case studies of around fifty projects, as well as interviews, discussion groups, limited participant observation, and questionnaires. The extensive data were analysed and benefits to participants framed in terms of six themes derived from the earlier scoping study: personal development; social cohesion; community empowerment and self-determination; improving local image and identity; imagination and vision; and health and wellbeing.

Matarasso does address the strengths and limitations of the types of data used. In addition he devotes several pages to flagging up the potential difficulties and dangers of participatory arts projects, noting that the process of change can sometimes be costly in personal terms, that not all social problems are appropriately addressed by these means, that not all projects examined were well

executed, that they were not all successful across all six of his dimensions, and that 'positive outcomes can turn sour if work is not built on' (p.9). Overall, he concludes that 'participatory arts projects are essential components of successful social policy' (p.9), and that reciprocally, the funded arts should see themselves as responsible for making a contribution to society. Addressing oft-voiced fears about 'poor quality' in the community arts, Matarasso notes that 'a cultural policy which needs protection from people's participation is not worth the name' (p.10). The high-visibility summary of findings that precedes the main account is quoted frequently, however, as irrefutable evidence in support of the beneficial impacts of arts participation. As a consequence, *Use or Ornament?* has provoked strong criticism (Merli, 2002; Belfiore, 2002). Merli, for instance, is scathing about the methodological weaknesses of the research (pp.108-12), and argues (p.114) that

Matarasso's vision is directed to social stability obtained by means of 'peaceful' popular consensus, the underlying inspiration seemingly being that whereas the rich are doing the 'right' things, the poor should be soothed through 'therapeutic' artistic activities'.

Merli makes a number of useful recommendations, highlighting the need for research that addresses differences in outcomes related to different art forms and diverse settings instead of attempting to generalize across the board. She notes that greater interdisciplinarity would increase the robustness of the research culture: 'relevant contributions include, for example, psychological and sociological theories of creativity and art perception and empirical studies in the field of cognitive psychology on the effect of the arts on individuals' (p.115). She also argues for a more situated view of creativity as 'a historical and consequential process' (p.115).

### *The contemporary arts for health research programme*

Matarasso's influential report has stimulated a large number of further studies (Merli, 2002). An active culture of arts for health research has also resulted from new health service responses to psychological difficulties (NHS England, 2013). Some of these result from criticism of the increasing medicalization of psychological distress (Pilgrim and Bentall, 1999; Conrad and Slodden, 2013). The sociological determinants of physical and mental ill-health are well established

(Marmot Review, 2010; British Academy 2014), and research suggests that many attendances at GP surgeries are motivated by social problems, often presenting as physical or psychological ones (Cawston, 2011; Popay, et al., 2007). Psychosocial problems are costly for an NHS increasingly seen as in crisis (Murray, Imison and Jabbal, 2014). As a result there is increasing interest amongst clinical commissioners in 'social prescribing' (Bungay and Clift, 2010; Hutt and Gilmour, 2010; Centre for Social Justice Mental Health Working Group, 2011; Friedli, et al., 2009). This optimally provides 'a formal means of enabling primary care services to refer patients with social, emotional or practical needs to a range of local non-clinical services' (Brandling and House, 2009; 2007, p.3), including crafts groups like those that are the subject of my research. Recent research (although confined to assessing the effects of well-defined, short-term interventions in primary care) suggests that where social prescribing provides an integrated service that takes account of individual needs and motivations, it can be therapeutically and economically effective (Kimberlee, et al., 2014).

As a consequence of these developments, there is now considerable literature, comprising evaluation (e.g. Bennett and Bastin, 2008; Caulfield, 2014; Matrix Insight, 2010) and academic research (e.g. Greaves and Farbus, 2006; Salmon and Rickaby, 2008; Kelahar, et al., 2014), documenting individual projects. Reporting ranges from straightforward evaluation to more substantial research at a variety of scales. This primary literature on projects in community and health care settings can be divided, following Clift, et al. (2009), into four categories: retrospective qualitative project evaluations; prospective, mixed-methods evaluations; experimental research; and economic effectiveness studies. The respective virtues and weaknesses of these approaches will be discussed from a methodological point of view in relation to specific studies in the next chapter.

This active culture of primary research has inspired secondary commentary in the form of literature and research reviews (for example Shaw, 1999; Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2000; Jermyn, 2001; Reeves 2002; Cave and Coult, 2002; Lowe, 2006; South, 2004; Staricoff, 2004; Clift, et al., 2009; Daykin, et al., 2008; White, 2010;). Commentators (e.g. McCarthy, et al. 2004, p.xiv) concur that 'most of the empirical

research on instrumental benefits suffers from a number of conceptual and methodological limitations'. Reviews also note the pragmatic difficulties involved in effective research and evaluation. A report commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Centre for Leisure and Sport Research, 2002), for instance, notes that those involved in cultural projects are frequently too stretched to carry out evaluation, lack the means or incentive to collect data, and lack clarity about the outcomes that are to be monitored. Most reviews, however, continue to assume that with the development of more sophisticated methodological tools, these problems can be overcome. Arts Council England, for instance, in their 2006 report *The Power of Art – Visual Arts: Evidence of Impact*, recommend a 'framework for consistently measuring social impact to be embedded in the visual arts sector, and in the funding and practice of the arts as a whole'; and 'application of this framework to collect more robust data on the economic and social contribution made by visual artists in regeneration, health and education' (p.13). An arts and health evaluation framework for health commissioners has been commissioned by Public Health England (PHE) and is in development (Howarth, 2015). Assumptions about the measurability of social impacts are implicit in the increasingly standardized use of wellbeing questionnaires such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (Stewart-Brown, et al., 2011) in evaluation in the arts for health sector (Interview 3, Jayne, AFHC, 25/11/15). This literature rarely problematizes the premises on which evidence is sought for impacts in complex interactional social processes.

### **2.3. Limitations of policy-based evidence making**

#### *Questioning the toolkit approach*

The arts-for-health research culture has been subject, elsewhere, to some more global criticisms of its epistemological and ideological underpinnings. Commentators, particularly in the field of cultural policy studies, suggest that 'the toolkit approach to arts impact assessment is inherently flawed' (Belfiore and Bennett, 2010, p.126), in part because 'manifestations by which the success of projects might be judged... tend to occur outside their jurisdiction' (Selwood, 2002, p.314). Such difficulties are not unique to the field of participatory arts impact

studies but a common feature of attempts to measure impact in many areas of public policy including criminal justice and urban regeneration (Oakley, 2004). Galloway (2009, p.128) notes the 'weakness of the successionist understanding of causal change... and its limitations for handling the contextual complexity of many social interventions'. If a linear, natural-science model of causation implicit in, for instance, randomized double-blind controlled medical trials, is not applicable to complex social interactions over long periods of time, then the weakness of research based on such a model is a necessary corollary.

### *Questioning the rhetoric of evidence-based policy making*

It has been argued, furthermore, that contrary to government rhetoric, policy making cannot be an entirely or even predominantly evidence-based activity:

The policymaking process is a political process, with the basic aim of reconciling interests in order to negotiate a consensus, not implementing logic and truth. The value issues in policymaking cannot be settled by referring to research findings. (Weiss, 1977, p.533)

Researchers in policy studies question the idea that there is any simple linear relationship between research findings and policy development. Kingdon (2003), for example, describes a 'policy primeval soup' (p.116), in which research of all kinds floats, and from which policy entrepreneurs fish out the solutions that are expedient or a good fit with values that often remain unspecified. In this account, the influence exerted by research evidence occurs through more indirect means, and values, as well as facts and figures, may have persuasive force. The current emphasis on evidence of impact, however, means that analysis of the values and discourses that underpin particular forms of arts-for-health practice is neglected by researchers, as is the development of conceptual tools that could be used to compare differing modes of practice.

Where arts funding is entirely dependent on instrumental benefits, furthermore, 'policies of survival' may well become 'policies of extinction' if the evidence on which they stand is discredited (Belfiore, 2002, p.104). Critics (e.g. Newman and McLean, 2004) point to the way that cultural activities start to be valued predominantly on the basis of their potential to meet goals in areas that are

completely irrelevant to them, and for their success to be judged not on their own merits but on how well these goals are achieved. The processes of evaluation that are required to monitor such instrumental impacts tend to override more central concerns (Gray, 2007, p.206).

### *Looking beyond evidence of impact*

As this review highlights, in a climate in which the arts are obliged to justify their funding on the basis of ascertainable social impacts, arts-for-health researchers have increasingly been concerned to defend broad claims regarding long-term, instrumental and social benefits of the arts. A number of critics (e.g. Belfiore and Bennett, 2010, p.136; Putland, 2008; Pawson, 2006) describe this tendency as 'policy-based evidence making', a reversal of the usual evidence-based policy making promoted in government since the late 1990s. This orientation has resulted in a lack of research directed to the close-at-hand, processual, experiential, and affective dimensions of arts participation, and into the emergent properties of particular situated, relational practices (McCarthy et al., 2004). As commentators (Merli, 2002; Milling and McCabe, n.d.) have suggested, research solely concerned with measures of impact can say little about distinctive potentials of particular art forms. Staricoff (2004), in a comprehensive review of the medical literature, cites cognitive studies evidencing the differential effects of individual art forms, highlighting the fact that it makes little sense to generalize across them in an arts for health context. The crafts do not feature prominently in any of the research literature, unless bundled together with a number of other art forms, and unlike, for example, the practice of singing (e.g. Clift, et al., 2010), their distinctive characteristics have barely been considered. The rare phenomenological studies have been carried out (e.g. Reynolds, 2000; 2002; 2004; Reynolds and Prior, 2006) rely on interview material (limitations of which will be discussed in the next chapter) and lack detailed theorization of the relationship of making and creating to improved mental or physical wellbeing.

To summarize, a context 'dominated by the need to justify expenditure in terms of government priorities' (Putland, 2008, p.268) tends to produce research that is often equivalent to evaluation for purposes of advocacy. It is concerned for the

most part to demonstrate causal relationships of the kind ‘input A leads to output B’, and the process that links A with B remains a mysterious black box whose contents are unknown. Consequently there is a lack of research into what takes place from moment to moment in the field of arts for health practice (for an exception, see Raw, 2013), and a shortage of observational data that could generate a better understanding of the experiential and affective processes involved in engagement with specific art forms. The distinctive characteristics of crafting, the main focus of this project, have barely been investigated, despite its extensive use in arts-for-health contexts. As Raw, et al. (2012. p.98) suggests,

without some redirection of scholarly effort away from evidence gathering and towards analysing and theorising the practice in question, the basis for understanding and accepting the findings of impact studies will remain insubstantial.

These deficits provide the primary rationale for this project.

## **2.4. Researching wellbeing**

As indicated above, the benefits of the arts have been described progressively less, over the last three decades, in terms of their purely economic merit or their civilizing and educating powers, and correspondingly more terms of their capacity to promote individual or social wellbeing. Any discussion of the therapeutic or health benefits of the crafts must include, therefore, some reflection on what is conveyed by the term wellbeing. In contemporary policy making and some academic literature, wellbeing is treated as a self-evident and ideologically neutral good whose characteristics and determinants can be ascertained. Other literature investigates conceptions of wellbeing as culturally relative, performative, and entangled with a variety of neoliberal discourses concerning characteristics of a well-lived life and the responsibilities of the individual. In this section I summarize literature on the roots of political interest in wellbeing; on economic, psychological, and sociological conceptions of its characteristics and determinants; and on potential difficulties with the contemporary wellbeing agenda, particularly in relation to its conceptions of agency and happiness.

### *The arrival of wellbeing on the political stage*

In the last fifteen years, the impacts of interventions such as the use of arts in healthcare have increasingly been conceptualized in terms of contribution to wellbeing, rather than economic benefit or effectiveness in tackling social ills. McLellan, et al. (2012, p.3) identify three contributory factors to the 'arrival of wellbeing on the political stage'. These are, firstly, an emerging consensus that there is no straightforward relationship between economic flourishing and individual life satisfaction; secondly, the acknowledgement that health and happiness cannot simply be equated with the absence of suffering, but have positive characteristics that are amenable to investigation; and thirdly, increasingly recognition of structural and social factors as determinants of mental and physical health. These developments can be loosely mapped onto the fields of economics, psychology and sociology.

### *Economic research*

In the field of economics, studies initially focused on objective aspects of wellbeing. Early research (Easterlin, 1974) suggested that, contrary to conventional wisdom, economic measures are not a reliable reflection of societal wellbeing, and subsequent studies tend to confirm this. When nations are compared, for instance, beyond the point at which basic needs are met, 'the correlation between national wealth and wellbeing evaporates' (Myers, 2000, p.59). Increased government interest in developing valid measures of life-satisfaction or wellbeing was reflected in a European conference of 2007 entitled *Beyond GDP*. The resulting *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress* (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009, p.9) recommended that European governments should 'shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's wellbeing'.

Over the last decade, there has been increasing UK policy emphasis on 'positive' mental health, wellbeing and happiness, evidenced for instance in Cameron's 'happiness speech' (2010). Reflecting this shift, there are current efforts to develop meaningful measures of wellbeing. Dolan, Layard and Metcalfe (2011), in a report to the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS), suggest that such measures

need to combine three dimensions: objective measurements (factors like education, skills, health, employment, and political and social context); quality of present-moment experience; and more general perceptions of meaning, purpose, and life satisfaction. The second two categories together constitute what has come to be known as 'subjective wellbeing' (Deeming, 2013). As part of the 'Measuring National Wellbeing Programme', the ONS (Office of National Statistics, 2015) have, since April 2011, collected data on subjective wellbeing, using a questionnaire that asks, 'overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?'; 'overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?'; 'overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?' and 'overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?' Information derived from such research and data gathering are used to advise individuals about the constituents of a well-lived life. The UK think tank New Economics Foundation, for instance, has popularized five evidence-based 'ways to wellbeing'—'connect', 'be active', 'take notice', 'keep learning', and 'give'—that in combination 'will help to enhance individual well-being and may have the potential to reduce the total number of people who develop mental health disorders in the longer term' (Thompson, et al., 2008, p.17).

### *Psychological research*

The discipline of psychology, in contrast, gives a predominantly subjective account of the experience of wellbeing. Most psychological research into wellbeing has organized itself under the umbrella of the positive psychology movement (Layard, 2005; Seligman, 2002), which originated in a call (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) to reorient psychological research away from psychopathology and towards happiness and optimal functioning. Research in this tradition is concerned to establish subjective and experiential characteristics of wellbeing and their determinants. Such research has had a considerable impact on the wellbeing agenda described above, both directly through a large body of empirical research, and indirectly, 'by inspiring positive scholarship in education, public health, political science, economics, neuroscience, social services, management, leadership, the organizational sciences, and the like' (see Donaldson, Dollwet and Rao, 2015, p.185).

Researchers (e.g. Diener, et al., 1999; Ryff and Singer, 2008; Deci and Ryan, 2008) agree that hedonic gratifications such as physical pleasures and material possessions are not sufficient as determinants of life satisfaction, and that accounts of subjective wellbeing need to include more than present-moment experiences of positive emotion. The term *eudaimonia* (used by Aristotle to describe a type of flourishing based on the possession and exercise of virtue and the fulfilment of one's potential as a human being) is harnessed in this literature to refer to more value-, purpose-, and meaning-oriented dimensions of wellbeing. Research (Keyes and Annas, 2009) proposes that that hedonic and eudaimonic elements of flourishing can be distinguished in empirical work. Studies have related eudaimonic wellbeing to a variety of factors such as self-expression, self-realization, and a range of virtues (Waterman, 1993; Seligman, 2002; Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

An important strand of positive psychology research focuses on the role of perceptions of agency, autonomy, and self-efficacy in wellbeing (Bandura, 1997; Reis, et al., 2000). Research into self-efficacy 'embraces the notion that individuals can be self-initiating agents for change in their own lives and others' (Maddux, 2002, p.285). This naturalistic account of agency is consistent with the observation that 'unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties' (Bandura, 2001, p.10). The corollary—that a diminished sense of personal effectiveness negatively impacts motivation and competence—has been investigated in research into learned helplessness (Peterson, Maier, and Seligman, 1995).

The positive psychology research programme, and government data gathering to support policy making in relation to wellbeing, are symptomatic of an academic and policy-making assemblage constituting itself around around the happiness agenda. Within this assemblage, agency comes to the fore as a key virtue in the management of the self: 'the self is to style its life through acts of choice, and when it cannot conduct its life according to this norm of choice, it is to seek expert

assistance' (Rose, 1996, p.158; see also Gershon, 2011). Literature that is critical of the contemporary wellbeing agenda will be examined below.

### *Sociological research*

Lastly, in the field of sociology and related disciplines, research looks at wellbeing from a structural rather than individual point of view, identifying its social and community-level determinants. The potentially critical social and community perspective of this work distinguishes it from the academic and policy assemblage described in the previous two sections. Early work highlighting the impact of social integration and social norms on wellbeing includes Durkheim's seminal 1951 study *Suicide*, which challenges a view of states of mind as intrapsychic and independent of social context. A similar analysis of the cultural and political dimensions of depression is undertaken by Cvetkovich (2012). Some empirical work investigates social determinants of individual wellbeing. Keyes (1998), for instance, identifies social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization and social acceptance as key aspects of personal wellbeing. Work of this kind is easily related to the notion of social capital, as developed for instance by Bourdieu (in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and by Putnam (2001). Whilst Bourdieu's work focuses on the inequitable distribution of social capital between groups, Putnam's focus is on social capital as a feature of whole societies, and as a resource that can diminish under the pressures of new social arrangements, harming both individuals and communities. The limitations of Putnam's distinction between social capital of the bonding (within-group) and bridging (between-group) kinds will be examined in Chapter 8. In adjacent fields there have been efforts over decades to unpick the geographical and political factors that impact on happiness and mental health (see for example Giggs, 1973, whose psychiatric geographies focus on the connections between place and mental health; Sen, 1992, who highlights the way economic inequalities affect 'functionings' such as transport that would allow access to basic rights such as voting; and Ballas and Dorling, 2013, on the effects of comparison of self with others at both national and local levels).

## 2.5. Limitations of the wellbeing agenda

As Cronin de Chavaz, et al. note in a review of the literature (2005, p.71), 'although wellbeing may indeed be extremely useful as a unifying concept for all those involved in health improvement or health research, at the moment it is being used unreflectively'. Recent work in the fields of geography and sociology looks at discourses of wellbeing with a critical eye (Atkinson, 2013; Carlisle and Hanlon, 2008; Sointu, 2005). Commentators suggest that 'whereas wellbeing appears to have been an issue pertaining to the 'body politic' in the mid-1980s, it now appears to have become a question almost solely related to the 'body personal' (Sointu, 2005, pp.255-266). They note that wellbeing is constructed in policy and in social representations more generally as something available to citizens as responsible agents and consumers, so that the role of structural and geographical factors as determinants of happiness and mental health is disregarded (Gray, Lobao and Martin, 2012). Conceptions of wellbeing, furthermore, 'presuppose ontological and liberal individualism as notions of the self and as normative prescriptions for the good or ideal person' (Christopher, 1999, p.141). At the same time, happiness becomes elevated to a moral imperative (see Ahmed, 2010) and constructed as a normal state of affairs for which individuals should take responsibility. Critiquing the essentialism of current representations of wellbeing and mental illness, sociologists (Cvetkovich, 2012; Conrad and Barker, 2010) and historians (Borch-Jacobson, 2009; Scull, 1989) examine them as constructions rather than states of affairs and investigate critically the work that such discourses are made to perform. Below I identify literatures that problematize, firstly, contemporary neoliberal conceptions of agency, and secondly, the normative prescription of happiness.

### *Agency problematized*

A number of literatures, including philosophy, political studies, sociology, and developmental psychology, put in question the naturalistic accounts of agency and self-determination harnessed in the contemporary wellbeing agenda.

A tradition of French political theory seeks to describe the way that agency is negotiated, enabled, or compromised, mostly with reference to political and cultural forces rather than what are, arguably, the impacts of evolution, embodiment and the material environment. Foucault (2001; 2008), for instance, draws out the way in which perceptions of the natural and the given, including seemingly essential aspects of identity, are produced top-down through discourse. He emphasizes that individual agency and structural constraints are in constant interaction, asserting for instance that 'there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or flight' (Foucault, 1982, p.225). His analysis nonetheless highlights the factors that limit individual agency, emphasizing their historicity, invisibility, and ubiquity. From this perspective, dissenting practices become reassimilated by dominant ideologies with disconcerting ease. De Certeau (1984, pp.37-38), conversely, analyses how individuals, confronted by the dictates of history, culture, and institutions, contrive to engineer a little freedom, 'through a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment', and 'vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers'. De Certeau's conception implies a crafty, opportunistic, and very limited form of personal autonomy that colonizes rather than transforms the 'places in which forces are distributed'. Jacques Rancière provides a more hopeful and enabling account of how dissenting practices, however quietly, produce social change. Rancière (2004, pp.39-40) talks of the 'distribution of the sensible' to describe how hegemonic and consensual practices chop up the world, forcibly constituting categories such as the knowledgeable versus the ignorant, and those who count versus those who don't. These dividing lines, however, themselves provoke 'lines of fracture and disincorporation' resulting in 'uncertain communities' and 'enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution of roles, territories and languages'. Introducing an alternative spatial metaphor, Deleuze (1993) pictures the extrapersonal and the intrapersonal in terms of a folded topology, in which inside and outside are produced from a single convoluted surface: 'the upper floor is folded over the lower floor. One is not acting upon the other, but one belongs to the other, in the sense of double belonging' (p.119). The uses of Deleuze's 'creative ethics of experience' in conceptualizing health are explored by Duff (2015, p.xiii).

Agency has also been theorized in relation to the construction of personal identity. Of relevance here is the work of sociologists Archer, Giddens, and Bourdieu. Archer elaborates a view of human agency as connected to an ongoing sense of selfhood and dependent on reflexivity or inner conversation as ‘one of our most distinctive human properties and powers’ (Archer, 2000, p.2). She sees an enlargement, over historical time, in the amount of reflexivity available to the modern actor; ‘the more social variation and cultural variety *available* to ponder on reflexively . . . the greater the stimulus to innovative commitments’ (2010, p.282). In her view, agents increasingly ‘navigate by the compass of their personal concerns’ and with a ‘growing reliance on their personal powers’ (p.284); she argues emphatically against socialization as the unilateral imposition of ways of seeing and doing. Archer’s critics (e.g. King, 2010; Elder-Vass, 2007; Fleetwood, 2008) counter that this description accords too much power to reflexivity and falsely insulates the latter against structural influences, which ‘would not respect the neat delineation of the personal from our social selves’ (Akram, 2012, p.49). In addition, Archer is criticized for describing agents as if they were engaged in ‘a continual process of conscious deliberation over everything that came within their orbit every moment of the day’ (Fleetwood, 2008, p.187).

Giddens’s account (1979) of the dialectical relation between structure and agency accords a much greater place to the role of habit or the unconscious reproduction of norms. He emphasizes the way that structures ‘enter into the constitution of reflexive and pre-reflexive motivations, knowledgeability and practices of people’ (Stones, 2001, p.184); intentionality has significant elements of ‘process’ or ‘routine’ (Giddens, 1979, p.56). He argues for a distinction between ‘discursive consciousness’, ‘practical consciousness’, and ‘unconscious motives/cognition’ (1984, p.7) as equally implicated in individual agency:

What agents know about what they do and why they do it – their knowledgeability as agents – is largely carried in practical consciousness. Practical consciousness consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to ‘go on’ in the context of social life, without being able to give them direct discursive expression. (1984, p.xxiii)

This sense of the role of the tacit and habitual also features in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as a habitual orientation to the social world or as ‘systems of durable,

*transposable* dispositions' (1977, p.72) that are largely structurally determined and therefore liable to conform to the status quo. Bourdieu's critics (e.g. Farnell, 2000) have seen his account as overly deterministic, portraying 'a sub-mind of embodied habituation and thoughtless practice' (Jenkins, 2002, p.93); others more sympathetic to Bourdieu propose that 'the unique value of habitus lies in the fact that it reflects the difficulty of reflexivity when certain structures are deeply embedded in society' (Akram, 2012, p.57).

The idea of individuals as autonomous agents is problematized from another direction by a large body of empirical research from the field of developmental psychology. This provides robust evidence of the impacts of infant and childhood experience on mental health in later life (Schoore, 2001, 1994; Anda, et al., 2005). Human beings, as social animals who are born in a state of utter dependency, are highly reliant on affiliative relationships for survival (Carter, 1998). Early relationships provide the first clues to the nature of self as object: 'What we see in the other's face is our own reflection, but not yet as a differentiated experience. This reflection gives back to us our sentient selves, amplified and real-ized through a circuit of otherness' (Wright, 1991, p.15). In Winnicott's words, 'the mother is looking at the baby, and what she looks like is related to what she sees there' (1971, p.131). Childhood attachment experiences (Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth, 1989; Cassidy, Jones and Shaver, 2013) impact on brain maturation, with enduring consequences:

because the brain changes in a use-dependent fashion and organizes during development in response to experience, the specific pattern of neuronal activation associated with the acute responses to trauma are those which are likely to be internalized. (Perry, et al., 1995, p.283)

Abusive, abrasive, neglectful, or rejecting parenting may result in neurophysiologically mediated tendencies towards chaotic emotional hyper-arousal, or conversely, dissociative responses (Schoore, 2010). There is strong empirical evidence that early apprehensions of self in relationship result in internal working models that exert life-long influence on self-evaluations and expectations of others (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005). The harsh evaluations of others are readily internalized (Baldwin, 1997). Absence of love or care is 'a

prototypic shame-inducing experience . . . often construed as a global and uncontrollable rejection of self'. (Matos and Pinto-Gouveia, 2014, p.222), and excessive childhood exposure to shame is associated with heightened vulnerability to depression in adulthood (Kim, Thibodeau and Jorgensen, 2011; Matos and Pinto-Gouveia, 2014). Whilst the consequences of early attachment difficulties can be moderated in later life (Schore, 2012), the developmental perspective underlines that capacity for wellbeing is a complex relational achievement underpinned by 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1953) early care. Developing the same argument from a sociological point of view, Butler (2004, p.31) argues for the ethical potential of

a general conception of the human . . . in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself and, by virtue of bodily requirement, given over to some set of primary others.

To summarize, the positive psychology research described above disregards the extent to which agency is constrained. Limits to agency can be seen as consequences of the unconscious reproduction of social norms. In addition, early experiences outside of individual control, themselves the effects of wider structural factors and cultural practices, may impinge on mental health and autonomy in adulthood.

### *The happiness imperative problematized*

A number of critics identify difficulties with the 'happiness imperative' enshrined in contemporary policy and discourse. Stearns (2012, p.41) identifies early modern roots of 'the push toward happiness' in changed attitudes to progress, emotional self-control and religion, and examines its contemporary relationship to consumer culture through linkage of 'the earlier happiness theme' with 'more openly commercial interests' (p.45). Ahmed (2010) examines the work that happiness is made to perform in encouraging individuals to adopt normative lifestyles and identities. From this perspective, the positive psychology movement promotes 'positive deviance', or 'a normative, morally anchored position characterized by a cluster of predefined virtues' (Fineman, 2006, p.271). There is a danger that the expression of culturally sanctioned emotions like optimism or cheerfulness is reinforced in the service of compliant self-management, whilst

equally generative and vital affects such as dissatisfaction and doubt are swept under the carpet; Fineman, for instance, examines the way the cultivation of positivity may become a mode of control or 'form of emotional eugenics' (p.280) within organizations. Happiness becomes a key asset and marker of successful adaptation under conditions in which the individual is increasingly seen as 'a collection of assets that must be continually invested in, nurtured, managed, and developed' (Martin, 2000, p.582).

A number of writers (e.g. Rieff, 1987; Polsky, 1991; Ward, 2002) identify the emergence of increasingly therapeutic forms of governance, in which palliation of emotional difficulties becomes the concern of the state. Such governance, in promoting wellbeing, provides 'a personalized remedy to a highly impersonal, rationalized, bureaucratic system', but does so 'without fundamentally altering that system' (Nolan, 1998). The role of pacification as a means of quelling radical discontent is explored in specific contexts in the edited volume *Good Governance in the Era of Global Neoliberalism* (Demmers, Fernandez Jilberto and Hogenboom, 2004). Similar critiques appear in the work of European philosophers influenced by Marx. Adorno (1973, pp.202-3), for instance, notes the role of discontent in generating social change. As a corollary, the masking of suffering is exposed as a form of distraction leading to quiescence. Baudrillard (1998) explores the compulsive nature of material consumption as 'an active, collective behaviour: it is something enforced, a morality, an institution. It is a whole system of values, with all that expression implies in terms of group integration and social control functions' (p.56). Through it, political subjects are replaced with 'the deracinated, depoliticised and cosmopolitan subject of consumerism' (Hall, 2012, p.375). In the fantasy world created by advertising, frustration and lack can be eliminated through consumption (see Stavrakakis, 2011, for an account informed by Lacan). The amusement purveyed by mass culture and the pleasure industry similarly serves to obfuscate, since it 'always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p.116). Similarly, Cvetkovich (2007, p.460) aims to 'depathologize negative affects so that they can

be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis'. In all these accounts, frustration is redeemed as a potential ally rather than as something to be eliminated, if only by sweeping it under the carpet.

The idea of an optimal level of frustration has been pursued in the field of psychoanalysis, for instance in the work of Kohut (1971), although this work also emphasizes that use can only be made of the developmental potential of optimal frustration where there is adequate satisfaction of need. A similar theme is developed in Winnicott's account of the good-enough mother, 'who makes active adaptation to the infant's needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration' (1971, p.10). Wright (1991), following Winnicott, produces a microgenetic account of the capacity for symbolization in early infancy and emphasizes its dependence on the potentially frustrating gap between mother and baby.

To summarize, the view of happiness as a self-evident good is problematized in literature that analyses its construction as a virtue, its relationship to neoliberalism, and the purposes it serves in soothing justified discontent, under which conditions the happiness imperative is potentially a form of oppression. Reflection on the cultural construction of happiness is germane in a research field—amateur crafts practice—that has often focused on distracting, soothing and pacifying aspects of manual creativity.

## **2.5 Researching crafts practice**

The term 'craft' in contemporary usage is applied to a wide range of forms of cultural production. In what follows, I identify historical literature that sheds light on the construction of craft as a category, and economic and sociological literatures that describe the contemporary economy of craft. I will go on to describe the progressive agendas, variously recreational, political, educational or therapeutic, to which craft is allied. I will conclude by highlighting neglected areas

in contemporary crafts and craft for health research that will be addressed in this study.

*Historical determinants of the category 'craft'*

Twentieth-century craft commentators and practitioners (e.g. Collingwood, 1938; Pye, 1968) for the most part treated 'craft' as a natural and self-evident category, and portrayed the beleaguered professional craftsman as guardian of traditional skills and practices under threat from encroaching industrialization and later digitization. In recent years, these accounts have been challenged, and new attempts (Harrod, 1999; Frayling, 2011; Adamson, 2007, 2013; Greenhalgh, 1997; Dormer, 1997) have been made to historicize and situate crafts practice. These accounts look at the historical contingencies that constructed the category of craft, and catalogue the plethora of roles—variously commercial, cultural, educational, therapeutic, recreational, or political—that crafts practice continues to perform. Greenhalgh (1997), for instance, emphasizes that a sharp distinction between what we now designate as the crafts and fine art would have been unthinkable until the eighteenth century, and only became commonplace during the nineteenth. During this period, 'the decorative arts steadily congealed into a *salon des refusés* of genres that cohered only by virtue of their exclusion' (p.28). He also describes how vernacular making, which had occupied a sphere completely separate from that of the decorative arts, became increasingly visible under just those conditions (industrialization and urbanization) that were perceived to threaten it, and how it was idealized as a model of honest and fulfilling work, in contrast with the dehumanizing division of labour demanded by mechanized production. These contingencies, he suggests, resulted in the unification, under the auspices of the Arts and Crafts Movement, of the decorative arts and vernacular making with an ethics of meaningful work; the idea of craft thus came to combine skilled manual practice with pastoral idealism and political utopianism. More generally, these craft historians share an interest in the roots of the current meanings of craft, and all emphasize its indeterminate status and tensions such as those between tradition and innovation, virtuosic skill and despised amateurism, or fine art and menial productivity. Adamson (2010, p.3) is typical in suggesting that 'craft is not a movement or a field, but rather a set of concerns that is implicated across many

types of cultural production'. Such statements illustrate the difficulty of producing a definition that is both inclusive and meaningful, and highlight the need for detailed accounts of specific practices in a variety of contexts.

A focus on professional activity fuelled by grand ideals leads to a neglect, by these authors, of amateur practice, and at times to its denigration; Greenhalgh (1997, p.37), for instance describes Women's Institute handcrafts as 'a rarefied form of household husbandry . . . a vision of craft void of the original political commitment, a vernacular ruralism with pretensions to decorative art', thus reifying craft in his own particular way. Historians of twentieth century hobbyism and amateur crafts practice (e.g. Knott, 2011; Gelber, 1999), contrastingly, draw attention to the ubiquity and significance of recreational crafting, and highlight a number of tensions and paradoxes. Knott, for example, notes the origins of the current connotations of amateurism in a period in which the territory of the professional applied arts was challenged not only by mechanization but also by the proliferation of (often highly skilled) non-professional enthusiasm fostered by the increasing availability and affordability of art and craft materials and books of instruction. He describes how the term 'amateur', previously applied without contempt to those activities, both scientific and artistic, done for their own sake, came to be invoked by professional artisans to exclude and devalue non-professional practice as anachronistic, trivial, and shoddy.

### *Economies of contemporary crafts practice*

Literature on contemporary UK crafts economies sits within a broader body of work on the creative industries. The latter have been of growing academic interest since New Labour's 1997 'rebranding of the creative economy' under the slogan 'Cool Britannia' (Thomas, Harvey and Hawkins, 2013, p.78). A number of accounts (see Flew, 2012; Banks, Gill and Taylor, 2013) document the establishment, of the Creative Industries Task Force, under the aegis of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), by Blair's new government in 1997. This body was intended to establish the economic contribution made by the creative industries, in order to foster their development. The resulting Creative Industries Mapping Document (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998) reported that creative

industries (identified as architecture, arts and antiques markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, and television and radio) employed 1.4 million people and produced five per cent of the nation's income. Whilst DCMS and its advisors (for example Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi, 2008; Bakhshi, Hargreaves and Mateos-Garcia, 2013) have continued to engage in similar mapping exercises, this endeavour has been subject to critique; Flew (2002, p.5) for instance, describes the list-based approach used in the aggregation of statistics as 'ad hoc', whilst Neilson and Rossiter (2005) assert that mapping documents misrepresent actual practices in the creative industries.

Decision making about what counts or gets counted in this domain exemplifies Rancière's ideas, noted above, about the 'distribution of the sensible'; academics as well as policy makers have expressed considerable disagreement about where the boundaries of the creative industries should lie (see Oakley, 2004). Craft, one of the thirteen designated industry groups, occupies a particularly indeterminate position, as evidenced by a consultation document (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2013) that proposed removing craft as a category from the list enumerated above (although it remains in the 2015 statistical release). The first version of the document read: 'we recognise that high-end craft occupations contain a creative element, but the view is that in the main, that these roles are more concerned with the manufacturing process, rather than the creative process' (p.15). The proposed exclusion was also justified on the grounds that 'most crafts businesses are too small to identify in business survey data' (p.14). These proposals reflect the ineluctable leakiness of the category of craft, and the consequent problematic of articulating its value, economic and otherwise.

Similar 'ad hocery' (Flew, 2002) is characteristic of many attempts to map economic dimensions of the crafts. Banks (2010, p.305), for instance, notes the invisibility of 'crafts labour', often overlooked in spite of being 'an integral part of what is ostensibly an artist-led and "creative" work process'. This neglect reflects the notional separation of making from elite creativity historicized above. Reflecting this bias, a Crafts Council report, *Craft in an Age of Change* (2012),

although intended to be ‘a mapping and impact study of the contemporary craft sector’ (p.3), reports mainly on designer makers. As far as amateur crafting is concerned, its economic dimensions are almost entirely overlooked in academic literature, in spite of the fact that amateurs support a burgeoning retail industry, particularly online (see Gauntlett, 2011; Hackney, 2013). A Crafts Council briefing (Yair, 2010, p.2) acknowledges that although ‘the social and/or community elements of many makers’ work impacts widely on agendas including health and wellbeing, young people and older people, and place-shaping/regeneration/identity’, the socio-economic impacts go unrecorded (see also Schwarz and Yair, 2010).

A further body of literature relevant to paid work within the crafts for health economy examines political dimensions of creative work and identity within a post-Fordist labour market of ‘fast capitalism’ requiring ‘rapid adaptation to change and differentiated demand’ (Morgan, Wood and Nelligan, 2013, p.401). The ‘creative classes’ have the aura of a ‘coveted, elusive vanguard’ (p.400), and with few rigid barriers to entry, pay is low and portfolio careers the norm. The resulting ‘creative precariat’ (Standing, 2009) has been seen as paradigmatic of the conditions of contemporary labour, variously understood as ‘precarious’ (Bourdieu, 1999), ‘affective’ (Hardt, 1999), ‘immaterial’ (McRobbie, 2010), ‘free’ (Terranova, 2000), and ‘fragmented’ (Reimer, 2009). In this view, under conditions of ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2000) creative workers are exploited whilst hailed as ‘model entrepreneurs’ (Gill and Pratt 2008, p.1) and celebrated for their ‘risk-tolerant pluck’ (Ross, 2009, p.21).

Some literature, however, questions these opposing constructions of creative work as either privileged or exploitative, and describes precarity in creative work in more nuanced terms as something with particular affordances as well as costs. Morgan, Wood and Nelligan (2013), for example, found that whilst young people in creative occupations reported financial insecurity, they also valued their ‘vocational sovereignty’ (p.407); Bradley (2009) similarly notes that flexibility is often framed as a virtue of current working practices. Whilst individuals’ adoption of these norms might be understood as passive or unreflective, this position is not

always portrayed as one without political power. The fluid nature of labour under contemporary conditions can be seen to permit 'radically autonomous processes of self-valorisation' (Hardt and Negri, 1994, p.282), and 'a (potential) new political subjectivity' (Gill and Pratt, 2008, p.3). Neilson and Rossiter (2008, p.51), similarly, highlight precarious labour's 'potential for novel forms of connection, subjectivization and political organization'.

A similar reluctance to represent 'capitalism as an obdurate structure or system, coextensive with the social space' is found in the work of two economic geographers writing as Gibson-Graham (2008, p.615; Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, 2013). Inspired by approaches to the social sciences that emphasize their performativity, they ask:

What if we were to accept that the goal of theory is not to extend knowledge by confirming what we already know, that the world is a place of domination and oppression? What if we asked theory instead to help us see openings, to provide a space of freedom and possibility? (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p.619)

Their 'diverse economies' model (see also Leyshon, Lee and Williams, 2003; Williams, 2004; Healy, 2009) includes not only the waged work and monetary transactions that are the bread and butter of traditional economics, but a plethora of other (unwaged or unconventionally remunerated) forms of exchange, contribution, and entrepreneurship, many of which go under the radar and hence disappear in conventional accounts of consumer capitalism. Their project is motivated by an awareness that such reframings are 'performative ontological projects' (Gibson-Graham, p.614) that reconfigure the landscape of academic value and interest by redescribing it, and increase the 'space of decision and room to move as political subjects by enlarging the field from which the unexpected can emerge' (p.620). Such a model is well suited to describing the economic characteristics of small-scale, domestic, alternative, and community-based economies, and its applicability to economies of crafts for health will be explored in Chapter 8.

*A social agenda for the crafts*

The economic literature above focuses on craft as a form of labour productive of goods with a monetary exchange value. Alongside this, however, the crafts have been and continue to be linked to a variety of social, progressive, or ideological agendas in which they are vehicles for wellbeing or for social or personal transformation. This section addresses literature in four of these areas—recreation, activism, education, and therapy—in detail.

As Knott (2012, p.255) suggests, ‘amateur craft practice has been part of everyday life for the last 150 years, but scholarly treatment of the subject has consistently framed the phenomenon as supplemental and marginal’. A number of writers note this as an effect of ‘tacit associations linking Art to “professional men”, and Craft with “amateur women”’ (Harriman, 2007). A recent body of literature (e.g. Daly Goggin and Fowkes Tobin, 2009; Abrams, 2005; Knott, 2011; Jackson, 2007) has reclaimed women’s domestic crafts practices, and leisure crafting more generally, as subjects worthy of serious academic study. Harriman (2007), looking at hobby crafts groups in Scotland, critiques the way that a ‘universal craft ontology’ has been imposed on makers from ‘distinctly different socio-cultural and economic realities’ (p.476). Jackson (2007), investigating DIY as a domestic but characteristically masculine mode of amateur making, challenges dominant representations of DIY in terms of its utilitarian or symbolic aspects, and examines its intrinsic rewards through the lens of Csikzscentmihalyi’s concept of flow (1990).

In other literature, amateur making emerges as a fertile site for micro-processes of resistance and reinvention in relation to culture and subjectivity. Leisure crafts are seen to embody a paradoxical tension between passivity and resistance. Parker (1984), for instance, shows that historically the performance of needlework both complied with restrictive social conventions and offered a space of freedom for women. Bratich and Brush (2011) note that ‘knitting in public turns the interiority of the domestic outward, exposing that which exists within enclosures, through invisibility and through unpaid labor: the production of home life’. Other researchers (Hackney, 2013; Gauntlett, 2011) examine the way that amateur crafts creativity supports the capacity to imagine and sometimes engineer alternative

selves and scenarios whilst resisting or critiquing others. Grace, Gandolfo and Candy (2009), for instance, explore the way mothers use knitting and sewing to resist the demands of their families; and Basting (1996), La Cour, Josephsson and Luborsky (2005) and Reynolds (2010) analyse the ways in which older practitioners use crafts as a means of defining themselves in positive terms, for instance as craftspeople and creators; as actively engaged with normal daily life, even when facing terminal illness; and as embracing future potential whilst actively rejected prevailing stereotypes (in connection with memory projects, for instance) that associate older people only with the past. Twigger Holroyd (2013) argues that amateur fashion making and design have the potential to 'disrupt the current paradigm of industrial production and over-consumption' (p.11). More generally, Gelber (1999, pp.19–20) comments that although hobbies have functioned to 'integrate the isolated home with the ideology of the workplace', they simultaneously 'passively condemn the work environment by offering contrast to meaningless jobs'.

The potential 'quiet activism' (Hackney, 2013) of the crafts hobbyist is rarely explicit and not consistently construed as such by practitioners. Other literature, by contrast, deals with amateur crafts practice as an overt form of political action or protest. Historian Newmeyer (2008) recounts how the quilting bee served as a subversive space for promoting women's suffrage; how nineteenth-century abolitionists used quilts both to carry political messages and to raise money for their cause; and how a range of contemporary 'craftivist' (Greer, 2014; 2008) projects have used vehicles such as quilting and knitting to highlight and protest against global inequalities, interventionist foreign policy, or political indifference to the AIDS epidemic. Craftivism is not always located at the margins of political life; Kramer (2013, p.345) demonstrates that handcrafted objects that were part of the visual culture of Obama mania 'were charged with meaning for their makers and consumers—demonstrating political leanings, jubilation over the election of the first African-American President and the future implications of this historic event'. Whilst more establishment crafts commentators like Adamson (2010, p.135) and Greenhalgh (1997) are at times cynical or denigrating about the political potential of making, recent work from the field of political science is

curious in a more nuanced way about the continuing frictions in craftivism between, for instance, tradition and radicalism, or materialism and anti-consumerism (see for example Dawkins, 2011; Williams, 2011).

The crafts have served an equally progressive but less radical agenda in the context of education. Early views on craft as a valuable and humanizing mode of education appear in the writings of Ruskin (1853), Adler (1883), Dewey (1966 [1916]) and others, and are reviewed by Parker (1984). In spite of the idealism of these writers, for many early twentieth century commentators the educational purpose of craft was narrowed to vocational training, often in line with 'an industrial education for the masses and a liberal education for the favoured few' (Judd 1918, p.159). Instruction in the crafts has thus often been seen as a necessary but despised poor relative of more prestigious engagement with intellectual materials, and has been harnessed to straightforward vocational and economic ends. This tension is evident in a recent body of research literature concerning the role and potential of crafts education in schools. In some of this writing the way that crafts practice fosters transferable skills such as independence and determination is strongly emphasized (e.g. National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999; Yair, Press and Tomes, 2001). Alongside this there is a somewhat more prosaic trend (e.g. Eggleston, 1998) that emphasizes the economic and vocational benefits of the acquisition of manual and design creativity. Studies note that crafts in schools retain their second-class status and the potentials of crafts education are neglected: a survey by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (2008) notes that 'not enough of the schools visited recognized the relevance of crafts in relation to pupils' personal development or future economic well-being' (p.31) and that there was a 'neglect of craft and design' (p.29).

The transformative potential of crafts practice has also been harnessed as treatment, both physical and psychological, in the fields of occupational and art therapy. Enduring convictions that 'good design and beautiful objects' could 'raise the moral tone of society' and that fine work was a source of 'moral purity and spirituality' are examined by Parker (1984, p.179). Kantartzis and Molineux

(2011) indicate some roots of these conceptions in Lutheran Protestantism. The nineteenth century witnessed increasing scientific and medical interest in psychological therapies (Ellenberger, 1970). Manual occupations were already in use as therapeutic tools for management or rehabilitation of the insane in institutions in the early nineteenth century as part of the moral treatment movement, headed in France by Philippe Pinel and in England by the Quaker William Tuke (see Tuke, 1813; Pelouquin, 1989). By the early twentieth century, ideas derived from the Arts and Crafts and moral treatment movements concerning the dignity of manual occupation and the value of beauty were informing an explicitly therapeutic agenda in the nascent discipline of occupational therapy (Cara and Macrae, 1998). During World War I the crafts were harnessed in the treatment of physical as well as psychological difficulties. In this context, handicrafts were seen to have

a special therapeutic value as they afford occupation which combines the elements of play and recreation with work and accomplishment. They give a concrete return and provide a stimulus to mental activity and muscular exercise at the same time, and afford an opportunity for creation and self-expression'. (Johnson, 1920, p.69)

In mid-twentieth century, alongside growing medicalization of the discipline of occupational therapy (Ikiugu and Ciaravino, 2007), the benefits of manual creativity were increasingly expressed in terms of relaxation, distraction and usefulness, and harnessed in support of a compliant and often gendered cheerfulness in which the maker 'has no time to worry over her fancied physical ill health or even over wrongs or slights which may be real, so that she is cultivating a more healthy mental attitude and habit' (Dunton, 1946, cited by Dickie, 2011). In recent decades, occupational therapy has gravitated towards physical exercise and skills directly related to daily living as its preferred therapeutic modes. In one study (Bissell and Mailloux, 1981), reasons practitioners gave for not using crafts included the belief that 'crafts give occupational therapists a poor image', and that 'use of crafts is insulting to the patient' (p.372). A number of accounts (e.g. Warren, 1993) describe the use of crafts activities in the context of art therapy, although here they are often used as a vehicle for the clinician's interpretative activity and their benefits are described in terms of their expressive or cathartic potential.

Extending this therapeutic use of crafts activities, there is interest in their use in the context of arts for health and social prescribing, for which relevant research was cited above. A few phenomenological studies in this area (e.g. Riley, Corkhill and Morris, 2013; Reynolds and Prior, 2006) investigate the distinctive affective dimensions of therapeutic crafting. Most of this research relies on survey or interview data from very small numbers of participants, who typically describe crafts practice in positive terms as soothing, distracting, and therapeutic. Reynolds (2000, p.10), for instance, investigating needlecraft as a means of managing depression, reports that her participants described its benefits in terms of relaxation, self-regulation and distraction: 'Being able to concentrate on a small, slow piece of work absorbs my mind and soul'. Similarly, Turney (2007, p.259), in a paper on therapeutic knitting, focuses on the meditative and self-help aspects of knitting as offering 'a form of escape from mental and physical pain', and 'a sense of calm during times of incredible anxiety'. Whilst the field urgently requires such phenomenological approaches, this interview material tends to focus predominantly on the soothing or pacifying rather than stimulating, thought-provoking, messy, or frustrating effects of crafts practice, and provides an inadequate account of aspects of process such as planning, problem solving, and design. When challenging aspects of crafts creativity disappear from view, a remedial account of crafting for health results, reproducing conceptions of craft as leisure-time therapy without artistic merit, and of participants in this context as passive recipients of care. In summary, this essentialist account of manual creativity reproduces dominant social representations concerning the benefits of the arts without attending to relational or contextual features of practice. My literature search found no long-term observational studies of amateur crafts creativity in the arts for health field (although see Riley, 2008, for a study of makers belonging to a textile guild, which uses some participant observation). The methodological limitations of exclusive reliance on interview material will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.



*Figure 2.1. Pendon Crafts Group, drypoint etching and mosaic  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

## **2.7. Neglected dimensions of amateur crafting for health**

The survey above highlights a number of gaps in the crafts for health literature, which offers little in the way of conceptual tools for capturing processual, material, or relational dimensions of practice. Some potential ways forward are outlined below.

### *Process in amateur crafts practice*

As outlined above, most work on the affective dimensions of therapeutic crafting relies on snapshots derived from interviews and questionnaires. Consequently, sequential or developmental accounts of making as a process are lacking. More generally, as Glăveanu and Lahlou (2012) note, ‘there have been few studies concerned with the topic of creativity in craft’ (p.152). Many traditional definitions of creativity are unhelpfully product-oriented, invoking the demarcation criteria of novelty and usefulness (see for example Boden, 2004; National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999, p.30; Gardner, 1993). Some research focuses on creativity as a process (Craft, 2000) and as an ordinary capacity in use in daily life (Runco and Richards, 1997; Richards, 2007); these accounts are more apt for a discussion of moment-to-moment dimensions of creative activity. Also helpful in the discussion of amateur or

everyday creativity is Beghetto and Kaufman's (2007) distinction between Big-C (eminent), little-c (everyday), and mini-c creativity; the latter provides a means of acknowledging, without reference to expert evaluation, the small-scale sequential innovations involved in any acquisition or development of competence. Some recent research into amateur creativity has been methodologically inventive; Glăveanu and Lahlou (2012), for example, use subjective cameras to record amateur crafting, and ask participants provide a moment-to-moment retrospective phenomenological commentary, although this approach provides 'vignettes' rather than longer-term accounts of creative process. A further useful framework for considering creativity longitudinally is provided in work that considers creativity's relation to play, improvisation, and serendipity (Bleakley, 2004; Brand, 2015; Ingold, 2013; 2010b). From this point of view, to be creative is 'to intervene in a world that is continually "on the boil"' (Ingold, 2010b, p.94), and (p.97) in which end products are neither fixed nor ascertainable:

It is in this very forward movement that the creativity of the work is to be found. To read creativity 'forwards' entails a focus not on abduction but on improvisation . . . To improvise is to follow the ways of the world, as they open up, rather than to recover a chain of connections, from an end-point to a starting-point, on a route already travelled.

This conception offers a diachronic, process-oriented perspective from which to observe creative trajectories in a group situation.

### *The material world in amateur crafts practice*

There have been numerous attempts to articulate the intuition that a creative engagement with the material world is good for us (Fischer, 1963; Needleman, 1981; Dissanayake, 1995; Sennett, 2008; Crawford, 2010; Gauntlett 2011). The works cited rely on persuasive mixtures of philosophy, anecdote, and observation. They are supplemented by a growing body of research into the emotional aspects of hand making, including work on immersive experiences of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Most of these accounts nonetheless focus predominantly on the human partner in this animate/inanimate partnership. Disregard of the complex role of materials leads to neglect of emotions like frustration, excitement, and enchantment that occur

routinely in making processes, and perpetuates a normative view of crafts creativity as soothing, distracting, and cosy, whilst materials are presented as malleable and inert. The absent material substrate of tangible stuff is placed centre stage in literature from material culture studies (Miller, 2012; Malafouris, 2008a; Dant, 1999), and in particular actor-network theory (Latour, 2005; Law, 2004). Latour (p.202) sets out to challenge neat ontological distinctions between the human and the non-human, the social and the natural, and the global and the local:

In most situations, actions will already be interfered with by heterogeneous entities that don't have the same local presence, don't come from the same time, are not visible at once, and don't press upon them with the same weight . . . Stretch any given interaction and, sure enough, it becomes an actor-network.

The work of philosopher Bennett (2010; 2001), similarly, argues for a re-enchanted and vital materialism in which 'all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations' (2010, p.13). These more inclusive maker-material accounts of creative practices are well suited to investigation of the emotional dimensions of amateur crafting, but have not been applied in studying the world of crafting for health.

### *The interpersonal in amateur crafts practice*

Due to the methodological individualism inherent in interviewing, existing research into crafts for health gives very little account of situated and relational dimensions of making. The impacts of social context, location and broader cultural factors are largely invisible, or reported solely in terms of the sociable aspects of creative groups. The specific interpersonal factors that make them enabling or challenging go unreported. Vygotsky's work (2004 [1930]; 1966 [1933]) as developed, for example, by Slade and Wolf (1994) is instructive in proposing that all creativity is a relational and developmental achievement, grounded in interactions with family and culture, and therefore reflective of a social world at least as much as an internal one. To the extent that creativity involves play, the work of Winnicott is also helpful in providing a developmental and relational view of play as an activity with a social location. For Winnicott, 'the playground is a potential space between the mother and the baby or joining mother and baby'.

Play is thus a joint achievement and has ‘the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that is being found to be reliable’ (1968, p.596). Winnicott’s observations have subsequently been supported by a great deal of empirical research on the interpersonal dimensions of play in early childhood: ‘play, if anything, is about the health of a mutual social system, the development of intersubjectivity, and learning to use the materials of a culture to make meanings that are understandable, or at least negotiable’ (Wolf and Slade, 1994, p.vi). This relational view of play provides a useful lens through which to view creative activity in the ‘playground’ of the group situation.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the literature that forms the background to this project. The relevant literatures on arts for health, wellbeing and the crafts were reviewed in turn. To summarize, research into arts for health shares limitations common to much social impact research, in that situated, relational, and affective dimensions of practice are neglected in favour of data about outcomes and end states. When such research is attached to the academic and policy-making assemblage around the contemporary wellbeing agenda, some problematic ideological assumptions go unexamined. The small existing literature into amateur crafting reflects these difficulties and also suffers from a methodological individualism that reproduces normative conceptualizations of recreational practice as soothing and unchallenging. It therefore neglects processual, situated, and relational aspects of wellbeing-oriented crafting. These deficits provide the rationale for the current research, which takes an alternative long-term, observational approach to investigating crafts groups in the community and in primary care, and aims to enlarge, through observation, upon conventional notions of distraction, social support, and therapy through which the benefits of such groups are generally understood. The next chapter will examine in more detail the methodological limitations of much research into arts for health, and describe the potentials and challenges of the ethnographic methodology central to this project.

## CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter provides a rationale for the distinctive methodological approach used in this study, and a detailed account of how data were collected, analysed, and used to construct the resulting thesis. In section 3.2, I review methodological features of dominant traditions in arts impacts research, and note significant dimensions of practice that remain under-researched or undocumented as a consequence of the focus on outcomes and impact as well as the types of methodology in use. In section 3.3, I discuss methodological characteristics of a body of relevant research in the fields of cultural geography and anthropology. Recent geographies and ethnographies of mental health, a few of which investigate the deployment of the arts in health, are distinguished by a critical perspective and by their use of participant observation, a method underused in conventional impacts research. In section 3.4 I describe the ethical and epistemological challenges characteristic of participant observation. Section 3.5 describes in detail the design of the current project, including its practical and ethical dimensions, and the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings. It also gives an account of how data were analysed, and how this analysis was used to construct the resulting thesis.

### **3.2. Existing research into arts and mental health: some conventional methodological approaches and their strengths and weaknesses**

In this section, I outline the methodological approaches that have dominated research into the arts and health. As noted in the previous chapter, it is possible, following Clift, et al., (2009), to identify four major types of study in existing research. These are retrospective evaluations, prospective evaluations, experimental research, and economic effectiveness studies. These studies respond to the perceived need to evidence beneficial impacts. I review the strengths and deficits of the various methodologies used, and highlight those areas that these approaches are unsuited to address. These gaps provide the rationale for the alternative methodological approach used in the current project.

### *Retrospective evaluations*

Research using the retrospective testimonies of participants has frequently been used as evidence for the impacts of participatory arts programmes. Methodologies are typically qualitative, relying on semi-structured interviews and discussion groups; data is subjected to thematic analysis and sometimes augmented by questionnaires. An example of this approach is the report *Strength through Creativity: A Study of Arts for Health in Primary Care in Cornwall* (Bennett and Bastin, 2008; for other examples, see Turner-Halliday, 2013; Lawson, et al., 2014). A qualitative methodology, reliant primarily on interviews with participants and stakeholders, was used to assess the impact of a project that piloted arts interventions in primary care. Between 2006 and 2008 AFHC, funded by ACE, arranged six artist placements in GP surgeries, each lasting eighteen months. The projects used a variety of art forms including crafts, animation, dance, and writing. The report notes 'an overwhelmingly positive response to the project from participants, practice patients and practice staff'; in addition 'anecdotal evidence from professionals suggested health outcomes and a reduction in GP attendance amongst some individuals' (p.5). Reports of this kind identify some factors of importance to good practice, but most acknowledge that their findings are suggestive rather than conclusive.

Whilst having the merit of representing participants' experiences, qualitative research of this type is vulnerable to critique on numerous counts. Most problematically, in retrospective evaluation there is a lack of any baseline or longitudinal dimension to the research. Further weaknesses are connected with the use of interview data. Good interview-based research succeeds in providing a 'rich' and 'thick' (Geertz, 1973), 'emic' (Headland, Pike and Harris, 1990) account of the experiences of those involved. As with all research that relies on stakeholder accounts elicited under these conditions, however, the evidence is vulnerable to distortion from several sources. Some of these are frequently articulated in the literature on qualitative research. It has often been noted, for instance, that interviews and surveys '*produce* declarations of principle that correspond to no real practice' (Bourdieu, 1979, pp.318-19; Nichols and Maner, 2008) due to the demand characteristics of the research situation. This may be

related to participant expectations as well as, potentially, to the use of suggestive or leading questions (see Loftus, 1996). Such research is vulnerable to further distortion by a tendency from all quarters to ascribe benefits to projects in which a significant personal investment in terms of time and effort has been made (Shadish, Cook and Campbell, 2002). There is often also a considerable degree of self-selection involved in recruiting interviewees, and data coming from a self-selecting group may not be representative of a broader sample. Women invited by a notice in a needlecrafts magazine to be interviewed about the psychological effects of needlework, for instance (see Reynolds, 2000) are likely to have had a positive experience of it by virtue of the fact that they are reading the magazine.

In addition to these problems there are three others that appear particularly problematic for survey- and interview-based work in the domain of arts for health, and which can be identified through reviewing the existing literature. These concern the highly selective nature of the material retrieved by interviewees, and as a corollary, what gets left out. Firstly, interviewees tend to produce information to do with impacts—the effects of an activity upon them. Statements such as ‘I found knitting calming’, whilst they look phenomenological, are statements about effects rather than process. Nothing is disclosed in such statements about the moment-to-moment dimensions of practice. As Raw, et al. (2012) suggest, this fine-grained information is required in order to hypothesize about mechanisms of change at work in the participatory arts. Secondly, accounts produced in interviews are highly vulnerable to ‘narrative smoothing’ (Spence, 1987, p.133), that is to say, they reflect the natural wish to appear both coherent and socially acceptable. When an interviewee recounts that a creative group ‘has given me a chance to meet new people, new friends, and see that there are lots of nice people about’, (Matarasso, 1997, p.27), he excludes from his narrative the times he has felt marginalized or lonely or intruded upon, what happens in those situations, and how he is helped out of them, or not. When a survey respondent reports that ‘daily stresses melt away’ when knitting (Riley, Corkhill and Morris, 2013, p.53), she glosses over the frustration, dissatisfaction, or boredom that are sometimes part of manual creativity. Much material of potential interest thereby disappears from view. Thirdly, there is what might be described as a ‘banality problem’ with such

data. Interviewees repeatedly describe crafting, for instance, as 'therapeutic', 'soothing', and 'distracting'. Whilst this may result from the lack, in everyday language, of a rich or nuanced vocabulary for describing affective and haptic experience, it can also be seen to reflect the dominance of particular social representations (Moscovici, 2000; Jovchelovitch, 2007) of hobby crafts. Such representations are 'autonomous' and 'evolve beyond the reach of individuals' (Philogène & Deaux, 2001, p. 6); they become rehearsed in everyday discourse so that experience and beliefs commonly conform to certain well-worn tropes. The use of interview or survey data alone, therefore, even if it could be guaranteed to faithfully represent the honest views of participants, is likely to produce a highly selective picture of the field of arts participation, and to recycle existing representations of its benefits whilst many areas of potential interest disappear under the radar.

### *Prospective evaluations*

Research designed at the outset of a project rather than during or subsequent to it tends to produce a somewhat more robust type of evidence, since qualitative and quantitative measures can be gathered at the start of the project and outcomes can be related to goals articulated in advance. A good example of this approach is offered by Spandler, et al. (2007) in *Catching Life: The Contribution of Arts Initiatives to Recovery Approaches in Mental Health* (see also Cohen, et al., 2006; and Greaves and Farbus, 2006). This project was commissioned by the DCMS and the Department of Health. One strand of the research sought quantitative evidence of outcomes related to mental health and social inclusion, using questionnaires with an eventual cohort of sixty-two participants who completed them at the beginning and end of a six-month period. Significant improvements were recorded along a number of dimensions, including social inclusion, mental health, and reductions in service usage, but the impacts did not extend to use of medication, or engagement with employment or education. A second strand of the research programme sought to gather qualitative evidence through which the observed impacts might be better understood. Researchers interviewed thirty-four participants from six projects and identified factors such as a greater sense of

motivation, purpose, and meaning that 'enhanced participants' ability to engage in other aspects of their lives' (p.5).

This research demonstrates good practice in its creative use of a mixed methodology and its longitudinal approach. Using interview and survey material alone to understand mechanisms of impact, however, is likely to limit potential understandings of the processes at work, for reasons outlined above. Similar difficulties afflict research using Theory-Based Evaluation (TBE), which has recently been proposed as a way of increasing the methodological rigour of arts for health research (see Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007; Galloway, 2009). TBE attempts to go beyond simplistic linear models of causation by designing research around richer preliminary hypotheses concerning 'how mechanisms are fired in contexts to produce outcomes' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p.85). Since stakeholder interviews and focus groups are the means by which such hypotheses are elaborated, the resulting theoretical models again reflect the limitations of interview material. In addition, finding participant numbers large enough to generate statistically robust conclusions remains problematic (see for example Matrix Insight, 2010, described below).

### *Experimental research*

Experimental research into the impacts of the arts is rooted in a medical rather than a social sciences tradition. The ideal, for the former, is the randomized controlled trial, which has been difficult to implement in the field of arts impact studies. Experimental methodologies measure physiological indices, for example of stress (pulse rate, blood cortisol, etc.) and the best of these studies manage to provide a control group. One study (Staricoff, Duncan and Wright, 2003), for instance, investigated the effects of live music and art in hospital settings, and was able to establish control groups who experienced neither intervention. Amongst the significant findings were that the presence of live music or art in a day surgery waiting room resulted in lower levels of cortisol (a stress hormone); and that live music in an antenatal clinic resulted in elevated physiological indicators of foetal wellbeing. Studies on the effects of music dominate in experimental research, and most involve passive reception (listening to music for example), rather than active

engagement (Stuckey and Nobel, 2010). In research into active arts participation using a range of art forms including crafts, Ross, Hollen and Fitzgerald (2006) found improvement on a number of physiological measures as well as reduced incidence of depression for participants who participated in an arts-in-medicine programme on a long-term dialysis unit. This study is typical in being weakened by lack of a control group and participant self-selection, and like many similar studies it can say nothing about the distinctive characteristics of manual creativity.

Many experimental studies that establish correlations between an intervention and a dependent variable, furthermore, are unable to say anything legitimately about direction of effect, although findings are frequently cited by others in strong etiological terms. A study by Geda, et al. (2011), for example, notes a correlation, in a random sample of cognitively normal elderly participants, between increased engagement in arts activities, and later reduced incidence of cognitive decline (MCI). The authors note that ‘since this was a cross-sectional study, we cannot determine the direction of causality between the hypothesized exposure of interest (i.e., cognitive activity) and the hypothesized outcome of interest (i.e., MCI)’. In spite of this the study is cited in the arts for health literature (for instance by Ramsden, et al., 2011, p.14) as if there were a proven causal relationship.

### *Economic effectiveness studies*

Finally, economic effectiveness studies include cost benefit analysis amongst other measures of impact, generally by comparing the costs of an intervention with money saved by reduced use of alternative services. An example of this type is Time Being 2 (TB2), carried out in the Isle of Wight by the NHS service Healing Arts, and funded by HM Treasury’s Invest to Save Budget (Matrix Insight, 2010). This project merits description as an example of the continuing difficulty of producing robust evidence in spite of increasing sophistication of research designs. The project ran eight courses of twelve weeks’ duration between 2007 and 2009. These provided a variety of arts activities for two hours a week and were open to participants suffering from depression and low levels of personal social capital who were referred through primary care and community mental health services. The mixed-methods research design conscientiously addressed many of the

deficits for which less sophisticated studies have been criticized. Anticipated outcomes were carefully defined. Design was longitudinal, using questionnaires at baseline, completion and follow-up. Questionnaires assessing depression/anxiety, serious life events, self-esteem, wellbeing and perceived social support amongst other factors all met 'gold standards' of reliability and validity. The assessment framework took account of life factors unrelated to the programme, and participants were asked not only about their views of impacts, but also about their perceptions of the mechanisms through which they occurred. Using a TBE approach, the researchers developed a relatively elaborate causal model, which distinguished between the social and creative aspects of the intervention. Finally, the research saw itself as a socio-medical study, was informed by Medical Research Council guidance on best practice, and was intended as a preliminary for further studies that would use a randomized controlled trial methodology.

In spite of these considerable merits, only fifty-seven participants (a third of the projected number) eventually met rigorous criteria for inclusion in the study. Analysis of the quantitative data showed statistically significant decreases in depression and anxiety, and improved mental wellbeing, self-esteem, and social participation; no changes in social trust or perceptions of social support were found. Whilst these findings again indicate many positive effects, the report concluded that 'a randomised controlled trial with a larger sample size' (p.8) would be required for any definitive conclusions regarding impact to be drawn. Finally it is worth noting that whilst the social factors hypothesized as causal mechanisms were wide-ranging, the researchers' conceptions of the active elements of arts participation were impoverished by comparison; experiences of concentration and absorption, for instance, were understood simply as means of escape from negative preoccupations, rather than as having merit of their own. As noted above, the 'leads' followed by researchers may reflect current social representations of the therapeutic benefits of the arts, rather than what happens 'on the ground'. Furthermore, because each course used a range of art forms, little can be said about the characteristics of any in particular.

A major aim of economic effectiveness studies is to gauge the cost-effectiveness of such programmes, and in the case of TB2 above, this was accomplished 'by juxtaposing the costs of TB2 with cost savings related to reduced service use which were found for use of PCMHT [Primary Care Mental Health Team] services, and other areas of potential cost saving' (Matrix Insight 2010, p.103); the low take-up of the programme made it a relatively costly intervention. The authors of the report acknowledge that there are a variety of approaches to cost benefits analysis, and recommend that 'a further analysis, using more subtle markers is undertaken' (p.103). Kimberlee et al. (2014) argue that assessments of the economic value of such programmes should take into account the money saved long term (rather than over the life of the project) through improvements in participant mental health and other areas. Their study, which estimated economic impacts using a Social Return on Investment methodology (Emerson, 2000) produced evidence of the economic value of a social prescribing programme offering a mixture of one-to-one and group support around a variety of activities including creative arts. Whilst these studies are suggestive of the benefits and potential cost effectiveness of such programmes, the need to adhere to strict criteria for participant inclusion and to deliver a time-delimited programme whose contents are well-defined means that this methodological approach is unsuited to the investigation of long-term, loosely structured, ongoing groups such as those run in community and some primary care settings.

In summary, the qualitative and quantitative measures used in these studies have both strengths and weaknesses. Whilst these different approaches may complement one another, the search for a single, standardized method of enquiry that has been described as the 'holy grail' (Hamilton, 2002, in Selwood, 2002) of research into arts for health is likely to be in vain. None of the approaches described above, furthermore, are suited to capturing the moment-to-moment specifics of arts for health practices. When hypotheses about mechanisms of change are based solely on participant accounts, much of interest—for example material concerning contexts, relationships, materials, and processes—disappears below the radar. Furthermore, as part of the research-policy assemblage already described, the literature above characteristically employs without caution or

criticism hegemonic definitions of mental ill health, wellbeing, inclusion, community, and creativity. All of these, in other academic contexts, have become increasingly contested terms.

### **3.3. An alternative approach: geographies and ethnographies of health**

In contrast to the 'hit-and-run' approach (Booth and Booth, 1994, p.417) evident in much survey- and interview-based arts impact research, geographies and ethnographies of mental health often rely on data gathered from participant observation over long periods. Participant observation involves sustained and active immersion in the context under investigation, and provides access to phenomena that disappear entirely in retrospective stakeholder accounts. These include the subjectivity and intersubjectivity of researcher and participants, affects that are hard to describe or disclose, moment-to-moment processual, bodily and non-verbal dimensions of phenomena that are invisible in much arts impact research, and the behaviour of neglected non-human, contextual, and material actants (Latour, 2004, p.75) in the research field.

In the field of cultural geography there is a substantial ethnographic literature focused on mental health (see for instance Parr, 2000; Pinfold, 2000), and this includes a small number of studies (for example Atkinson and Scott, 2015; Parr, 2006; Rose, 1997) concerning wellbeing-oriented arts interventions. Distancing themselves from the culture of 'policy-based evidence making' discussed in Chapter 2, ethnographies of mental health and arts for health are able to problematize, and thereby open up to reflective scrutiny, many things taken as given in the arts for health literature, and to examine the socially constructed and performative nature of concepts such as mental health and wellbeing. For example, arts impact research generally assumes that the role of researcher is unproblematic, and that data can be gathered quite simply by asking people their opinions in interviews or questionnaires. Ethnographers by contrast draw attention to the embodied nature of research, and the 'unspoken subjectivity' that affects interactions and is also an important part of what is there to be recorded:

how for instance, in a particular context, 'to be seen as active, efficient and busy only serves to alienate both the researcher and the researched' (Parr, 1998, p.30). How the notion of the recipients of care is constructed is equally salient; much participatory arts outcome research portrays participants as 'passive demographic containers' (Parr, 2004, p.251) and makes scant reference to the complex worlds that selves inhabit, with or without 'mental health difficulties'. Ethnographies of mental health also pay detailed attention to the effects of location, social context, and resource allocation on the constitution and treatment of psychological and other health difficulties, factors not attended to in much outcome literature in which depression, for example, is either medicalized or viewed intrapersonally as an aspect of temperament. Duff (2015, p.5) for instance notes that in research based on participant narratives, although connectedness, hope, optimism, meaning, and empowerment are routinely considered as stages on the journey to recovery from mental illness, a phenomenological approach offers few insights into 'how these stages are enabled or inhibited within a broader web of social, political and economic contexts' with the problematic consequence 'that recovery is treated as a function of a given individual's *effort or will to recover*'; this assumption fits comfortably with neoliberal conceptions of individual responsibility, and makes it possible to overlook the part played in recovery by affective resources that transcend the individual. It is also recognized (see for example Rose, 1997) that divergent discourses of wellbeing and community are harnessed to a variety of ends by a range of stakeholders including policy makers, community arts workers and participants; the use of concepts of wellbeing in connection with 'neoliberal citizenship agendas' (Parr, 2004, p.539) is critically addressed. The ethnographic literature usefully problematizes, furthermore, the role of the arts in the creation of 'inclusionary belonging' (Parr, 2006, p.152). In a study of two Scottish arts programmes for people with mental health difficulties, for example, Parr observes how identities and affiliations are reorganized through 'processes of differencing that occur within spaces and strategies of inclusion' (p.152); and that not all reintegration into mainstream cultural production has predictable or desirable results, for instance when particular artists are paradoxically excluded from a public exhibition for 'not being outsider enough' (p.162). Unlike most impacts research, thus, an ethnographic approach values

'knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grab and hold them tight' (Law, 2004, p.3), and takes a curious and critical stance towards conceptual tools and their existing modes of use.

To summarize, the ethnographic methodology chosen for the current study relies on long-term participant observation. This approach yields a distinctive contribution to knowledge in capturing situated, interpersonal, material, and processual aspects of crafts for health practice that disappear in conventional interview-based arts impact research. Research into arts for health requires work at this finer geographic scale, particularly since analysis at the level of general features and national impacts has failed to provide the conceptual instruments required to articulate change processes at the level of the small group or the individual (see Jones, 1998). Whilst the observational approach used here acknowledges that participants are 'experiential experts' (Eatough, Smith and Shaw, 2008, p.1772), it also recognizes that attention is selective; participant observation captures an abundance of material disregarded as irrelevant or trivial by stakeholders. This material, it will be argued, is essential in understanding mechanisms of impact in arts, and specifically crafts, for health.

### **3.4. Methodological challenges**

Ethnographic fieldwork has historically been central to anthropological research, and has increasingly been adopted in related disciplines such as cultural geography and sociology. Unlike a range of qualitative methodologies in which textual data are produced in interviews or surveys, participant observation characteristically involves the systematic recording of observations made during immersion in a particular social context. This immersion comes with its own methodological, epistemological, and ethical challenges: 'whatever else an anthropology of experience might be, it is clear that it is, like experience as such, abundant, multiform, and a bit out-of-hand. Wherever we are, it is not at the gates of paradigm-land' (Geertz, 1986, p.375). This section will examine firstly the ethical issues involved in fieldwork, and secondly the challenges, both

epistemological and ethical, arising when interpreting data and communicating findings.

*Ethics: questionable entanglements*

Ethically, anthropology's rootedness in colonial encounters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a reminder of the potential for abuse of power in any ethnographic undertaking (Pels and Salemink, 1999). Epistemologically, whilst at times the position of the 'unobtrusive observer' has been seen to bestow a kind of objectivity, in recent decades it has been increasingly recognized that, whether stepping forwards or standing back, field researchers are in 'constant confrontation with ethnography's Heisenberg dilemma' (Katz and Csordas, 2003, p.276), and 'almost never mere observers: rather, they are engaged actors who become socially and intersubjectively linked, whether fleetingly or over years or even decades, to those whose lives they hope to understand' (Willen and Seeman, 2012, p.2).



*Figure 3.1. At work, aproned on the right, as participant researcher in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

As a trainee child psychotherapist I had previously been asked to be a neutral or unobtrusive observer in two years of weekly observation of a mother and her baby, a paper based on this experience being a requirement for qualification. Trainees were expected to interact with mother and baby as little as possible so as to have minimal impact on the situation. It was rapidly obvious that this distanced position had substantial effects on what transpired, not least in making both mother and child suspicious of this strange way of interacting; the best way not to

disturb the situation was to 'act normal', sit on the floor, and get involved. As Lawlor and Mattingly (2001, p.149) point out:

the unobtrusive researcher stance is reminiscent of the 'still face' experiments conducted in developmental psychology to demonstrate the transactional nature of dyadic relationships between infants and mothers (Tronick et al., 1998). In fact the unobtrusive researcher becomes highly intrusive when he or she fails to respond to the interactional solicitations of children.

Whilst the distanced observer is often disturbing and intrusive, the perils of the alternative position of immersion are considerable. In playing a significant role in the lives of others whilst using the information thereby gathered for personal or professional gain, there is considerable risk of harm, particularly when working with vulnerable participants. Fine (1993) provides a succinct and pithy account of the contrast between ideals and reality in the field. In practice, he suggests, researchers repeatedly fail to live up to the ideal of the kindly, friendly, observant, honest, precise, observant, unobtrusive, candid, chaste, fair, and literary ethnographer. Fieldworkers, being human beings, are sometimes kind only because it is expedient, and may take a dislike to individuals whilst feigning a friendly demeanour; they can be vague or downright misleading about their motives to their participants, sometimes subjecting disclosures, produced in good faith, to a hermeneutics of suspicion or debunking; they generally record approximations which they then present as truth; they regularly suffer lapses of attention and sometimes have unfortunate effects on what they are trying to observe; they parade palatable aspects of themselves and conceal the rest; occasionally they develop unprofessional intimacies with their informants; they take sides; and publication then requires that they distort what they have observed by forcing it into an immaculately crafted literary or academic straightjacket.

At first glance some of these ethical slips look straightforwardly discreditable or avoidable; in many ethically reflexive accounts, however, it is clear that things are not so black and white. Parr (2001, p.165) for instance discusses her covert observation of people with serious mental health problems in public spaces. She acknowledges that this was ethically problematic, but also that

to have refused to observe them because I could not ask that permission or obtain those agreements would have been to render their experiences 'unresearchable', and such people and their everyday lives are already marginalized by an academy that constructs them as 'irrational others'.

Attempts have been made in recent years to negate or moderate the power differential between researchers and participants through substantially reframing the relationship. Participatory research (PR) is one attempt to engineer 'a collaborative and nonhierarchical approach which overturns the usual ways in which academics work outside the universities' (Pain, 2004, p.652). More recently, this ethos has been articulated in terms of 'co-production' (Durose, et al., 2011). The central feature of such collaborative research design is the aspiration to work inclusively with participants in as many aspects of the research as possible. Participants are enlisted as co-researchers, and reciprocally, academic researchers often take a participatory role. Historically the approaches have roots in a variety of disciplines and have been evolving since the 1970s (see for example Freire, 1972), although there is earlier work founded on the same assumptions (Lewin, 1946). PR and co-production are concerned to undermine the expert status of academic researchers, and to counter the way that research may unwittingly reinforce categories of exclusion and perpetuate inequalities in knowledge ownership (see for instance Durrer and Miles, 2009). They are therefore well suited for use by communities for ends that they define for themselves. The ethical dimensions of such work go beyond the aspiration, discussed above, to do no harm; they also aim to increase wellbeing and social justice. PR and co-production have been methodologically creative in developing a variety of collaborative data-gathering methods; amongst such innovations have been the use of arts activities, collaborative mapping, and participatory diagramming, which are now common in more educationally oriented or information-seeking arts for health work. At best, these approaches may permit 'the retelling of certain geographies that are taken for granted because they emanate from authoritative sources' (Cieri, 2003, p.149).

Collaborative approaches have their own difficulties. It has been suggested that egalitarian rhetoric masks a familiar paternalistic stance that assumes people's incapacity to empower themselves (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; McDowell, 1992). From a different perspective, Pain (2004, p.657) notes that 'power relationships

which participants are enmeshed in can make it difficult to participate fully, even where they want to'. 'Learned helplessness' (Seligman, 1975) and health difficulties frequently contribute to a lack of interest in full participation (the case in the present study). In addition, collaborative modes of working may obliterate individual differences and give a voice only to those willing to speak. Most intractably, 'in practice, academics often have most input and retain overall control in research' (Pain, 2004, p.657). Participants rarely aspire to be involved in data analysis or academic writing. This is also the point at which material may be heavily shaped by theories and understandings that participants do not share, and the challenges of this interpretative dilemma are examined in the following section.

### *Epistemology: questionable interpretations*

Ethnographies that concern themselves primarily with patterns of behaviour or cultural artefacts can claim to have at least some concrete evidence at hand on which to base their accounts – the kind of evidence that is repeatable or enduring, and that can be drawn, photographed or independently verified. In the last two decades, however, there has been increasing interest in emotional geographies and anthropologies of experience (Anderson and Smith 2001; Davidson and Bondi 2004; Willen and Seeman, 2012). This reflects a critical turn in the human sciences and concomitant interest in the role of emotion in the constitution of ideological, gendered, personal, and social identities (Ahmed, 2004). Whilst notions of the bounded self, interiority, deep subjectivity, and a purported intrapersonal unconscious have been critiqued from the perspective of critical and constructionist relational psychologies (e.g. Gergen, 2009), a fine-toothed engagement with subjective experience is difficult to dispense with in any attempt to understand the phenomena of mental life. As a consequence of the affective turn described above, however, a broader and more distributed account of affect has been harnessed to describe the forces at work between bodies, subjectivities, and social worlds. From this point of view emotions, conventionally understood as intrapersonal, are helpfully located 'as part of a wider continuum of affectivity between bodies, things, ideas and the social environment' (Fox, 2013a, no page number).

The ephemeral, blurry, and erratic nature of affective states, as well as the historically contingent and arbitrary construction of categories such as clinical depression or borderline personality disorder, raise a variety of epistemological issues for ethnographic research. (On the construction and medicalization of mental illness see Foucault, 2001; Borch-Jacobsen, 2009; Conrad and Barker, 2010.) Most obviously, the emotional states of others are not consistently apprehended on the basis of direct statements or even, necessarily, visual and aural cues, and often rely on an intersubjective empathy that is hard to describe except in quasi-mystical terms like intuition. Very often such intuitions are founded on a parallel somatic arousal or sympathetic bodily resonance, and whilst the latter is demonstrable at a neurophysiological level (see for instance Gallese, 2003), it often escapes conscious detection, or is hard to articulate. Unconscious emotional communication or contagion has also been theorized in terms of counter-transference, a concept which whilst sometimes pragmatically useful or true to experience, remains laden with psychoanalytic assumptions; the uses and abuses of psychoanalytic theory in cultural geography will be discussed below. Such concepts exemplify the way that conventional language of the emotions (saturated with Freud, Skinner, Rogers, Maslow, et al.) imposes itself upon raw bodily states; we experience ourselves in the ways that language currently allows, even if this is not always totally constraining.

Numerous challenges result. Haptic geographies (Paterson, 2009; Crang, 2003), sensory ethnographies (Pink, 2009) and anthropologies of experience (e.g. Turner and Bruner, 1986) are at pains to reintegrate bodily, felt, and irrational dimensions of experience, and in so doing are forced to make language perform in new ways. Ingold (2011, p.16) writes, for instance, of

how practical skill, in bringing together the resistances of materials, bodily gestures and the flows of sensory experience, rhythmically couples action and perception along paths of movement. Together, these experiments suggest that the entangled currents of thought that we might describe as 'mind' are no more confined within the skull than are the flows of corporeal life confined within the body. Both spill out into the world.

Bennett (2001, p.111) pushes language in a similar way in describing enchantment as 'a mixed bodily state of joy and disturbance, a transitory sensuous condition

dense and intense enough to stop you in your tracks and toss you onto new terrain and to move you from the actual world to its virtual possibilities'. Language is stretched so that it breaks, as it were, and reconstitutes itself around a subtly different set of meanings. The problem remains, however, of how to write about haptic or emotional experience, or complex blendings of the two, whilst maintaining some academic rigour. Whilst this issue is alluded to by a number of writers interested in sensory or emotional ethnography, there are no checklists for plausibility and this type of research is not infrequently 'derided for being somehow soft and "touchy-feely"' (Crang, 2003, p.494). In addition, consciousness is not routinely attentive to bodily sensations or the quieter disturbances of the emotional everyday, and the language available for their expression is impoverished; to be curious about these things in ethnographic work is to make oneself vulnerable to criticism that one has invented or brought into existence things that had no meaningful or significant life until hypothesized or named by the researcher. Countering this view, it may be argued that good research is a type of dissenting practice that can 'put into contention the objective status of what is "given" and impose an examination and discussion of those things that were not "visible", that were not accounted for' (Panagia and Rancière, 2000, p.125); where this is the case, it cannot, by definition, reproduce the way that things are ordinarily, 'objectively' perceived. Law (2004, p.116) puts this in succinct methodological terms: *'Method always works not simply by detecting but by amplifying a reality'*.

A further important epistemological problem concerns the theoretical frameworks which are invoked in making sense of 'raw' data but also partially constitute it, since they can only be 'bracketed' (as recommended by Glaser, 1992, for example) in a fantasy textbook world. One way to order attempts in the human sciences to shed light on human experience is to range them along a spectrum from the ostensibly descriptive to the highly theoretical. In the case of sociological anthropology, Willen and Seeman (2012, p.1) suggest the orientations represented by the two ends of this spectrum 'might be glossed imperfectly as the phenomenological and psychoanalytic schools'. Whilst both approaches involve the search for meaning, a hermeneutic phenomenology involves the thematization,

or search for essences, in the visible-but-taken-for-granted, whereas psychoanalysis privileges the redescription of the visible as evidence for invisible, unconscious processes. Phenomenological approaches in the social sciences have their roots in the philosophy of Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, and share a 'return to embodied, experiential meanings' aiming at 'a fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as concretely lived' (Finlay, 2009, p.6). Phenomenology nonetheless encompasses a variety of approaches—note, for instance, the contrast between Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodied experience, and Heidegger's focus on existential 'thrownness' and temporality. In recent years, some anthropologists have questioned the adequacy of this experience-near approach. Good (2012, p.24), for instance, argues that

studies of subjectivity need to attend to that which is *not* said overtly, to that which is unspeakable and unspoken, to 'the Impossible and the Forbidden' in Sudhir Kakar's words, that which appears at the margins of formal speech and everyday presentations of self, manifest in the Imaginary, in dissociated spaces and the apparitional, in individual dream time and partially revealed affect, coded in esoteric symbolic productions aimed at hiding as well as revealing.

Psychoanalysis has increasingly been used as a way to make sense of this presumed hidden continent (see for example Bondi, 2014). Its assumptions have also been seen as problematic (Philo and Parr, 2003), not least because of the claim that certain things are manifestations of an 'unconscious' that by definition is unknowable. Psychoanalytic theories, applied to manifest behavioural phenomena through the act of making an interpretation, construct a particular kind of unconscious substratum, which, 'made visible' in this epistemologically problematic fashion, is then used as evidence to support these same theories (Welsh 1994; Marinelli and Mayer 2003). Contemporary attempts in the human sciences to use psychoanalytic theory potentially risk the same circularity, and may be ethically problematic. To give an example, whilst the use of a psychoanalytic concept like transference 'to describe the unconscious archaic images that the subject imposes onto the person of the researcher' (Hunt, 1989, p.58; see also Clarke and Hoggett, 2009) might be intuitively appealing, it can also be used to invalidate subjective accounts, and to justify a stance of suspicion and unmasking that puts words in people's mouths. Anthropologists and geographers of mental health continue to debate whether theorizing the unconscious

dimensions of human experience can be done without ‘reproducing a colonial anthropology of “knowing better” than those with whom we work’ (Good, 2012, p.32).

Some responses to this dilemma are suggested by two modes of clinical engagement that theorize an active unconscious dimension to experience without forcing it into being through interpretation. Lacan, putting his own twist on Freud’s metapsychology, argues against conventional psychoanalytic interpretation and suggests that the task of the analyst is to facilitate and draw attention to instances of ‘full speech’ (Soler, 1996, p.47) – talk into which the forbidden, unspeakable, incongruous, and *unheimlich* can irrupt, as contrasted with the habitual empty talk in which familiar, coherent narratives are rehearsed and embroidered again and again. Interpretation here takes the form, not of putting words into the analysand’s mouth, but of strategies designed to draw attention to what has just been said before it is glossed over or rationalized; the truth demanded of interpretation is no longer a full stop – ‘so *that’s* what that means’ – but an opening up of discourse to its full indeterminacy. American philosopher and psychotherapist Gendlin (1996, p.15) arrives at similar conclusions via the route of humanistic psychology:

*Every experience and event contains implicit movement. To find it one must sense its unclear edge. Every experience can be carried forward. Given a little help one can sense an “edge” in the experience more intricate than one’s words or concepts can convey. One must attend to such sensed edges because steps of change come at those edges.*

By working consistently at the blurry, inchoate borders of the ‘felt sense’ of how things are, clients are encouraged to find a language for that which was previously inaccessible to consciousness; again the therapist (and by extension the researcher) does not presume to articulate this material on behalf of a ‘defended subject’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2009).



*Figure 3.2. Mosaic head, Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

These two ways of engaging psychotherapeutically are suggestive of how a model of unconscious processes might be part of ethnographic method, both in the field and in writing up, without the dismantling or violation of participants' conscious accounts. They also acknowledge the role of the therapist/researcher in eliciting such material, consistent with a view of research as performative rather than purely descriptive. To quote Law (2004, p.143),

Method is not, I have argued, a more or less successful set of procedures for reporting on a given reality. Rather it is performative. It helps to produce realities. It does not do so freely and at whim. There is a hinterland of realities, of manifest absences and Othernesses, resonances and patterns of one kind or another, already being enacted, and it cannot ignore these. At the same time, however, it is also creative. It re-works and re-bundles these and as it does so re-crafts realities and creates new versions of the world. It makes new signals and new resonances, new manifestations and new concealments, and it does so continuously.

### **3.5. Design of the current project**

#### *Starting point*

Because this project was an AHRC-funded collaborative doctoral award, its basic form and rationale were in place before my involvement (see Falmouth University, 2016). As initially formulated, the project's overall purpose was to critically examine craft hobbies as a means of promoting health and wellbeing through creativity and increased social capital, and to consider how collaborating partner AFHC might learn from this to further engage communities with the health benefits of crafts. AFHC provided the structure and resources necessary to set up the group I facilitated myself, as well as offering me the opportunity to be an observer in one

of their existing groups, which became the first site for my field research. Although resident in London, in the first two years of the studentship I spent two or three days a week in Cornwall, and was able to base myself in AFHC's office when not involved in collecting data. Due to hectic schedules on both sides, AFHC's director and I saw less of each other than either of us initially expected, and at times were unable to touch base as regularly as would have been ideal. For the most part, however, our collaboration was straightforward, since it was underpinned by a shared interest in the potential benefits of crafting, and a shared curiosity about the outcomes of my research. The collaboration with AFHC provided a valuable opportunity to gain an understanding of the workings of an established arts-for-health organization. In the third year of my studentship, I was able to make a reciprocal contribution through devising and delivering a series of workshops for AFHC's facilitators; this will be further discussed in Chapter 10. In addition to the support I received from AFHC, members of an advisory panel set up by my supervisory team (Professor Jacqueline Atkinson, Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Public Health at Glasgow University; Hannah Maughan, Senior Lecturer in Textile Design at Falmouth University; Mike Westley, Landscape Architect and specialist in participative project development; and Dr Stephanie Jackson, General Practitioner) offered me their valuable critical reflections in finalizing the research design.

Participant observation was from the start envisaged as central to the project, and my preliminary reviewing of arts for health research confirmed that observational methods, in which I was practised in other professional contexts, were underused in the field. As part of the process of familiarizing myself with the work of AFHC, I identified the Hellan Crafts Group (whose structure and history will be further described in Chapter 4) as an ideal candidate for preliminary visits. Once familiar with the group after a dozen weekly visits, it was apparent that this would be an appropriate setting in which to carry out sustained field research, since its activities were all crafts-based, its participants were happy to welcome me as well as supportive of my research aims, and the group's links to a local general practice made it possible to consider the group's operation in the context of social prescribing. Fieldwork was formally underway in this setting at an early stage of

the studentship, and continued until the end of the second year. My participation was documented in extensive field notes, and supplemented by interviews with a number of participants and others involved with the group.

### *Choosing a setting for a second group*

Once fieldwork was underway in the Hellan group, my supervisory team and I considered suitable settings for a second group, which I would start and run as facilitator throughout the second year of my studentship. A potential opportunity to run a weekly group as artist in residence in a public gardens in Falmouth was rejected on the grounds that data would be contaminated in disruptive ways by the history of romantic ideas about the improving and civilizing influences of nature and the landscape (see Parr, 2007). The garden itself, and its history as a private estate, were potentially laden stimuli whose effects would be hard to differentiate from creative aspects of the group I was planning to run. A more appropriate setting suggested itself in the form of a church hall, where there was an established community-run pop-up café once a week. We considered that setting up a group in proximity to this venture (immediately after the café's session) would make the group visible and accessible to potential attendees, and provide a way of linking participants to other community ventures. Initially we explored the possibility of a link to a local general practice, mirroring the referrals route of the Hellan group, but this offer was not taken up by the surgery. Instead, the first participants self-referred on the basis of a flyer (see Appendix 1) that invited potential members to explore 'a variety of crafts as ways of improving wellbeing, especially if you are facing life difficulties that impact on health or happiness'; others came by word of mouth. Wording involving 'mental health' was deliberately avoided, partly because of associated stigma, and partly because of difficulties mentioned above concerning the normative social construction of related categories; I wished to avoid some of the most obvious 'processes of differencing that occur within spaces and strategies of inclusion' (Parr, 2006, p.163). Some of those attracted had been members of other AFHC crafts groups that were no longer in existence. Further details about this group's set-up and development over time are given in Chapter 4.

As settings for fieldwork, these two groups potentially provided an interesting contrast between a form of social prescription on the one hand, and a more independently run community venture on the other. In addition, the new group presented an opportunity to observe the consequences of engaging with unfamiliar creative activities for the first time, and an opportunity for participants to articulate their initial assumptions, as well as the new or unexpected: 'people who know each other well are likely to operate with taken-for-granted assumptions that they feel do not need to be brought to the fore' (Bryman, 2004, p.354). Had my observations highlighted major differences in how creative practices unfolded between the two settings, they would have served to draw out the distinctive features of crafts groups in community and primary care contexts, and I have, where relevant, drawn out differences that I observed. In the final analysis, however, my observations highlight that the creative processes stimulated by a confluence of makers, materials and supportive facilitation were similar in the two groups. I have therefore used them predominantly to evidence some common features of wellbeing-oriented group crafts activities, when underpinned by a common philosophy of practice on the part of facilitators. These features were observed in spite of differences of context, and further confirmation is provided in material from interviews with arts-for-health facilitators using making activities in a range of settings.

### *My position as researcher*

Salient dimensions of my role as researcher include, firstly the prior experience and philosophical commitments with which I embarked upon this study, and secondly, my impact upon the groups in the course of my work with them, through participant perceptions of my academic agenda, and through ways in which I was necessarily involved in directing the course of events, particularly as a facilitator and teacher.

I approached this research with a long-term interest in the benefits of handmaking for psychological wellbeing. My professional background includes many years of working as a fine art printmaker, designer bookbinder, and art teacher. I have extensive experience of teaching groups of adult beginners, and endorse a

democratic view of creativity as a basic form of literacy available to anyone willing to acquire and practise a set of basic skills. I am experienced at helping learners develop confidence through experimentation and improvisation under conditions in which mess and uncertainty are permitted rather than discouraged. These commitments certainly affected my style as a facilitator, and my interviews with other arts for health practitioners suggest that we shared a range of basic assumptions about how best to foster creative confidence. Also relevant to my role of researcher was my long-term work with children and adults as a psychotherapist in NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and an inpatient psychiatric setting. This background provided me with appropriate skills for working with vulnerable participants, and also offered a variety of frameworks for thinking about psychological aspects of making. Most relevant to this study was a developmental perspective, which encouraged me to think in terms of relationship, with reference to the impact of interpersonal transactions in the present, as well as to the enduring effects of early experience. Whilst these existing foundations might be said to have directed my attention to certain features of the situations observed, they were not constraining. To give two examples, my initial view of the positive affective dimensions of crafting as essential or intrinsic was substantially contradicted, and replaced by a much more situated and interpersonal account; and the role of materials as very active collaborators in the creative making process is something that only became apparent to me in gathering and analysing my data.

My presence as researcher in the groups in which I worked also necessarily had effects on what I observed. Participants were clearly informed about my research agenda at the outset. I was initially anxious about seeking my participants' consent, particularly in the established group, where I felt participants might feel scrutinized in a setting that had previously been experienced as safe. In the event, participants were enthusiastic about the research, which positioned me as an interested listener; they communicated a sense of wanting their experiences to be known (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/12/12) and I noted that 'if anything people seem more eager to talk to me' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 28/05/13) once I had sought their permission to use my observations as research data.

I tried to strike an ethical balance between glossing over the fact that I was writing about the groups, and drawing attention to this. In practice, my active role—one in which I must have seemed totally preoccupied with cutting paper, mixing grout, making tea and discussing issues of design—probably made my presence as researcher easy to forget, although occasionally participants asked me how my studies were going. As far as possible, with the exception of the necessary consent forms (Appendices 2 and 3), I tried not to disrupt the setting through the introduction of unnecessary paperwork, assessment or visible documentation. There was initial participant reluctance about photography, particularly when an unfamiliar AFHC photographer visited the Pendon group, and there was some disagreement about the most appropriate form of consent in relation to images. One regular visitor to the community café was a skilled amateur photographer, however, and was eventually trusted by all to document the group as long as he avoided shots that identified individuals. In order to minimize my impact as researcher, I also refrained from persuasion and repeated requests in recruiting my participant interviewees, although this limited the number of those happy to be involved. Lastly, I aimed to minimize my impact on what transpired by resisting the temptation to seek the opinions or beliefs of my participants through questioning. In pursuing the non-interpretative and unobtrusive strategies mentioned in relation to Lacan and Gendlin above, I relied on the safety of the groups as the condition most likely to facilitate unguarded disclosure of thoughts and feelings. Similarly, I avoided broadcasting my own perceptions of the impacts of creative making and creative groups. Whilst this is something I might have done to useful effect in an ordinary teaching situation, I felt there was risk here that my own beliefs would be obligingly adopted by participants, obscuring their own perceptions.

These measures aimed to reduce the possibility of creating distortion through participant anxiety or compliance. They were also intended to minimize the risk of producing data that simply mirrored my expectations. It is obvious, however, that in my role as teacher or facilitator, I directed some of what transpired, not least by encouraging particular attitudes (experimental, playful, or tenacious, for example) towards making activities. Since these strategies are familiar ones in arts for

health facilitation (as evidenced in Chapter 9), my interventions can be seen as characteristic. To return to Law's words, 'method always works not simply by detecting but by amplifying a reality' (2004, p.116); it does not, however, 'do so freely and at whim' (p.143), but responds to the legitimate affordances of the materials available.

### *Data collection*

As noted above, participant observation focused on creative process has been little used in research into arts for health. Some studies of amateur or wellbeing-oriented creativity describe themselves as ethnographic and include participant observation among their methods, but limit the use of observation to providing a background for interview material (see for example Johnson and Wilson, 2005; Caulfield, 2014). Responding to the lack of observational data about process dimensions of wellbeing-oriented crafting, I wished to foreground observational material as a primary resource in this project. More innovative forms of data collection that might have involved participants in recording their thoughts or activities were considered but rejected as overly intrusive, demanding, and potentially anxiety provoking, and therefore likely to distort what I was aiming to observe. For the same reason, I never made notes during sessions. Conscious of the limitations and distortions of memory, I generally wrote field notes immediately after each session that I attended, relocating to a quiet café or the train, and writing for a minimum of an hour. I most frequently used a method of writing that I had evolved over a decade of professional observation in clinical and educational settings, and in documenting sessions with psychotherapy clients. This consisted in recording my observations as rapidly and fully as possible, by writing down whatever came to mind. In practice this stream of recollections either presented itself in the form of a roughly chronological account of the session from my perspective as engaged participant, or organized itself into accounts of a number of participants' creative trajectories, as observed by me, over the course of a session. Aware of the possibility of distorting my account by excluding material deemed to be irrelevant or trivial, I aimed to be as comprehensive as possible in what I recorded, and to document it simply and factually with as little theoretical framing as possible. My notes record the banal (floor sweeping, looking for

materials, cutting paper, pouring glue, making tea) as well as ‘epiphanies’ (moments where participants were tearful, insightful, jubilant, or excited, for instance). Some of the material is autoethnographic, to the extent that it records my satisfactions, frustrations, and practical challenges. In all accounts, I was also concerned to capture the situational and interactional contexts in which events occurred, and the way that creative making processes emerged from a confluence of interactions with others as well as with the material world.

I also carried out some supplementary interviews (see schedule of interviews, Appendix 4). Five of these were with professional stakeholders (a GP, previous and current facilitators, the director of AFHC, and a member of the Pendon church hall committee) connected with my research settings. Interviews were designed to elicit factual information about the history of the Hellan group, its facilitators’ experiences, and the work of AFHC. In order to better understand how social prescribing is developing in the NHS, I also interviewed a GP who is vice chair of a Clinical Commissioning Group in a central London borough. A further eight interviews were carried out with directors and facilitators from a range of arts-for-health organizations, in order firstly to characterize work using crafts in an arts-for-health context, secondly to explore how practitioners understood the impacts of such work, and thirdly to provide a broader context and opportunity for comparison with the two groups I studied. Given the impossibility of an exact description of UK crafts for health activity (see Chapter 9), no claims can be made, in selecting eight projects to interview, to have achieved a representative sample. The organizations were chosen because they made substantial use of crafts activities in their work, and varied in scale, setting, and type. My interviewees had both hands-on and organizational experience of using group crafts activities in a mental health context. These interviews—generally lasting between one and two hours—were structured loosely around a small number of themes: organizational history, location, funding, client group, routes of referral, and how crafts activities were used. I aimed to find out how these mostly well-established organizations perceived the affordances and challenges of their current situation, and in particular how they saw the crafts in the context of their work. The visits I made in order to carry out the interviews also allowed me to make observations about

geographical location and its relevance to each project, to note the characteristics of the spaces organizations used for their work, to see workshops underway, and in some cases to talk informally with participants.

Lastly, I interviewed four participants from the Hellan group. I decided not to interview members of the group I had set up myself, since I wished to avoid potential confusion created by blurring the roles of facilitator and researcher. In addition members of this group had known me for a matter of months, whereas I had been familiar to members of the Hellan group for over a year and a half by the time I carried out interviews. Participants were interviewed to provide a supplementary source of information about the perceived benefits of such groups, and in order to test my observation that certain kinds of information go missing under interview conditions.

### *Ethical considerations*

Potential risks to participants were considered carefully in advance, and minimized in a number of ways. Firstly, the group I facilitated was set up and run in consultation with participants at every stage. From the beginning, those attending were encouraged to take ownership by deciding what they wanted to do and how my facilitation would be of most use to them. Intermittent meetings with the director of AFHC were arranged in order to consult with the Pendon participants about the future of the group, and director Jayne Howard was an occasional visitor at the church hall. Participants in both groups were given a very clear account of the aims of my study, using consent forms (Appendices 2 and 3) designed to reduce any chance that they would feel labelled, pathologized or intrusively monitored as individuals. I remained open about my research agenda and available to talk about it for the duration of my field research. In accordance with the principles of participatory research, I made it clear that participants were welcome to take a more active role in the project, although in practice, in ways that will be examined, participants were unwilling to take even minimal roles as co-researchers since the time and physical and psychological resources for such collaboration were in short supply. Although I made it clear that nobody would be marginalized if they declined passive or active participation, and that all were free

to withdraw from the research at any time without needing to leave the group, all of my participants gave their consent to my writing about the group, remained involved, and supported the aims of my research. I feel that my offer of more active involvement in the study, although not taken up, allowed participants to feel valued and respected as equals, and to consider themselves as making an important contribution to the project. It can also be argued that, had group members become active in the co-production of this research, the effects of this involvement may have been difficult to disentangle from the benefits of group crafting, and the fact that they were not contributors in this way preserved the naturalism of my research settings.

Secondly, I worked throughout to create and maintain a safe, validating, enabling, and supportive atmosphere, communicating my conviction that we all have the means to be creative and learn new skills, and gearing any teaching sensitively to individual needs. A culture of mutual concern and consideration was fostered. Participants' wellbeing and benefit, and my responsibility to facilitate a safe and enjoyable group, was always prioritized over the needs of my research.

Thirdly, participants knew that they had absolute freedom concerning what they wished to share with me, and that this would be treated confidentially. Their confidence depended on my assurance that in writing about my participants, they would be identified by a pseudonym, and that all other identifying characteristics would be disguised. (For reasons concerning the guarantee of complete confidentiality, my field notes, which contain a great deal of material through which participants could be identified, will not be made available in the public domain.)

Fourthly, it was clear to participants that this was not a therapy group, and there was no advice giving or therapeutic engagement inappropriate to the setting. As group facilitator, I avoided taking on roles more appropriately occupied by community mental health or medical professionals, and worked to counter dependence on my practical support or friendship. In addition, following good

practice for projects of this type, I liaised closely with AFHC and informed them immediately of any potential difficulties.

Lastly, sensitive attention was paid to an exit strategy in both groups. I was very clear from the start with participants that my regular involvement would end in July 2014, and I continued to prepare them for my departure as it approached. As a volunteer, my departure was not critical for the functioning of the Hellan group, and it was easy to bring my involvement to an end without creating disruption. The situation with the group I facilitated was less straightforward. AHRC undertook to provide funding for the Pendon group to continue with volunteer support at the end of one year, and we endeavoured to provide a smooth and satisfactory transition to alternative facilitation, although this was problematic in ways that will be elaborated in Chapter 4.

### *Data analysis*

All fieldwork and interviewing were completed by the end of the second year. Once field notes were typed up and interviews accurately transcribed, in both cases by myself, I had over 117,000 words of field notes and 125,000 words of interview transcriptions. These were uploaded to a web-based social sciences qualitative data analysis package (Dedoose) in order to code the material. Thematic analysis involved the circular and reiterative strategies common to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992). I used an open coding approach (Strauss, 1987) in my first and second read-throughs of data, tagging field notes and transcripts fairly intuitively to flag up potential areas of interest or emergent themes. This approach generated 90 individual codes, for example 'practising', 'bricolage', 'showcasing', 'distraction', 'peer support', and 'listening'. Some reviewing was carried out in order to apply all codes across the whole body of data. These codes were initially grouped under seven superordinate headings: 'organizational'; 'intrapersonal'; 'interpersonal'; 'facilitation'; 'creative skills'; 'materials', and 'my position as researcher'. The subcodes 'practising' and 'bricolage', for example, were considered as examples of creative skills; 'showcasing' and 'listening' were categorized as aspects of facilitation; 'distraction' was considered as an

intrapersonal dimension of making, and ‘peer support’ as an interpersonal phenomenon.

Whilst these superordinate categories formed a temporary holding arrangement for a large number of disparate themes, writing the thesis along these lines would not have adequately represented what was most of interest in the material, particularly because these fragmented typologies uprooted affect and interaction from the sequential processes in which they were embedded. In order to clarify the strengths, weaknesses, and interrelationship of my codes, I generated some theoretical notes on each of them. Each of the ninety codes was allocated a post-it note, to which I added my thoughts concerning on the original justification for its creation, and problems associated with its use (for example duplication, limited relevance, over-applicability, vagueness, or loss of meaning when treated in isolation). I also noted any striking links with other codes.



*Figure 3.3. Generating notes on codes (Photo: Sarah Desmarais, 2014)*

In writing critically about the codes like this, the distinction between intra- and interpersonal dimensions of what transpired became increasingly meaningless. Neither could facilitation or the social aspects of the group be convincingly separated out from the affective dimensions of manual creativity, nor indeed from structural, organizational, discursive, and economic dimensions of crafts-for-health practice. It was impossible to separate issues of context, relationship, process, and materiality neatly at the joints. Writing the thesis necessitated a comprehensive rearrangement of coded material into chapters that better conveyed the (interdependent) situated, relational, processual, and material

dimensions of my observations. A processual account obliged me to weave data concerning materials and facilitation throughout the central chapters of the thesis, and the intrapersonal/interpersonal distinction was discarded as meaningless. My post-it note strategy allowed me to experiment with some more satisfactory arrangements of the material. Methodological dimensions of the decisions taken in organizing the thesis are described below. Before starting to write, all the extracts related to each code were printed out together, and I wrote further detailed notes about many of the codes in margins. Further analysis of this type was carried out throughout the writing process.

### *From analysis to thesis*

Since the specifics of my involvement with participants as a facilitator or assistant were crucial to the collection of a distinctive type of data, I decided to introduce the reader to participants, settings, and associated field notes as early as possible in the thesis. Chapter 4, therefore, was dedicated to creating a picture of the two settings and numerous participants who were part of my research, and set the stage for the affect- and process-oriented analysis of the groups' activities that followed.

My data contained a number of themes un- or under-represented in other research into arts and crafts for health. Seen holistically through sustained observation, creative making encompassed a range of affects that go largely unrecorded, perhaps because unwanted, like apathy; hard to articulate, like enchantment; or incongruous, like creative ambition when participants are viewed as passive recipients of care. Most strikingly, alongside experiences of flow, distraction, and relaxation, there were many instances of creative frustration and self-doubt. My experience as an art teacher, facilitator, and maker, and the accounts of my facilitator interviewees, suggest that such experiences are an ordinary part of any creative activity, but one that almost vanishes in interview-based data. In Chapter 5, therefore, I set out to complicate and diversify existing accounts of the affects associated with crafts creativity in an arts for health context, and to challenge normative views of creative making.

Although clarity dictated that I draw out the characteristics of these affects as discrete entities, in so doing the process dimensions of what transpired were insufficiently represented. The picture that emerges from long-term observation depicts a complex, sequential, emotional eventscape in a state of constant transformation that cannot be adequately captured in the form of a number of discrete themes without misrepresenting affects as unitary, stable, unrelated, and intrapersonal. In fact it was precisely the situated and emergent nature of the emotions associated with crafts creativity that seemed of most of relevance in considering the potential benefits of making, and for any analysis of good practice in the field. Chapters 6 and 7, therefore, were used to place these affects within the temporal frames provided by making sequences. In Chapter 6 I focus on playful and fortuitous aspects of making, and in Chapter 7 on its intentional, agentic dimensions, although I emphasize their interdependence throughout.

My documentation of experiences that would not have been attended to by most participants, or disregarded as unrelated to the potential benefits of arts for health, produced a predominantly etic view, somewhat at odds with a trend towards viewing participants as the sole experiential experts in the picture. I have explained above my reasons for contesting this view. My analysis, however, left a remainder of 'homeless' but important data including participants' first-hand accounts of the meanings and benefits of crafting, which I wished to take into account. A small part of this material was derived from the four interviews I carried out with participants. The most informative participant accounts were located, however, in unself-conscious talk recorded in field notes, in which the meanings associated with making and with crafted objects emerged in the course of descriptions of everyday events, or as spontaneous insights connected to particular moments in a creative process. These comments could have been used to produce a conventional emic or first-person account of the benefits of group crafting. In reviewing them in the contexts they were produced, however, I was struck by their performative aspects. In articulating the personal meanings attached to crafting, speakers were not just reporting their perceptions of the benefits of crafting for wellbeing, but practising, performing, and bringing to life alternative aspects of identity. I wished to highlight the role of crafted objects,

both completed and under construction, as a focus for the organization of such talk. Chapter 8, therefore, investigates how participant understandings, and the material artefacts around which they were discursively organized, were connected with the moment-to-moment construction and maintenance of experiences of agency and connection.

A more general analysis of the wider economy of UK crafts for health interventions, derived from interviews with other professionals using crafts in health (whilst it might have worked equally well as an introduction to the field if positioned earlier in the thesis) was left for Chapter 9. In situating it here, I was able to integrate analysis derived from my own ethnographic work with that based on interview material. Placing this material later in the thesis also reflects the fact that interviewing took place in parallel with (rather than prior to) my engagement with the crafts groups, and analysis of this material and my ethnographic data took place in tandem rather than sequentially.

My findings, arranged in this way, produced chapters 4 to 9 of my thesis, prefaced by an introduction (Chapter 1), contextual review (Chapter 2) and methodological discussion (Chapter 3), and drawn together in my conclusions (Chapter 10).

### **3.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach used in this study. Section 3.2 reviewed the methodologies most commonly used in arts for health research, and assessed their strengths, their weaknesses, and their limitations for building a more detailed and comprehensive picture of specific arts for health practices. In section 3.3, this impacts-oriented research was contrasted with ethnographic approaches to mental health and arts for health. In particular I noted the distinctive potential of participant observation in circumventing the limitations of interview and survey data, and in producing long-term, processual, relational, and situated accounts that attend to details of everyday practices often deemed as inconsequential or as unnecessary for understanding the impacts of the arts. In section 3.4, I examined the distinctive ethical and epistemological challenges of an

ethnographic approach, and the difficulties of writing about the emotional experiences of others from an engaged perspective. In section 3.5, I described how the current project was designed. In so doing, I reflected on my role as participant researcher, and how my prior commitments and my role within the groups may have impacted on the events I recorded. I outlined the methods used for data collection, and the steps taken to respond to the ethical and epistemological challenges that presented themselves at this stage of the project. I also described how my data was analysed, and how this analysis provided a structure for the resulting thesis.

This chapter has drawn out the distinctive potentials of a participant observation-centred ethnographic methodology and its suitability for addressing research questions concerning the potential benefits of crafts practice in arts for health contexts. In keeping with this interest in the fine-grained, specific and situated, Chapter 4 will describe in detail the two settings in which I worked.

## CHAPTER FOUR TWO GROUPS USING CRAFTS FOR WELLBEING

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides sketches of the two settings in which my fieldwork was carried out. These provide a context for the fine detail and analysis of group making activities and their affective dimensions that follow in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The groups are described in terms of their histories and funding, the characteristics of their locations and membership, the rhythm of their activities (both within typical sessions and over the longer term), and the course of my involvement with each.

### 4.2. Hellan Crafts Group: creative making on prescription



*Figure 4.1. Members of the Hellan Crafts Group at work on a quilt  
(Photo: Lisa Faisey, 2014)*

#### *History*

Hellan Crafts Group was an established AFHC group, set up in January 2009 in collaboration with a local general practice. Prior to involvement with this group, AFHC had piloted creative residencies in six Cornish GP surgeries through their Arts in Primary Care project. These interventions were run between 2006 and 2008 using a variety of art forms and types of engagement (see Bennett and Bastin,

2008). Aware of this work, and in a context of increasing interest from the NHS in links to community services (discussed more fully in Chapter 9), the surgery in Hellan approached AFHC asking if they would help them set up a creative project for patients. The work was funded using a one-off sum allocated to the surgery by the local Primary Care Trust for 'winter pressures' (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 10/12/13). Admission to the group was, and continued to be, by referral only. (Many participants found attending the group initially very difficult, and required support to do so; consequently they were not 'self-selected' in the same way as participants in the Pendon group.) Once NHS funding ran out, the group's first facilitator undertook considerable independent work to obtain further grants; she reported that her attempts to encourage group members to engage more proactively with fundraising and managing their resources quickly led to anxiety and misunderstandings (Interview, Leah, 11/02/14). At this point Faye, who had been working with the group as a volunteer, agreed to take over the role of facilitator. During this early period of the group's life, AFHC had been involved in an advisory rather than funding capacity, but with these difficulties the organization took on a greater role in the group's survival (Interview 1, Jayne, AFHC, 30/07/13). In keeping with the generally threadbare economy of arts for health that will be described in greater detail in Chapter 9, the group was leading a hand-to-mouth existence during the period of my involvement, with funding rarely guaranteed for more than the next four months or so. Although AFHC were committed to the long-term survival of the group, a reliable source of financial support remained to be secured.

As detailed in Chapter 3, I became involved with the group as part of my familiarization with the work of AFHC. My initial attendance over a number of weeks served to build trust and rapport with group members, and it became apparent that the group was an ideal setting in which to carry out field research. Having sought participants' permission to involve them in my research project, I continued to attend, generally weekly, and my involvement extended over a period of twenty months.

### *Setting*

The group had a weekly two-hour booking in a community venue, originally a technical institute founded in the late nineteenth century by a social reformer and philanthropist. The solid granite-faced Victorian building constructed for this purpose was now administered by a charity. Its rooms were hired on a weekly basis by a variety of community groups. The space used by the crafts group was a sunny room with windows on two sides and an adjacent kitchen and storage room, and in many ways was well suited to purpose, although it would have been an impractical room to use for messy activities, being carpeted. Although the institute was a heavily used community resource, this was not reflected in the decoration of the internal spaces, which was fairly minimal, although the group members softened and personalized the environment by filling the room with colourful textiles for the duration of their sessions. Demerits of the setting were a rather hard acoustic (talk that included the whole circle was impeded as a result, as it was hard to hear) and lack of a convivial communal space where members of different community groups might have interacted. As described below, however, the group's facilitator undertook substantial work to establish community connections beyond the group.

### *Facilitation*

The group's facilitator, Faye, was a textile artist with experience of work in a variety of community groups. She had in common with all the crafts facilitators I met in the course of my research a huge enthusiasm for creative making, an enabling and empathic manner, and a passionate commitment to the work she performed in arts for health. This dedication will be discussed further in Chapter 9 in relation to the emotion work involved in this field, and the characteristics of precarious labour in the creative industries. Faye had entered the crafts-for-health field initially as a volunteer. During the period of my involvement, she was seeking to increase her paid work in the arts for health sector, although employment of this type was in short supply in the region. She was also actively engaged in making her own textile work, which she sold through local galleries.

Faye worked constantly to develop links between the crafts group and other community resources, most importantly with the surgery itself, as the group contributed work to decorate the walls of the waiting room and had a stand of handmade cards on sale there. Amongst a number of collaborative projects orchestrated by Faye whilst I was involved, the group produced a quilt that is now permanently displayed in a local heritage centre, and decorations for local food retailers as part of a regional food festival. At a smaller entrepreneurial scale, participants sold crafted objects to friends and returned the proceeds to the group. Alongside the display in the surgery, members also organized one or two stalls a year at community fairs or car boot sales. Taking responsibility for these ventures was sometimes experienced by participants as an unwelcome burden (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13), but it was evident over the two years I was involved that a number of members were increasingly comfortable in this role. The beneficial impact of such community connections is a recurrent theme in the arts for health literature, and the particular role that crafted objects, as ‘stuff that you can show’ (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13) played in creating these links will be explored in detail in Chapters 7 and 8. Links were also maintained with the surgery and AFHC through termly meetings, attended by Faye, Jonathan (GP from the surgery), and Jayne (Director of AFHC), to which participants were invited.

### *Activities*

Activities of this group were tied fairly tightly to a calendar of church, community, and commercial celebrations including Halloween, Christmas, Valentines Day, and Easter. This was in part a consequence of efforts to generate some funding through sales of cards and festive decorations at the surgery and on stalls at local fairs. (The display in the surgery also advertised the existence of the group to potential new members.) Christmas decorations were made for local retailers. The anniversary of World War I was also commemorated through the construction of a quilt for public display. Alongside activities that were aimed at sales or exhibition, Faye imaginatively devised accessible projects around less familiar textile crafts like rug hooking, silk painting, quilting, and appliqué. In a typical session, most group members would be working on individual pieces connected to

one of these projects, which Faye delivered using a carefully organized, step-by-step approach as a way of moderating participants' anxiety about their artistic skills or dexterity. No one was pressured to join in, and one or two people in the group would generally bring their own work—crochet or cross stitch for example—to work on during sessions.

The room was equipped with about twelve small, rectangular tables and these were arranged in a large rectangle with an enclosed space in the middle. Faye would arrive early to set up the room, so that at the start of the session, materials (bags of fabrics, boxes of paper and fabric dyes, tools, and so on) would be set out neatly on tables and chairs around the edge of the room. This lent an orderly, workmanlike feeling to the room, and particularly when the sun was shining, it became a cheerful space. Participants commented on numerous occasions on their appreciation of Faye's thoughtful organization and preparation: 'Faye's always prepared' (Interview, Faith, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/04/14). In a typical session, members (generally about ten people) would arrive promptly at 10am and, after enthusiastic greetings and some minutes spent chatting whilst standing, seat themselves in their familiar positions. There was, nonetheless, plenty of movement around the tables during the session as people went to look at or contribute to the work of others, to search for materials, or to watch an informal demonstration. Several members of the group commented to me on how Faye's orchestration of activities within the group, and the consequent bodily movement and verbal exchange around and between participants, had produced a friendly and inclusive culture; this was in contrast to the static nature of the group previously, which participants told me had resulted in an 'us and them' divide between the original members on one side of the table, and the later joiners on the other; 'since Faye came, the whole thing has gelled, and the whole group has taken off in a different way' (Interview, Joni, Hellan Crafts Group, 20/05/14). There was typically a continuous flow of conversation, mostly between neighbours rather than across the table, because of the arrangement of the furniture as well as the hard acoustic. Intermittently Faye would talk to those present collectively in connection with new skills, a collaborative project, or other issues concerning the group. There were also some whole-table discussions in which participants sought

feedback or advice from the group about their work, or shared a story or a joke. Faye spent most sessions moving about, offering technical help, and making sure that all participants felt attended to as individuals. In my role as volunteer, I also tended to walk around the tables, seeing how people's work was progressing, offering help or encouragement where needed, and engaging in chat.

Halfway through the group, one or two participants would get up to make tea and coffee. Responsibility for refreshments had been taken on by the group; they operated a kitty, and one group member brought in materials required, including biscuits. Members collaborated in clearing up. Once refreshments were on the table, there would often be a pause in making whilst the focus was on chat; making activities would slowly resume over the rest of the session. The group dynamic was warm and inclusive, and as noted above, facilitation played a role in this. Conversation was not organized around the current life difficulties of participants, but neither were these avoided. Over the course of my involvement, participants reported that they liked the fact that they didn't have to share these difficulties, but also that they felt accepted for who they were: 'people are very accepting of you, they take you at face value, which means that they trust you' (Interview, Faith, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/04/14). In practice the vicissitudes of everyday life, such as illnesses and interpersonal difficulties, were shared between participants and with facilitators, whilst material explicitly concerning mental health was less frequently articulated, although participants were willing to admit on occasion that they might be feeling 'not so good, actually . . . I don't know why I keep saying "fine" really' (Field note, Hellan Craft Group, 17/12/12). Participants in this group seemed inclined to experience their difficulties in terms of a medical model; the surgery and participants' respective GPs were often described as important anchors in their lives.

### *Participants*

I initially considered providing (disguised) pen portraits of individual group members at this point, but however many details I changed, I felt that individuals were still recognizable, in breach of my undertaking to participants not to divulge identifiable personal material in my writing. I have provided instead a group

portrait that conveys a general sense of the strengths and difficulties of members whilst concealing identities. Only approximate ages are linked to names (invented) that I have used here and elsewhere within field notes or to label quotations from interview material. To make the groups themselves less immediately identifiable, I have also used pseudonyms for facilitators and others who worked with the groups, as well as for their locations.

Members of the Hellan group were all women. Although this was not a condition of membership, several members said they would be reluctant to have men join, and reciprocally, GPs connected with the project felt it difficult to refer men now that this culture had been established (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 10/12/13). Apart from one person, all members were of white British origin, and roughly half had been born and had always lived in Cornwall. Of the eleven most regular attendees (the membership was very stable over two years), one (Annie) was in her forties, four (Edna, Abby, Em and Joni) were in their fifties, three (Gayle, Amanda and Faith) were in their sixties, and three (Sylvia, Alice and Mary) were in their seventies. Two of the women were married, one remarried, three recently widowed, and five had left relationships described as abusive or violent. All participants had suffered considerable life difficulties. These included the unhappy partnerships noted above, bereavement, and serious physical health problems including cancers and arthritis. One woman had been the victim of a violent attack by a stranger. On the basis of what was disclosed to me, it is likely that ten of the eleven participants had been diagnosed with depressive or anxiety disorders, often connected with these misfortunes, and one of these participants had been frequently hospitalized in the past, with the result that her children had periodically been taken into care. The eleventh participant had a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Perhaps half the group's members had been very socially isolated prior to belonging to the group, and two suffered from agoraphobia.

Alongside their difficulties, group members had many strengths. A majority of group members had raised adult children who were doing well in their lives and who were reciprocally a source of support; two participants had older teenagers who were still at home. Most played important supportive roles in the lives of

their families, in relation to ageing parents, parents-in-law, partners, or offspring. Although problems had often been incapacitating, most members had histories of active engagement with community, employment, and culture. One participant was volunteering and taking courses with a view to seeking a job. Whilst only two had a lifelong, confident and comfortable relationship with artistic creativity, most enjoyed some other form of engagement with the arts, often through reading or the media. As a group they were welcoming, generous, humorous, and playful, and demonstrated a great commitment to supporting one another. Interpersonal dimensions of the groups will be explored in detail in later chapters, but the group ethos could be broadly characterized as protective, supportive and emotionally sustaining, and cemented by the shared experience of physical and emotional hardship.

### **4.3. Pendon Crafts Group: creative making in the community**



*Figure 4.2. Members of the Pendon Crafts Group at work on mosaics  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

#### *History*

The second site for my field research was the group that I set up and facilitated, with the support of AFHC and a volunteer. Since it took time and reflection to find a suitable setting, my involvement was limited to a single year of forty-one almost consecutive weeks from 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013 to 21<sup>st</sup> July 2014 (there was a break of two weeks for Christmas and one for Easter). This group forms an interesting contrast with the first, since it was set up in the community with no specified mode of referral and with no explicit links to a medical model of mental health. Given AFHC's track record of working in partnership with primary care, we initially

hoped that this group would also be connected to a local surgery. This possibility was discussed with a general practice in a suitable location, and raised twice, at our request, in their weekly team meeting; it was reported to me by our GP contact that on the first occasion, there was 'zero interest', and on the second, 'some interest' (email dated 11/09/13), although this may have been said to mollify me; the practice did not respond to our offer to attend a team meeting to present some information about the group, and no referrals materialized. Challenges in building links between community resources and primary care as part of a move towards social prescribing will be further discussed in Chapter 9.

The setting—a church hall used as a venue for a wide variety of community groups—was chosen as an easily accessible and appropriate location for the kind of group we wished to run; in addition, the existence of a pop-up community café that took place just before our group every week offered links to other local resources and an effective way of recruiting participants. In the absence of interest from local GPs, we decided to advertise our venture as a community group (although the flyer referred to 'crafts as ways of improving wellbeing, especially if you are facing life difficulties that impact on health or happiness' – see Appendix 1). This approach attracted a membership that was more diverse than the Hellan group, in that it included men and women, and a range of ages from twenty-three to ninety-three years old. It was nonetheless similar in that participants were variously seeking medical help for mental health difficulties such as depression, suffering from physical or cognitive problems that impacted heavily on their freedom, opportunities, and happiness, or dealing with intractable life difficulties often involving a burden of care for dependent others, whether small children, dependent adult children, or elderly relatives. This was consistent with AFHC's experience that participants generally 'self-refer' appropriately to arts-for-health projects. Membership of the group increased slowly but steadily, through personal recommendation as well as our visibility through leaflets and proximity to the café. Two participants attended the first session, five the second, and by the end of my involvement, there were fourteen regular attenders and perhaps another eight intermittent visitors.

### *Setting*

The hall itself was essentially a single space of approximately 10 by 15 metres, high-ceilinged and wooden-floored, with an adjacent kitchen, bathrooms and storage space, constructed in the 1950s on a plot of land a ten-minute walk away from the church. It had been the focus of recent community activism, since the church had periodically considered selling the land for redevelopment, and this threat was only lifted during the period of my involvement, due to concerted efforts of some members of the church committee managing the hall, as well as the venue's current users (Interview, Annie, Pendon Church Hall Committee, 30/06/14). As a consequence the space attracted a great deal of community commitment, as evidenced, for instance, by the willingness of volunteers to redecorate its interior and to maintain the adjacent plot of land as a community vegetable garden (work on both these projects was ongoing throughout my involvement). The vegetable plot had been transformed from a rocky bramble patch into a productive and decorative allotment, and was linked to an international project supporting the reclamation of land for community food production. Its produce was used to make soup every week for those who attended the pop-up café immediately preceding the crafts group. Surplus produce was distributed amongst users of the hall including my participants, some of whom also volunteered as gardeners. My participants expressed their appreciation of the hall for reasons that included physical warmth, the proximity of a kitchen for tea, the hall's comfortable scale, the sunny interior, the view of thriving plants and freshly dug earth outside, and even the frequent visits of a cat who behaved as if he were our mascot. On one winter afternoon I describe the hall in my notes as:

very cosy in spite of the dilapidated feel of its grubby walls—soon to be repainted—and ancient wooden flooring. It's not so large a space that we rattle around in it, and it has incredibly powerful heaters, six of them, mounted high up on the walls, that chuck out heat so forcefully that you can feel it landing on your back like sunshine. . . . the sun slants in horizontally at this time of the afternoon, making everything light up. Looking out of the large window on the sunny side of the hall, you see the developing community vegetable garden, which goes steeply up a bank so that parts of it are at eye level; tidy rows of vegetables are backlit in the glittering half-light and the soil in the newly prepared areas is very black. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/11/13)

Because of its siting within this hub of local activity and activism, the crafts group was connected to numerous other community ventures. The coexistence of a number of groups, sometimes simultaneously under the same roof, was not always pragmatically straightforward:

When I arrive at the hall [to set up the group], it's set out with six or seven of the small tables and on each is a large paper lantern under construction—each about a metre high, a pyramid or box structure made of willow twigs taped together and covered with white or coloured tissue paper which is then sponged with dilute PVA in order to stretch and strengthen the paper over the frame. The lanterns are very intriguing objects and it's nice that the hall is full of people making things. Daisy and Nadine are already there, each making a lantern—Daisy is panicking a bit that she won't finish hers, and asks if I will help her during the session. Although it's festive to have the lantern makers in the hall, it's a challenge to find enough tables for our group . . . (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 02/12/13)

The overlapping use of the hall also brought to the fore the competing interests and agendas of a number of parties, for instance in this lunchtime discussion:

We move to a discussion of how the crafts group might continue beyond July. It's interesting how many vested interests compete for the form it might take—Kate likes the idea of it happening on another day to extend the use of the hall and linking it to another café—lovely though this idea is, it doesn't take account of the fact that the group is valued as a creative retreat from ordinary social interaction . . . some people dislike the presence of small children, noise and so on. The café organizer, meanwhile, misses the presence of arts activities during the Community Café session, and wonders if the arts activity could be monthly and incorporated into their slot, which would of course make any long-term, sustained creative practice impossible. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 28/04/14)

These notes evidence the simultaneous potentials and challenges to be negotiated in this informal economy of intersecting and competing community activities, and demonstrate the role of the location as an important node in a network of loosely affiliated groups. Our intention to encourage participant ownership of the crafts group left it directionless at times, or subject to disagreements about its future. These conflicts were generally resolved, however, through ongoing discussion, and in some cases through an increasing capacity in my participants to tolerate noisy and messy aspects of social interaction. (Anyone was free to attend the café, and people also freely wandered into and out of our group, although for safety and in order to respect the wishes of some participants, I discouraged people attending with preschool children.) Participants found themselves drawn to explore or participate in community activities they might not otherwise have encountered,

since the timetable for the use of the hall and flyers for other groups were prominently displayed. It was commonplace to see participants, some of whom had previously been very socially isolated, deliberating in twos and threes about attendance at other events which included concerts and classes in Falun Gong, Tai Chi, singing, and tango. The presence of the pop-up community café that took place before and sometimes overlapped with our group contributed to this effect, since it brought together different sections of the community – elderly residents and mothers with tiny babies lunched alongside self-employed artists and business people, church stalwarts, and community activists.

### *Activities*

On a typical Monday afternoon, a number of participants would be present at the community café, and having eaten, would set out the tables and materials for our group themselves. I noted, for instance (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 24/02/14), that ‘as usual people collaborate to set up, and seem eager to begin well before 2.15pm’. This set up increasingly orchestrated itself, and although my input in other ways was considerable, this contributed to a sense of the group as self-organizing and self-run. (The mid-session refreshments and end-of-session clearing up were also increasingly organized by participants themselves.) We used ten small square tables, set out as a two-by-five rectangular block at one end of the hall; this was a convivial arrangement that allowed for group conversation as well as more private chats. In later sessions, there was an extra small block of tables set aside for messy processes like grouting mosaic, and a small etching press was set up on the kitchen counter, so that there was more circulation. For reasons explored in other chapters, I chose not to orchestrate activities around the festive calendar, but to encourage the development of personal creative projects in a variety of media. Whilst rug hooking and patchwork provided a simple starting point, reluctance of the male participants to do textile activities led to the introduction of mosaic and then printmaking, both of which were enjoyed by the whole group. I equipped participants with drawing and design skills where this was helpful, and encouraged them to become creatively autonomous, that is, comfortable to come up with their own ideas and to develop them with support. Because of our relatively secure funding position, sales were not a focus of our

activity, although the possibility of selling work was raised by participants independently. We did, however, showcase our work by having an end-of-year exhibition. The creative explorations undertaken in both groups are described in detail in subsequent chapters.

### *Participants*

The Pendon group attracted a membership that was diverse. All were of white British origin, and roughly half had been born in Cornwall, but most had spent long periods out of the region. Amongst fourteen very regular members, three were men. Two participants (Kate and Lou) were in their twenties, one (May) was in her thirties, one (Cath) in her forties, four (Daisy, Susan, Rachel and Eric) in their fifties, five (Nadine, John, Liv, Angie and Caroline) in their sixties, and one (Brian) was in his nineties. Nine group members were single and one was recently widowed. Four were in partnerships, two of these with young children. A handful of participants made reference to mental health difficulties including depression, anxiety, and OCD. The group's community rather than primary care location allowed some group members to state their resistance to mental health labelling:

Rachel [on her first visit] asks me if there's she 'has to be' anything in particular to join the group. When I say the only requirement is to enjoy crafting as something that's good for wellbeing, she's relieved and says she doesn't like to see herself as belonging to some category or other. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 10/03/14)

Other group members were ironic about the stigma surrounding mental health issues and implicitly critical of a them-and-us stance, for instance when a potential volunteer visited: 'Eric makes her feel awkward when I introduce her as an AFHC volunteer: "Oh, you're not one of the inmates then – you should go and sit with them up the other end!"' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 28/04/14). A number of participants suffered severe problems with their physical health. For others, caring for dependent family members could be a taxing responsibility. Several members of this group had lived alone for long periods, and some of them described themselves as isolated.

Like members of the Hellan group, participants also possessed formidable strengths, and were often resilient in the face of great hardship; one member for

instance performed an advocacy role for others suffering her life-changing physical disability, and others were philosophical in the face of bereavement or life-threatening illness. At least five participants had acquired creative skills through an art education or other structured means, although they were ambivalent about describing themselves as artists or makers. Collectively they had a diverse range of life experiences, interests, and opinions, which were often the topic of conversation, and were generally shared with mutual tolerance in spite of occasional disagreement. Humour, caring, mutual respect, and bonhomie were constant features of the group. The energy and enthusiasm of its members also contributed to the autonomy already noted; as Kate put it, 'the group feels really alive' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 16/06/14). In comparison to the Hellan group, the collective ethos, whilst caring, might be characterized as more assertively individualistic, in that members resisted medical categorization or mental health labelling, enjoyed and asserted their differences, and actively pursued personal creative trajectories. By the time I left, considerable entrepreneurialism was evident, with a number of members adopting the enterprising spirit characteristic of self-employment in the creative industries; some thought about developing their making into a business, or eventually using their skills in teaching and facilitation. One member of my group was actively developing a business as an illustrator at the end of our first year, and this had happened directly as a result of her learning printmaking skills as part of the group. Other participants were engaged in a return to education or employment.

### *Sustainability*

Although my group's funding was secure for a year as a consequence of AFHC's partnership in my CDA, participants knew from the start that my involvement would not extend beyond a year, and that I would be replaced by a volunteer. This led to pessimism in some quarters, one participant telling me, 'there's no point giving his opinion on anything as nobody ever listens—he implies a huge power differential between AFHC and the members of our group . . . "I think it's just going to fall apart when you've gone"' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 02/06/14). Such comments reflect the fact that participants could position themselves at different times as enterprising agents or as passive and vulnerable beneficiaries,

but also that they had a realistic awareness of the precarity of such interventions. The speaker in this case had previously belonged to another AFHC group that had folded because of lack of funding. The difficulty involved in finding an unpaid partner for our long-term volunteer at times left holes that required unsatisfactory patching; one likely candidate dropped out at short notice as she was offered a job, and another became ill after a few weeks in the role. Participants took me aside to express concern about the suitability of proposed volunteers. The group did, however, settle under its new direction (one established and one new volunteer), and four members who stopped coming as a result of the make-do-and-mend reconstruction of the group at the point at which I left rejoined a few weeks later.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has set the scene for the fine-grained description of making activities that follows. Although the two groups that I observed both operated under the umbrella of AFHC, and were underpinned by a similar philosophy of practice, there were important differences in terms of community location, funding, route of referral/self-referral, facilitation, activities and membership. Ways in which these differences were significant will be drawn out in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# BEYOND COMFORT AND SATISFACTION: EXTENDING NORMATIVE ACCOUNTS OF THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF MAKING

### 5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I extend normative accounts of the affective dimensions of amateur crafts creativity. Foregrounding material gathered through sustained observation of making itself, I complicate familiar descriptions of crafting as soothing, distracting, and therapeutic, and argue that making's challenging, conflictual, and stimulating aspects, alongside its pleasures, are relevant to its potential benefits in an arts-for-health context.

As noted in Chapter 2, commonplace social representations of amateur making as cosy, diverting, and peaceful also circulate in arts impact research. Crafting is represented in somewhat more complex ways in a small body of qualitative literature in which makers in both leisure and arts-for-health contexts are interviewed about handicrafts, although benefits are still often framed as 'therapeutic'. Dickie (2011), for instance, describes therapy as a recurrent theme in women's accounts of their practice of quilting, which interviewees see as providing both 'mundane' therapy in the context of everyday life, and 'exceptional' therapy in times of crisis (p.209). In this literature, the psychological benefits reported by interviewees can be categorized roughly as those related to its intrinsic sensory dimensions, those dependent on its role as a 'quiet focus occupation' (Howell and Pierce, 2000), and those connected to more global impacts on personal meanings and self-concept. With regard to sensory qualities, for instance, Dickie's participants noted the tactile, visual, aural, and olfactory pleasures they experienced in hand sewing, and in a study of knitting (Riley, Corkhill and Morris, 2013) participants referred to the mood-enhancing and restorative effects of tactile pleasure. Where crafting provides an experience of quiet focus, this may be reported in terms of flow, distraction, and immersion, for example a 'loss of self-consciousness and lack of awareness of things going on... which displaced anxieties and facilitated relaxation' (Burt and Atkinson, 2012,

p.56); or conversely described as a space which 'keeps hands busy' while the maker 'sorts through thoughts and feelings' (Langellier, 1990, p.36). In the domain of self-concept and meaning, participants note impacts on feelings of confidence, accomplishment, agency, self-esteem, purpose, and fulfilment (see for example Reynolds, 2000; Teall, 2011; Lawson, et al., 2014).

Although these studies report perceptions that go beyond therapy and distraction, little is said about the relationship of emotional states and processes to moment-to-moment dimensions of making itself. In studies reliant on interviewing, this material and processual information goes missing, and crafting is typically presented as a fuzzy matrix for emotional states that are stable and independent of context. The specifics of making are equally absent in ethnographic studies (e.g. Dickie, 2011) in which field notes document 'the content of casual conversations' (p.211) rather than creative activities themselves. Most strikingly, making is often represented as though it entailed no difficulty, perhaps in part because comforting and mood-enhancing representations of crafting have intuitive appeal where craft is used therapeutically in situations of physical and psychological suffering. As noted in Chapter 3, comfortable affects are also disproportionately emphasized in arts for health research that relies substantially on interviewing, for reasons connected with interviewee expectations, narrative coherence, and self-presentation. Because the making process itself is almost never foregrounded as worthy of observation, on the rare occasions where studies report participant difficulties in relation to making, nothing can be said about how these feelings come about in the context of a creative process. Stacey and Stickley (2010), for instance, report creative frustration and pressure in service users' perceptions of arts participation, but the interview methodology disembeds these feelings from the specific material and interpersonal situations in which they arose.

The observations on which this chapter is based contribute to a more complex and materially grounded account of the affective dimensions of making. In section 5.2, following Sennett's suggestion that cultural materialists 'map out where pleasure is to be found and how it is organized' (2008, p.8), I discuss a range of pleasurable affects that I observed, but describe them as part of a flux of processes,

interactions, and sequences of events, rather than as discrete, stable features of crafts creativity. In section 5.3, I examine more uncomfortable emotional states that featured abundantly in my observations, and which are rarely reported when participants are interviewed about wellbeing-oriented crafting. Frustration, in a variety of forms, stands out as an important and overlooked feature of creative making. To balance its neglect in other literature, I develop a phenomenology of frustration as it occurred for participants in the Pendon and Hellan craft groups, exploring its sources and characteristics, and how participants variously avoided it, befriended it, and used it creatively. Section 5.4 explores the role of, firstly, facilitation, secondly peer support, and thirdly, the group as a structure in helping participants work with, and through, challenging aspects of creative making. From the relational perspective developed through my observations, frustration and its resolution 'belong' neither to given activities, nor to actors, but can be viewed as emergent properties of particular interactions between people, and between people and things. Whilst some of these interactions unfold in the present moment, others are rooted in personal history, which has a life in the present as memory and expectation. This focus on relationship underlines that the affects associated with crafting are part of a shifting eventscape, rather than stable and essential features of particular activities.

## **5.2. Pleasure in creative making**

Because existing research describes the positive emotions associated with crafting through the retrospective impressions or generalizations of participants, a great deal of lived experience is condensed into summaries or snapshots. The relationship of emotional states to particular making situations is lost in this material, as is the fact that pleasure is rarely simple or reliably enduring. In this section I focus on experiences of pleasure that I observed first hand. (More sustained affective sequences related to making in terms of its fortuitous, improvisatory dimensions, or as an intentional, results-oriented activity, are left for exploration in Chapters 6 and 7, and participants' assessments of the creative and social pleasures of making activities are set aside for discussion in Chapter 8.) The pleasurable experiences observed were of broadly two kinds: those

characterized by flashes of excitement and enthusiasm, and those that were sustained, productive, and immersive. It was commonplace to witness both these types of enjoyment; numerous instances of each occur in every session I recorded.

### *Excitement*

Excitement was an affect very evident in facial expressions, vocal quality, and bodily energy, and on many occasions I record how participants ‘come alive’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 12/05/14) or are captivated in response to aesthetic delight: a participant says, for example, ‘there’s something really special about the beauty of the mosaic squares and the depth of colour of the glass. She seems really moved’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 15/04/14). Touch also produced visceral liveliness: one participant is ‘clearly really enjoying the tactile quality of the hooked surface – she tells me, “I keep wanting to do *this* to it’, and rubs her hand over the soft, bumpy surface’ (Pendon Crafts Group, 21/11/13); another ‘says she particularly likes the feeling of the tiles snapping as she cuts them’ (Pendon Crafts Group, 13/01/14).

This tonic engagement was sometimes in a low key, as where a participant is ‘very interested today in how colours and textures change when placed in different configurations’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/10/13). Often, though, such affects were powerful in character, and reflected the uncanny magic of ‘starting with nothing and bringing something into existence using your own hands and imagination’, as one participant expressed it (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 25/11/13). The possibility of bringing something new into the world was tinged with enchantment, as if it were a kind of birth giving. Delight and enthusiasm were often expressed when there was a new sense of possibility in relation to techniques and materials, generally those in use in the session, and aesthetic pleasure was often tied up with these feelings, as here where a participant experiments with adding glitter to her lino cuts:

She decides to have a go with the very fine, iridescent bluish-white glitter that I have. She comments on the magical effect it produces over black ink—a mysterious, sparkling lighter grey, very unusual and very frost-like. She turns her prints from side to side to catch the light and is thrilled at their metallic shimmer . . . She’s also really aesthetically captivated by the combinations of coloured tissue

and card, and the varying effects of the glitter on these different backgrounds. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 09/12/13)

The aesthetic response as it features in my field notes—most often an emotion close to surprise—is akin to what Bennett (2010, p.x) describes as ‘an aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality’. The close association of this aesthetic captivation with excitement about the possibility of manifesting something *ex nihilo* is intriguing and resonates with Gell’s depiction (1992) of art as a technology of enchantment. For Gell, enchantment arises through appreciation of the extraordinary virtuosity of the artist as ‘occult technician’ (p.49). More salient in my observations were the mysterious and entrancing properties of ‘matter on the go’ (Bennett, 2010, p.49) and its potential to reorganize itself into objects that often surprised their makers. ‘Bringing things to life’, as Ingold (2011, p.29) suggests, ‘is a matter not of adding to them a sprinkling of agency, but of restoring them to the generative fluxes of the world of materials in which they came into being and continue to subsist’. Creative excitement and aesthetic rapture both seemed to arise from entanglement in these fluxes.

As participants became more assured as makers, this prospective excitement became more ambitious, and fuelled bigger plans, as in these examples:

She seems unsure of what to do, but gets excited about the lino cutting and confidently draws a scarab beetle and starts cutting this into a lino block. Her mind races ahead to how she might build repeating patterns for fabric out of this, and she asks me about whether anyone works on a really large scale in lino printing. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 11/11/13)

Faith comes over to me and chats excitedly at one point about an artist whose work she saw in last week’s Sunday Times Magazine . . . she’d like to experiment with his technique, which involved trickling streams of house paint down a vertical surface which was curled at the bottom edge so the paint pooled and flowed laterally along the bottom edge. She’s thinking of getting hold of some syringes and house paint to do some experiments of her own along similar lines. She’s clearly excited, and tells me of her aesthetic delight in the vibrant and unusual colour combinations the artist used. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 03/06/14)

Snapshots of this tonic affective arousal might suggest that it was part of a general atmosphere of cheerful creative endeavour. Observation of individuals over single or multiple sessions, however, highlights the vulnerability of this excitement to deflation. It could quickly dissipate as soon as technical difficulties arose, as in

many instances in relation to the material on frustration that follows. Excitement could also be conflictual from the start if it was attended by fear of failure, and participants sometimes disavowed it; for instance one ‘seems excited by this new venture, although she initially says rather dismissively that she’s just drawing to distract herself’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 01/04/14). Another participant is observed taking great pleasure in making some small, simple mosaic designs in which she allows herself to just play with colour combinations: ‘she says she’s playing with the idea of doing something really easy, although this feels a bit of a cop-out – she’s not sure she’s allowed to do something this simple’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 31/03/14); here the pleasure is dismissed because it seems too trivial or childlike. Facilitation cultivated these fragile moments of delight, and one important aspect of this support was the facilitator’s own capacity for passionate enthusiasm, as in one example where I offer help with a drawing:

Whilst we’re sitting together she hesitantly shows me the drawing she started last week, which is beautiful—very tenderly observed. She has no sense of its quality herself. My excitement and pleasure in the drawing is probably helpful in bringing her attention to this. She then settles to another slow and careful drawing, as delicate and ‘felt’ as the first, which this time she is pleased with. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 24/06/14)

Facilitators’ lively demonstrations of enthusiasm also contributed to a group culture in which participants were vocal in their delight and interest in the work of their peers, as here:

Now the [dyed silk] strips are laid out like this in all their glory, almost everyone else comes at some point and admires: ‘Did you do all this?’—‘I remember you doing some dyeing but I didn’t know they’d come out so lovely!’—‘How did you do this then?’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 08/04/14)



*Figure 5.1. Strips of silk dyed by a member of Hellan Crafts Group  
(Photo: Sarah Desmarais, 2014)*

Such affirmative responses, whether from peers or facilitators, can be seen as a kind of mirroring that is also highly characteristic of good enough parenting in infancy: 'in individual emotional development *the precursor of the mirror is the mother's face*' (Winnicott, 1971, p.130). Such groups may therefore provide a renewed or reparative experience of being seen as valuable, capable, and able to inspire attention and delight.

### *Productivity*

Pleasure had a more workmanlike and steady quality when it was linked to repeated actions and ongoing tasks. Manual engagement frequently produced experiences of immersion that were commented on with surprise, as in these examples:

At the point at which we should be packing up, nobody seems inclined to make a move. After a few minutes, Nadine looks up surprised and says she's been so immersed in what she was doing that she didn't notice we were packing up. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 28/10/13)

Gayle has made a lot of progress during the week on her proddy wreath and . . . says once she got going, she couldn't put it down. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 22/10/13)

A few times today, people have commented on how quickly the two hours have gone—Joni repeats that the group is too short and that we should start earlier. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 22/10/13)

Someone jokes as they leave at the end of the session, 'You'll still be sitting there when we come back next week!' and she agrees, 'Yes, I'm really getting into it now, I'd just like to keep going'. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 10/03/14)

Where states of calm were observed, it was often in the context of these periods of quiet absorption. In offering a more complex account of such experiences, it is worth noting, however, that they could result in creative difficulties, since successful making often required a balance between immersion and more strategic direction:

Sylvia is making rapid progress with her 'go peacefully' piece, and talks about how she got so immersed in filling in the letters for 'go peacefully' that she worked the spaces that should have been left for the background colour and had to undo her work. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 26/03/13)

Such experiences are generally understood in the arts-for-health literature in terms of Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' (1990), a state characterized by immersive enjoyment, the merging of action and awareness, focused concentration, and time distortion. Early research on flow emphasized its intrapersonal rather than social dimensions. More recent research into 'social flow' (Walker, 2010) or 'co-flow' (Salanova, et al., 2014), although limited (Sawyer, 2007) has greater relevance to my observations, given the importance of the structure provided by a group in supporting the pleasures of sustained immersion. Many participants complained of the difficulty they had in motivating themselves or finding the concentration to craft at home. In the groups, however, there was often a collective mood of peaceful concentration, accompanied by quiet, spasmodic conversation or comfortable silence:

Meanwhile, the work on the frames seems to grow without problem, and in a spirit of improvisation—Liv is mixing lots of bits of brightly coloured fabrics—hot pinks, yellow, mauve—and moving out in concentric circles; Cath is energetically and quickly hooking mauve cotton around the border of her butterfly, although she breaks off to do a bit of an orange spot on one wing; Daisy proceeds very slowly with her green diamond but is mastering the technique; John puts aside his tree mosaic, but doesn't seem restless. 4.15pm arrives and nobody seems inclined to stop ... (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 01/10/13)

Studies on social flow proposes emotional contagion (Totterdell, 2000; Lamm, Battson and Decety, 2007) as one means through which flow becomes collective; as Walker (2010, p10) suggests, 'the mirror neural system also predicts and explains the interesting phenomenon of vicarious flow', as observed in my field note above. Flow is also likely to be shared through more conscious 'empathic crossover' (Salanova, et al., 2014, p.438); Walker's study above also found that experiences of side-by-side flow were rated as more joyful in situations with higher potential for social conversation.



*Figure 5.2. Companionable making on a winter afternoon in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2013)*

The pleasures of productive engagement were still present, although modified, when a collaborative task was involved. Satisfaction here was not always related to the intrinsic pleasures of flow, since it was often clear that these activities would not have been voluntarily chosen by participants unless framed as meaningful contributions to the collective:

Faye has people begin by simply tacking along lines she's drawn at the borders of squares of backing fabric to mark the eventual seam lines. This activity of doing simple, large running stitch is experienced as pleasant, undemanding, and satisfying by everybody. The squares are quickly done and everyone seems to have a sense of being productive and effective. There are a few declarations of 'I quite like doing this!'—including from Joni, for whom sewing has been a no-go area. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 03/06/14)

Such pleasures duplicate those found in paid employment when constructed as socially useful. In both groups, conflicts around paid work and social contribution were articulated. Many younger participants felt pressured by family members or benefits providers to take up a job, were unable to do so because of their health, or idealized employment as an alternative to caring for others who relied on their unpaid labour. The benefits of such groups have often been articulated in terms of their potential effects on participant employability, consistent with a neoliberal tendency to view the human agent as 'the embodiment of an internalized yield curve' (Payne, 2012, p.110; see for example Sixsmith and Kagan, 2005). On occasion participants themselves orchestrated activities as if to reproduce an idealized workplace. Here, for instance, the factory-like production of cards is a source of pleasure, perhaps because of the sense of belonging and useful employment that it engenders:

AH and AP have the card production line in action again, and are finishing off a batch of about 20 cards, all very professional. Towards the end of the session, AB is persuaded to join in with the finishing details and there seems to be something very satisfying to those concerned about being able to collaborate, by working at different tasks, in producing the finished article—the division of labour here seems to have positive effects. Everybody involved seems to feel productive and businesslike, and it seems to be just what Abby needs today. (FN/HCG/151013)

Such observations might be used to support Gelber's assertion (1999, p.20) that 'hobbies developed as a way to integrate the isolated home with the ideology of the workplace'. Ambivalence was, nonetheless, expressed:

Joni spends the session working on more cards with Em. They've now packaged lots of them up in cellophane bags with a sticky label for Hellan Crafts Group. Today Faye shows Em, Joni and Edna how to use the heat gun for metallic effects on card, but this takes place in the kitchen area. Joni and Em return and finish their cards off in the big room. Joni jokes 'I always tried to avoid working in a factory, and now look at me!' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 12/11/13)

Productivity could thus mirror a range of contemporary forms of labour including domestic manufacture, the Fordist production line and the individual entrepreneurialism characteristic of the creative industries (Gill and Pratt, 2008), and appealing and problematic features of these types of work were articulated and enacted in the group situation. Group crafting permitted experimentation with the pleasures and burdens of a range of work identities, and the virtues of some were contested. Such observations highlight the way that experiences of pleasure are related to broader social meanings, and cannot be fully understood in simple, universal, intrapersonal terms.

### **5.3. Displeasure in creative making**

The discussion of pleasurable affect above highlights its fluctuations within a situated and unstable continuum of states; the potential for frustration was always present. The topic of creative conflict or frustration is neglected in the field of creativity studies as a whole. An oft-cited model of significant affective dimensions of creativity (Russ, 1993), for example, focuses predominantly on positive affect. Sapp (1992; see also Hutchinson, 1940) proposes 'a specific point of creative frustration occurring within the creative process' (p.21), but this theme is glossed over by others; see for example Henderson (2004, p.293) who characterizes design

creativity in terms of 'the finer dimensions of enjoyment'. This trend may be the result of a focus, in this field, on elite rather than amateur or everyday creativity; creative professionals will have built a workable and ultimately rewarding relationship with the frustrations they encounter, and are more likely to reframe them as challenges or part of a 'problem-solution-problem continuum' (Ecker, 1963, p.285). There is a small literature on creative blocks or inhibition (e.g. Crosson, 1982), but this is limited to elite or professional creativity in fields such as literature and fine art.

Where amateur crafts creativity is concerned, the existence of challenging technical and design problems is often overlooked (see Knott, 2011, for an exception). This is particularly the case in an arts for health context, where participants may be depicted as passive consumers of care, and craft assumed to be remedial, repetitive, predictable, and done 'with little conscious thought' (Dickie, 2011, p.212). Needleman provides a detailed description of the challenges and ordinary frustrations of crafts creativity in *The Work of Craft* (1981), although this is a highly subjective autobiographical account. Twigger Holroyd (2013) describes the frustrations of amateur knitters acquiring design expertise in knitting workshops, but her interest is in 'the knowledge that emerged from this process', (p.39), and the making itself is not centre-stage. When it comes to research on wellbeing-oriented crafting, most of the ordinary challenges that are part of designing and making activities make themselves invisible.

My field notes do not describe crafting in familiar arts-for-health terms as the purveyor of 'an enhanced state of calm' (Turney, 2009, p.152); what is recorded is, rather, a gritty but generative and enlivening friction between possibility and reality, or mind and materials. The ubiquity of experiences of frustration in both Hellan and Pendon groups, as well as the fact that it was also reported by facilitator interviewees, suggest it was not a product of a particular facilitation style. In addition my long experience as a maker and as an arts facilitator suggests that it is an ordinary feature of most creative activity. The paradoxical presence of frustration in groups dedicated to improving the wellbeing of their members, therefore, demands to be better understood.

Creative frustrations recorded in my field notes were of many different kinds but can be roughly categorized as those to do with embodiment—that is, related to pain or physical incapacity; those that involved materials and the various ways these misbehaved or refused to comply with the intentions of makers; and those taking the form of bad feelings—shame, hopelessness, uselessness—often with a strong component of self-blame. The material below explores these different repertoires of frustration, before exploring how difficulties were tolerated, befriended, or transformed as a result of qualities of the groups and their facilitation.

### *Disobedient bodies*

Problems with bodies were common in the groups in which I worked. At the most straightforward level, more than half the participants were suffering from physical difficulties. These included cancers, cataracts, osteoarthritis, ME, difficulties ensuing from a major organ transplant, and the motor problems of old age; in many cases these were or had been a direct cause of extreme anxiety or unhappiness. Reciprocally, it seems likely that life difficulties involving trauma or prolonged periods of distress had been a factor in the aetiology of some physical problems. In between there was a blurry area of psychiatric pathology—bipolar disorder, clinical depression, anxiety disorders—where the relationship between mind, body and environment is still poorly understood (Pilgrim, 2007). It can safely be said that most participants lived with a body–mind assemblage that was giving them trouble. Less directly, physical ill health was often reported in the lives of those for whom participants cared, and this was also a source of stress.

Physical difficulties not infrequently caused trouble with making activities, most often in the form of pain. A number of participants were unable to do certain activities because they resulted in joint pain; rug hooking was one frequent culprit. A considerable sense of loss was often expressed in relation to diminished capacities:

Edna talks to me briefly about painting and the watercolours she used to do—watercolour is a problematic medium for her now, as it requires her to work too quickly—and a smaller scale won't work because her hands shake, and holding a

small brush tightly causes her fingers to go numb. She's thinking of trying acrylics to see if these work better for her. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 08/10/13)

As here, these difficulties, perhaps because they were not construed as matters of fault, usually immediately resulted in some creative problem solving. With another participant, for example, 'we talk together about the difficulties caused by her stiff hands. She thinks small scissors and cutting the fabric single rather than double may work for her' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/09/13). Participants shared solutions, for example discussing crochet hooks for arthritic hands that they had sourced online. Once a good alternative was found, people often improvised their own versions from materials at hand. In general, participants adopted a philosophical attitude: 'the mind is willing but the body doesn't always go along with the plan' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/02/14). One participant told me that she experienced her making as a triumph over physical limitations:

She went to the doctor about her painful hands and was told she has osteoarthritis—this was 'a bitter pill to swallow', but the day after, she'd made this silk piece which she really likes—this is evidence to her that with or without this diagnosis, she remains a creative person who can do things with her hands. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/06/13)

In such situations, the made object potentially provides 'an altered surrogate of the body' Scarry (1985, p.280), accomplishing a symbolic repair. As Rosenberg (2013, p.3) suggests,

In any real understanding of making there needs to be an appreciation of the unmaking that shadows it; an appreciation of the pain or harm that may be inflicted to not only a body, but also to the intermingling of bodies—matter, things and environments.

Whilst the body was experienced by most as a source of difficulty, participants were not shamed by what were constructed as non-compliant bodies in the way they were shamed by difficulties understood as cognitive, mood dependent or creative. In this sense they circulated social representations of a mind-body dualism in which what occurred below the neck, as it were, was the result of bad luck, whereas what occurred above it was something for which they should feel culpable.

### *Intransigent materials*

Beyond physical difficulties specific to individuals, there were constant frustrations involving the slightly less volatile materiality of the tools, textiles, paper, ink, and other substances they used. The challenges that arise in manual work in any craft medium have been explored philosophically by Sennett (2008) and Ingold (2013) and from a personal experiential point of view by Needleman (1981) and Crawford (2010). The rather argumentative or proactive nature of materials themselves is the focus of work by Latour (2005), Bennett (2010), Whatmore (2006) and others. The liveliness of materials and the nature of collaboration between participants and materials in these groups will be further explored throughout the thesis. Here it suffices to say that materials have behavioural repertoires of their own. When things go well, successful outcomes may be negotiated with materials; when they go badly, materials are stubbornly resistant to manipulation or go about their business behind the maker's back. In the activities I observed, participants were frequently frustrated by materials that would not conform to their carefully laid plans. Mosaic tiles fractured according to their own internal demands rather than those of the maker, and then became invisible when they fell on the floor. They mysteriously detached themselves from places they had been glued. Wooden boards warped when stored in a cold, damp basement. Strips of cut fabric hooked into rough hessian refused to reproduce a detailed drawing, or even to stay where they were put. All such vagaries were multiplied when materials were asked to cooperate nicely together:

I give Rachel a lino-cutting demo and she's initially a little bit frustrated that the medium can be a bit clumsy, but she soon gets going, and shortly before the end of the session, she has something she's ready to print to see how it's looking. Lou too would like to see what's happening on her block, so we get some ink out on a plate and I do a quick demo. Both Lou's and Rachel's prints are a bit faint and patchy, which is to do with several things: the way a lino block needs a few inkings to take the ink properly; how the ink I first squeeze out seems to be on the watery side; how the paper we're trying out takes up too much water when it's dampened because it's completely unsized; and how Lou and Rachel both struggle to stop the paper shifting around on the block whilst exerting a sufficient amount of pressure with a roller. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/11/13)

It must be emphasized that these experiences are characteristic of crafts skills acquisition, and not simply the product of poor materials, inadequate instruction, or ineptitude. As Needleman (1981, p.139) observes:

At first the student is stirred up, agitated by the frustration of not being able to do with his hands what he wishes with his mind to do. Something, not only the body, doesn't obey him. It gets in the way. The teacher tries to 'help' but, although what the teacher says and shows seems quite clear, the difficulties only increase. The student is angry with himself, tries harder, fails again. And again. In the corner of his 'eye' he catches a flicker of something, like a thought but unlike it. He tries to look at it directly but it evades him, vanishes. He starts to work more carefully, alertly, hoping to catch sight of it again. Without realizing it he becomes less agitated. Instead of pushing at the craft he is being drawn by it, called by an echo in himself.

Because most participants were inexperienced as makers, they often expected things to work first time, and thought they ought to be able to exercise total control over whichever medium they were working in. In addition to the frustrations caused by the fact that materials had agendas of their own, there were also difficulties that came about through lack of skill or experience, and could therefore be remedied by knowledge or practice. In many cases such frustration could be quickly remedied through demonstrating the most effective way to do something:

Abby . . . starts working on decorating the Christmas trees on the accumulating cards with tiny gemstone decorations. This is a very fiddly task, and she's struggling with the glue stick and a kebab skewer, before Faye comes round and shows her how to use spots of PVA and a cocktail stick, dampened by licking in order to pick the stars up. Abby seems relieved to find that there's a practical way to carry out the task, and not too chastened to find she's been doing it a less effective way. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/10/13)

Deficits in practical capabilities were sometimes surprising, and suggested either great gaps in childhood manual and creative learning, or the presence of tacit rules not available to be reworked in consciousness, although here again, if help was available, frustration was rapidly alleviated:

Daisy . . . starts to build a diagonal across the tile; it ends up deviating from its course and finishing on one side instead of the opposite corner, and she comments on how it's difficult to make the line arrive in the right place. It strikes me that this mistake happens probably through complete unfamiliarity with drawing and design processes and the activity of taking a line for a walk—and probably some internal rules, which may even have been pursued more generally in life, such as 'once a certain path has been taken it can't be modified and must be followed through to its conclusion'. I'm interested that as soon as I tell her the 'mistake' with the line doesn't matter because the glue isn't dry yet and she can simply replace the tiles where she thinks they should be, she finds it easy to make them take the direct route from corner to opposite corner. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 27/01/14)

Many forms of learning required persistence over weeks and months, however, so that the learning process itself could be trying. Such frustration manifested itself most often through boredom or impatience, particularly where tasks were finicky; for instance a participant is 'frustrated at how slowly her work progresses, and regrets having drawn a complex design' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 13/01/14) and another 'bemoans how long making an image is going to take her — "trust me to do it like this with these fiddly little pieces!"' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 20/01/14). As here, participants were quick to reframe difficulty that was properly located in the area of materials and learning as evidence of personal inadequacy or bad judgement. Reasons why this might be particularly the case in an arts for health context are explored in the section below.

Finally a particular kind of frustration arose where participants found, after some trials, that a particular medium was not a good fit for them. The various craft media might be seen as metaphorical languages, and there are some that are simply not fitted to what an individual wishes to express. Participants, being inexperienced makers, sometimes desisted from their efforts either too early, before they had fully explored the expressive potential of a medium, or too late because they blamed themselves for their failure to feel at home in it. Here the group itself, nonetheless, was a helpful influence, in supporting the tenacity to explore something without rejecting it prematurely. The helpful influence of the group as a structure will be explored in section 5.4.

### *Sinking feelings*

Bodies and materials that were not necessarily under control provoked a certain amount of inevitable frustration, as described above. In these cases, participants could at least potentially express irritability with their materials or physical limitations (so that causal attribution was directed away from core aspects of self) and then develop strategies for working around them. In many cases difficulties were remedied by gradual acquisition of craft expertise, which could be developed through instruction or practice and contributed to feelings of self-efficacy. Beyond this, however, there was a realm of distress arising from perceptions of failure and personal inadequacy, and at the core of this frustration was shame. Such feelings

often arose in the context of challenges related to design, understood as ‘the planning and patterning of any act toward a desired, foreseeable end’ (Papanek, 2011 [1971], p.3). A typical instance occurs here as a participant sketches a plan for a mosaic:

Daisy, in spite of having said in a mood of excitement when I was talking about design at the start of the session that she loved art at school, gets really paralysed about getting started—she’s trying to put down a border to a square, but she hasn’t outlined the square first, and the confidence or knowledge she needs to construct a square on paper is lacking—when John tells her she needs to do a square first, it’s clear she can’t, and is ashamed about this. I come over to help her, and she whispers to me, ‘I was always dyslexic—I find this kind of thing really difficult’. John, who is sitting next to her, hasn’t managed to help her out—interesting to ponder why, as he is a very caring, tactful and enabling friend generally. She perceives him as laughing at her inability to do this, and whispers fiercely, ‘It’s not funny, John!’—it’s clear this is humiliating for her. As I explain to her how to use the ruler and set square to draw a square, I’m aware of how I . . . appear as someone who thinks she might not be ‘clever’ enough to do this—she says to me, ‘its not that I’m stupid or anything’. I’m also anxious to reassure her that this is at least partly a matter of practice—if this isn’t something you do all the time, how would you know where to start? I end up drawing the basic square for her, but she is then able to draw a border by eye using a ruler and says with more comfort, ‘it doesn’t have to be perfect, does it?’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 06/01/14)

Papanek (2011, p.3) emphasizes that ‘all that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity’. It was an elite, professional conception of design, however, that was reflected in creative anxieties experienced by participants. Those with no formal training in art were initially surprised to find that design had basic principles that could be articulated, taught, and acquired by anyone. As Pacey (1992, p.217) points out:

The ‘specialized, professional character of design’ has become so well established, its status confirmed by the cult of ‘designer’ products, by the celebration of designers as stars, and by the emergence of a design history which tells its story, that it is design as an activity practised by all human beings which is in danger of being not merely ignored but progressively undermined and marginalized until it all but ceases to be.

The role of design in amateur and vernacular crafting has been relatively little explored, and its complexities underestimated (Mall, 2007). Glăveanu and Lahlou (2012), in their micro-observational study using subjective cameras, note that even work that adheres faithfully to traditional idioms demonstrates a considerable level of creative freedom and innovation. Where participants, as in

the groups I observed, were often producing unique personal artworks in crafts media, the skills exercised in design were significant, and the attendant challenges resulted in particular types of frustration, paralysis, and anxiety. The necessary presence of design as an adjunct to making also presented distinctive opportunities. When shame was triggered in response to such difficulties, the groups offered the potentially transformative opportunity to question such feelings, to reframe 'failure' as a necessary and generative part of design and making processes, and to redescribe self as competent, tenacious, and effective. The following is a typical example, in which I am helping a participant make a colour plan for her embroidery; the participant alludes herself to the importance of an empathic other in taking these scary steps, which otherwise feel like being abandoned, potentially to drown, helpless as a child:

It's clear she's very anxious about this. We spend about an hour just gaining some familiarity with the tube watercolour and brushes. What comes across most strongly is Abby's terror (not too strong a word) and her fear that she's going to get it wrong. She needs to be gently encouraged to pick up the brush and try for herself, and the panic is palpable. She talks lots about how school was all about getting it right, knowing the 'right' colour to put down, rather than trusting an experimental, free, curious approach. Once she tries out the paint, she suddenly discovers that she can produce beautiful marks, colours, and textures. She takes a great deal of pleasure in how surprisingly lovely, malleable, and forgiving the watercolours are. We just play for a bit. She even does a spirited little free drawing and starts to apply paint to it. She says jokingly, 'Everything in my life is changing all at once! You're turning my world upside down now, telling me I'm an artist!' At the end of the session I suggest she experiments further at home. She jests, 'This is like throwing me into the pool and leaving me to sink or swim—that's what they did to me as a child, and I didn't swim again!' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 26/03/13)

In keeping with this apt, watery simile, in what follows I characterize material concerning shame-based frustration either as 'frozen panic' or as 'not going in the water'. 'Frozen panic' describes situations in which participants were in the grip of powerful feelings of failure, and incapacitated by anxiety or hopelessness. Failure was attributed entirely to self and it was notable that nobody ever found fault with facilitators or tools; likewise in many cases where it would have been logical to note that materials were behaving badly, fault was reassigned to the maker. In 'not going in the water', conversely, participants responded to the threat of bad feelings with determined (or sometimes, arguably, unconscious) avoidance, coming up with a variety of making strategies designed to preserve feelings of safety. These

strategies, although face-saving, engendered another form of creative paralysis. I will look at these different forms of immobilization, before going on to describe the many moments where support of facilitators, peers, and the group itself allowed modification of these shame-based inhibitions so that a shift into openness, playfulness, and creative movement took place. I characterize these transformative moments as ‘thawing out’.

In states of frozen panic, participants often articulated a fear of ‘getting it wrong’, as in this instance:

Joni has started a complex rug-hooking project—it’s a complicated landscape . . . which she has scaled up, with Faye’s technical assistance, from a photo of the harbour and is marking out on a large piece of hessian. She expresses considerable anxiety about starting, feeling that she’s bitten off more than she can chew. Faye and I are standing next to her, and we encourage her to feel that she’s as creative as anyone else. She looks dubious, and a little bit frightened. She says she’s always liked to ‘get things right’, and is afraid of making a mistake—whilst she likes the idea of ‘freeing up’, she has no sense at all of how she would go about this. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 23/02/13)

Underlining the strongly relational nature of shame, the presence of an imaginary and critical audience of parents, teachers, siblings, and important others past and present was often implied, and sometimes displaced onto the figure of the facilitator, who could be pictured as someone likely to be disappointed, in spite of the fact that this expectation was never met in reality; a participant for instance rails at herself for losing work at home and ‘her regret about this seems to go a bit beyond frustration at the wasted effort—she seems to be beating herself up for wasting Faye’s materials and letting her down (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 12/11/13). Similarly:

Abby greets me, and invites me over to show me her new silk painting, which is intended as the background to the tree embroidery project (although she also jokes that she *doesn’t* want to show me, in a self-deprecating way that positions me in jest as a critical teacher). (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 07/05/13)

Participants often compared themselves unfavourably to other group members, one commenting for instance that ‘she feels a bit demotivated because everybody else is miles ahead with their projects and may have completed pieces of work, whereas she’s struggling to even start her embroidery’ (Field note, Hellan Craft

Group, 16/04/13); and they expressed inhibition about being observed, underlining the relationship of shame to the gaze of others: 'I can't do it with you all watching me!' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 24/09/13). Critical family members were often mentioned by participants as a source of self-doubt, as here:

Joni says one of her sisters is a ruthless perfectionist who can't comment on anything without pointing out its flaws—Joni half-wanted to show her harbour piece to her sister, but she's aware of how undermined she feels by her inability to praise anything, so she's resisted the impulse. (Field note, Hellan Craft Group, 12/11/13)

In other comments, shame and frustration at a worthless self seemed to have been internalized, even where others were perceived as encouraging:

A bit later, when I come and see how she's doing, she seems a bit paralysed. She's decided to make the maze pathway out of tiles and let the grouting read as the 'walls' between them, but she's afraid the design might get lost—she hates this feeling that it might go wrong, she says. She says it makes no sense to her when people say, 'just have fun, it doesn't matter'. She says this feeling has got progressively worse in relation to her own art making. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 24/02/14)

The icy deflation of shame was often quite visible:

I see Abby and Faye involved in a long conversation that concerns Abby's ambitious textile project—it's slow to get off the ground, and this seems to be related to Abby's fear of things going wrong—she's repeatedly paralysed by indecision and a feeling of 'I can't do it'. These thoughts are strongly mirrored in her body language—a whole body collapse or deflation occurs when she makes statements like 'I'm probably never going to get this right'. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/06/13)

When responded to with less panic and more stoicism, low self-regard could take the form of weary pessimism, as here, where a participant produces a domestic allegory of hopelessness to illustrate the futility of trying to do something different or to express herself, a waste of effort that could only lead to undoing and restoration of the status quo:

Faye and I both challenge the idea that she has problems with colour, given that she's just produced a wall hanging that's a great success from the colour point of view. Em counters by telling us that she once decided bravely to paint her chimney breast a different colour from the rest of the room, and ended up with the whole thing covered in squares of sample pot colours, until she finally gave up and painted the whole thing back the same colour as the rest of the room. (Field note, Hellan Craft Group, 24/09/13)

Dissatisfaction was often expressed about work in progress, which by its nature was incomplete and inevitably required bits of invention and innovation to get around problems that cropped up unexpectedly:

I put this to him . . . by commenting the challenge seems to be to finish this piece in such a way that it's good enough, rather than needing to make it perfect. Eric responds that the problem is that it'll never be good enough. He says cynically, 'I'll never look at this again once it's finished'. I flag up to him that it's impossible to know what this piece will look like before he's grouted it, but he's dismissive of any idea that he may end up liking it eventually. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 24/03/14)

Feelings of failure were also expressed about finished work, with participants sometimes 'not happy' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 28/10/13) with what they had done, and unable to accept that others liked their work:

Caroline also brings a drypoint etching and a collagraph, both exquisite, but both finding them to bring and showing them are events laden with stress—she says she turned the house upside down—even more than usual—to find them, and now they are on display there seems to be real shame about their not being good enough. In fact, both are rather exceptional, but she's unable to take pleasure in her accomplishment. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 05/05/14)

These and many similar observations suggest that certain features of crafts creativity make it prone to trigger feelings of shame in vulnerable participants. In Bourdieu's words (1991, p.23) the body 'does not memorise the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life'. Given that being looked at may be shaming and incapacitating, it is unsurprising that participants came up against such feelings in a context where what they were making was on display, whether finished, half-made, or half-conceptualized. The same risk of painful exposure will rarely be a feature of a community choir, or a gardening, reading, or walking group. Since participants at least some of the time exercised a high degree of design autonomy in what they did, the groups made appreciable demands on individual initiative and creativity. Although reflective facilitation usually ensured that adequate support was available at every stage, when participants were stuck, or at a loss, or faced with something they had produced that they didn't like, both the crafted object and accompanying state of mind were visible to others, the object being a particularly concrete, visible, and shaming manifestation of difficulty or failure (although the object was equally powerful as a symbol of competence when taken

to a final state that was pleasing to its maker). Writers exploring the phenomenology of shame have often focused on its visual dimensions. Looking and facial expression are central to apprehension of others' responses in early infancy, and continue to be so in adult life: 'Shame is originally grounded in the experience of being looked at by the Other, and in the realization that the Other can see things about oneself that are not available to one's vision.' (Wright, 1991, p.30) Tomkins (1963, p.357) speaks of a 'shame microscope', and Lynd (1999, p.49) of a 'flooding light'. Shame, unlike guilt, involves being the object, in fantasy or actuality, of another's gaze: 'it is as though something we were hiding from everyone is suddenly under a burning light in public view' (Izard 1991, p.332) and this often results in 'the compelling desire to disappear from view' (Frijda, 1988, p.351) or 'an impulse to bury one's face, or to sink, right then and there, into the ground' (Erikson, 1950, p.223). Sartre (1957, p.265), compellingly, extends this sense of objectification to the realm of subjective potential:

Thus in the shock which seizes me when I apprehend the Other's look, this happens—that suddenly I experience a subtle alienation of all my possibilities, which are now associated with objects of the world, far from me in the midst of the world.

The fact that making involves many of the same skills laboured over in early childhood, also in public, watched over by carers or teachers who are sometimes demeaning or domineering, also seems significant. The groups' spatial arrangements, being somewhat reminiscent of classrooms, probably intensified this association, however subliminally, as did the fact that facilitators inevitably walked around to be of help, whilst participants were seated and thus surveyed from above. Whilst participants' vulnerability to shame in this setting may seem a distinct liability, its potential for transformation will become apparent in the material that follows.



*Figure 5.3. Starting a mosaic project in the Pendon Crafts Group  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

Although this frozen panic was often in evidence, it was also clear that participants were skilful in avoiding it, finding a multitude of pretexts for ‘not going in the water’. This avoidance kept them immobilized in another way, since they were obliged to remain within a familiar repertoire of behaviours where shame and frustration would not be encountered. As an artist, these were tactics I was familiar with, having practised them myself, witnessed them in my peers, and encountered them in other teaching, but in this context, attended by so much anxiety, they could sometimes seem intractable. Modes of avoidance included a range of forms of inactivity; they could also take the form of making that looked productive but contained elements of stalling or procrastination that got in the way of starting, progressing, or finishing creative projects.

At the inactive end of the spectrum, participants sometimes came to the session and chose not to work. This of course could be for a number of reasons, not all of them avoidant. It occurred, for example, when people were so distracted by problems outside the group that creative activity was impossible. One participant for instance says ‘she doesn’t feel like doing anything – her father has taken a turn for the worse, and she is preoccupied. It’s hard for her to concentrate on anything’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 16/04/13); another talks of feeling

very shut down, as though her brain has gone solid, and nothing can move—it feels very hard to be creative in this state and she feels there are too many worries and too much going on; she refers to the feeling of being shut down as a form of self-protection. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/06/13)

The possibility of doing nothing was an important feature of such groups (and highlighted as valuable by most facilitator interviewees as well as participants); it created a space of no expectation, in which, paradoxically, the likelihood that something challenging could be attempted was increased. This freedom to choose inactivity is one reason why such groups are qualitatively so different from classes in mainstream adult education.

Inactivity was often, however, explicitly linked by participants to the difficulties of the making task. As reasons for this reluctance, participants talked of 'the need for everything to be orderly and perfect' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/03/13), 'too much choice' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/06/13), and the daunting conviction that there was 'a "right way" to do something' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 31/03/14) that they might not master. Encouragement to engage in making was met sometimes with outright refusal. One participant tells me firmly, for instance, that 'he doesn't like to do anything out of his comfort zone, and adds sadly, "and this is all out of my comfort zone"' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 04/11/13). Others found good rationalizations for sticking with the familiar: for instance one 'remains resistant to thinking about [a new way of working] and talks about how many projects she's got on the go, and of wanting to finish these before starting something else' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 16/07/13). More often, participants could be gently coaxed into trying out something new, as here: 'When I suggest we could just *play* with some experimental drawings, really just play, not have to get anything right, and does she want to just have a go at this, she says "no" stubbornly, although playfully, and then says, "oh, go on then"' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 09/07/13).

Stalling tactics were also evident within what was ostensibly creative activity, but done in a way that involved not starting, not moving things along, or not finishing. Procrastination could involve being stuck at the planning stage for far longer than was helpful. One participant, for instance, 'traces slowly until tea break, without getting to the point where she can play with arranging shapes' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/06/13); another is 'reluctant to start transferring her cut-out design to the hessian once she's ready towards the end of the session, even though

there's half an hour to spare' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 07/10/13).

Sometimes this process of deferral could go on for weeks:

When she arrives, the lily-of-the-valley mosaic is as unbegun as ever. She's now preoccupied with fixings for the back, but she has some D-rings whose screws are much too long and would come through to the front of her mosaic if she used them. After some conversation about this and my suggestion that a plate hanger could be used for a piece like this, she's still struggling to get started with gluing the mosaic pieces down—she has three alternative versions of the composition, as well as a host of flowers pieced together provisionally on Plasticine, and remains unable to make the decisions necessary to begin. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 15/04/14)

Once a work was underway, perfectionistic redoing could often get in the way of moving it towards completion: 'Em's perfectionism seems to be slowing her down and she spends the first few minutes of the session undoing the work she has done so she can do it better' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 19/09/13); another participant

... seems a bit stalled today—he's already taken a bunch of pieces off it and redone it, and he doesn't feel motivated to get the first picture finished although it requires only minor work. There's a fine line for him between . . . redoing that never arrives at a final commitment to something, and a conclusive change that moves something towards completion and satisfaction. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 10/03/14)

Frustration presented thus may appear as an intractable obstacle, particularly in groups like these, where participants characteristically lack confidence in their own abilities and in some cases are emotionally very vulnerable. It was evident in both groups that participants could be sufficiently discouraged by a perceived failure to stop attending for while, or to consider leaving; one participant confessed to me for instance that 'she went home and told her husband, "I don't think I'll go to the craft group anymore"'. She describes herself as having felt she was trying to do "something I just wasn't meant to do" (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 17/06/14). In practice, however, frustration was just as unstable and amenable to transformation as more comfortable affects, and relational aspects of the groups were strongly implicated in its modification.

## 5.4. The group as a facilitating relational environment

In the supportive environments provided by the groups, frustration could turn out to be not only manageable but a generative bit of grit in the creative oyster. The group situation, in spite of its tendency to provoke feelings of shame, provided multiple possibilities for its modification. In particular the groups' relational dimensions were conducive to an unfreezing or thawing out that set creative development in motion again, and undid the sense, described by Sartre, of 'alienation from all my possibilities'. Facilitation, peer support, and the structure of the group itself were all involved in these transformations.

### *Facilitation*

Participants had very often reframed difficulties intrinsic to the creative process (and everyday life more generally) as failures of their own competence or natural endowment. A central role for facilitators, consequently, was to convince participants that mess, uncertainty, experimentation, and flawed prototypes were simply unavoidable and even exciting aspects of making and design. The importance of design has been flagged up above, and facilitators were just as actively involved in teaching design skills as the strictly technical expertise concerned with making. Such interventions could be quite minimal and sometimes did no more than highlight the virtues of improvisation, having a go, and taking a risk:

She gets stuck at one point feeling dissatisfied with the way she's filling in the background—it looks untidy to her. Her perfectionism is driving her to work more carefully but at the same time she's driving herself a bit crazy trying to get things right. I say there is no right way, and at times when it's not enjoyable to be so meticulous, perhaps that's a good signal to change the way we're doing things – what if she just filled it in in a much less careful and more lively way? After all, what her tiles communicate is a vigorous pattern, a dance. She tells me that makes her feel much better and volunteers that it's the same problem she has with everything—wanting things perfect and making herself miserable trying to make them so. Later I come back and she's filled the background in a more relaxed way, with a more energetic application, and says she likes what she's done more now. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 28/04/14)

Facilitators' interventions about design often communicated the fruits of long experience rather than formal rules, as where a participant tells me:

And I went, well, months or more where I didn't touch it [an unfinished textile piece], because, I don't know, but then Faye said about just putting it somewhere to look at, which I did, and that really helped; I just stuck it on the other side of the room so it was there and I looked at it, and then by looking at it I realized what I actually needed to do. (Interview, Joni, Hellan Crafts Group, 20/05/14)

Persistence is a key aspect of most successful design and making practices, and facilitators played an important role in supporting tenacity when it flagged, as where I 'encourage Angie to give up this micro-management of the piece and to trust that the strength and grace of the design will carry it through' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 16/06/14). There were also many occasions where facilitators could model some acceptance of their own creative difficulties, for instance by framing botched first attempts as an inevitable part of making and design processes:

Doing a demo puts me in contact with my own fear of 'not getting it right' but this serves as a useful point at which to model antiperfectionism and the importance of muddling through, bearing with things not going right the first time and so on. This is particularly the case with lino, where the first couple of prints are often disappointing. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 11/11/13)

Making sure that participants were not left struggling with unmanageable feelings was a crucial part of the facilitator role in both groups. Practically this was made difficult by the fact that often many group members needed help at once, which could lead to feeling overstretched:

Eric arrives and gets into a chat with Cath, but I'm aware there's quite a lot of preparation to do to set him up for oil painting, and I also feel the stakes are high—if the group doesn't work easily enough for him, he won't stick with it. I find myself rushing around trying to set up paints, show Eric how to clean his palette, and set up a lino-printing demo all at once. I'm relieved that our volunteer is there to help when I've lost things, and that Faye [visiting] is 'holding the fort' on the conversation end of things. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 11/11/13)

The assistance of a volunteer was very necessary under these conditions. As demonstrated in material above, participants were not well served when inadequate help was available. If the Pendon group had expanded beyond its characteristic weekly attendance of ten or twelve (something which looked likely at one point) we would have required additional volunteer support.

Faye and I both aimed to support our participants in developing autonomy as makers and designers. Faye's characteristic approach was to encourage careful, step-by-step development of technique leading eventually to a freer approach, whereas I was more likely to encourage play and experimentation, with traditional skills acquisition following in their wake. Although we differed in this respect, we were both experienced as effective and enabling by our participants, and both deeply frustrated when the strategies we were using seemed insufficient to help someone out of a creative impasse. A great deal of thought went into reflecting on what individuals most needed from us, particularly since a delicate balance had to be engineered between too much and not enough challenge or risk. The maintenance of absolute safety in activities was sometimes extremely helpful, and at other times could limit possibilities for development of new skills and new self-perceptions, as noted by the director of AFHC:

It's keeping people in a really, really safe space so not necessarily encouraging them to have more of that sort of creative expression. So the danger, I suppose, in crafts is that they become less creative and more about skill, and I think that's the challenge is how we match those two things really, how we encourage people to take their own creative risks within what we term as craft. (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14)

One distinctive virtue of crafts practice in the arts-for-health field is that it presents a spectrum of levels of difficulty or risk that participants, with support from facilitators, can learn to vary as appropriate. At the level of intrinsic reward, the experience of flow has been observed to depend on a reasonable match between 'the opportunities for action perceived by an individual' and 'his or her capabilities' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p.52). At the level of finished product, the maker is able to engineer an end result that embodies a satisfying balance between 'the workmanship of certainty' and 'the workmanship of risk' (Pye, 1968, p.20).

### *Peers as supporters*

Participants themselves, once they had discovered the virtues of a less self-blaming approach and the pragmatic effectiveness of experimentation and persistence, were ready to offer encouragement to peers who were struggling; on one occasion, for instance, a whole group collectively offer a discouraged peer 'the pep-talk she needed, telling her, just leave it for a while, then come back and look

at it afresh; you can have another go, and so on' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 28/05/13); on another, a participant encourages her friend in a very supportive way to 'trust her own judgement when it comes to colours' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/06/13). Such interactions evidence the way that new approaches to creative activity were internalized to become a resource for self and available to offer to others. Straightforward appreciation and enthusiasm from peers was also a factor in this equation, as noted above, and the importance of feeling valued and admired will be further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 in connection with handmade artefacts as 'stuff to show'.

### *The group as structure*

The simple existence of the group itself, as a regular, timetabled occurrence, also had a significant enabling effect. A number of participants commented that the group made possible activity that they were unable to sustain elsewhere. This could be because of lack of space, resources, motivation, or tenacity, as in these examples:

Rachel talks about how having the group provides a structure for art making—it would be less likely to happen at home. I think this is true for most of the members of the group, who for various reasons would struggle to maintain a practice at home. Rachel puts this down to internal self-criticism: when things go wrong and you're on your own, it's easy to feel that you're rubbish, whereas in the group you get support from facilitator and peers, and you just keep going. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 26/06/14)

Kate says she thinks if she'd been trying out mosaic at home, she would have got frustrated by this point and put it aside, perhaps for good. She notes that the group itself, being present in the group, makes it possible to keep going through disappointment and irritation in a way that is often difficult alone. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 20/01/14)

There was a further aspect of the groups that contributed to their functioning as 'facilitating environments'. This was the way in which they created a space of freedom not just for doing, but for thinking. Offered an environment of acceptance and freedom from pressure to achieve, and encouraged by the facilitator's readiness to reflect on the challenges arising in creative practice, participants naturally became reflective about themselves, at first in relation to their difficulties as designers and makers:

Caroline pulls three nice prints of various densities of tone, somewhat pleased by one of them, and not very happy about the other two. In one case this is because she thinks the plate's not inked up enough; in the other it's because some circular scratch marks have crept in when she was cleaning the Perspex plate with scrim, which must have contained a sharp foreign object. These marks are so faint that I wouldn't ever have noticed them, but for her they spoil things. More generally, to produce two less-than-perfect prints alongside one satisfactory one seems to spoil the day's work, and even to spoil the one excellent print. We engage in some light-hearted chat about how she might experiment with producing ten prints and throwing nine away with impunity. She says wryly, 'but I never throw away the nine that don't work'. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 12/05/14)

This participant, however, then went on then to talk about how her perfectionism and negative self-talk got in her way in her daily life, so that the making provided an opportunity to articulate and reflect on something central to her life predicament. It was notable that participants often spontaneously extended reflections and insights about difficulties in their creative practice to other areas of their lives. For instance one participant says, 'this is what happens to me all the time—I can't get started on anything because I'm not sure it'll be good enough' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 15/04/14); another participant tells me 'I'm starting to realize this group isn't just about crafts—it's about how you live your life', and goes on to say that a comment I'd just made about not needing to be too picky is just what she needs to realize in every area of her life (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 12/05/14).

The groups, by offering this safe space for reflection, allowed a thawing and a setting in motion of creative processes that were inhibited. Under these conditions the resurrection of shame, rather than a liability, was the very possibility of its transformation, consistent with Winnicott's conception of therapy as 'a renewed experience in which the failure situation will be able to be unfrozen and re-experienced, with the individual in a regressed state, in an environment that is making adequate adaptation' (1954, p.281).

## **5.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has enlarged upon conventional accounts of the affects of making on the basis of sustained, close observation of processual dimensions of manual

creativity. An alternative was presented to normative representations of therapeutic crafting as soothing and distracting, and of hobby crafting as derivative, mechanical, and repetitive. Field notes were used to describe a shifting affective eventscape in which pleasure and relaxation are mingled with disappointment, ambition, frustration, and enchantment. These emotional fluxes are inseparable from their cultural, interpersonal, and material contexts. When pleasure, enthusiasm, and contentment are viewed in the context of a full range of creative affects, it becomes possible to establish the conditions under which frustration becomes a useful and potentially transformative part of a making practice, rather than its nemesis. Field notes were also used to evidence the role of enabling facilitation, supportive peer relationships, and the reliable group frame in building a working relationship with creative challenges. Extended observation of creative processes themselves will be further used in Chapter 6 to investigate the transformation of frustration through playful, serendipitous, and experimental entanglements with materials.

## CHAPTER SIX

# MUDDLE, UNCERTAINTY, AND PLAYFULNESS IN CREATIVE MAKING: AN AESTHETICS OF FORTUITY

### 6.1. Introduction

In Chapter 5, I used field notes to evidence some broad emotional registers observed in the two groups, and emphasized that these affects were unstable and related to factors—interactional, cultural, material—not located in any simple sense within the crafts activities themselves. The mere act of categorizing these affects, however, somewhat disembeds them from the flow of interactions and creative practices in which they waxed and waned. In this chapter and the next, therefore, I situate my observations within a notional ‘chrono-architecture’ (Malafouris, 2008a, p.26) of group making, by investigating how these and related affects came into being and into play in longer-term group making processes. One possible extended temporal frame is that stretching from the conception of an object through to its completion, and it is from this perspective that making will be examined in Chapter 7. The use of a start-to-finish unit of analysis is at risk, however, of reproducing a familiar but misleading ‘construction kit’ view of making, ‘according to which the maker begins with a plan or template and a finite set of parts, and ends when the final piece is put in place’ (Ingold, 2013, p.45). Before examining the workings of agency and intention on the path from an initial plan to a completed artefact, therefore, I turn in this chapter to how participants navigated through the episodes of creative mess, muddle, and uncertainty that were routine features of the journey.

As already noted, a variety of frustrating obstacles, accidents, diversions, and forced changes of direction are encountered on the notional clear, linear path from initial conception to finished artefact. Field notes record how participants were thwarted by unpredictable bodily, material, and emotional forces that were only partially subject to control. Confronted by these obstacles, they were often tempted to blame themselves. In Chapter 5 I described how participants were helped to build a workable relationship with creative difficulty, rather than

freezing when they encountered it, or attempting to evade it. Forging a path through this uncertain territory towards an equally uncertain destination required participants not only to tolerate bad feelings, however, but more deliberately at times to adopt an 'aesthetics of capitulation' (Müller, 2015, p.302), following materials or partnering them rather than attempting to control them. For many participants the necessity for such ad hoc and heuristic strategies was at odds with received wisdom about crafts creativity. This chapter will explore how participants came to appreciate the virtues of playfulness, characterized by curiosity, experimentation, and improvisation, in their practice as designers and makers.

The literature on play is of mixed relevance when considering adult creativity. Many classic developmental accounts (e.g. Piaget, 1926) describe play solely in terms of its role in preparation for adulthood. Where the cultural world of adulthood is discussed (e.g. Huizinga, 1949 [1939]; Caillois, 2001 [1958]), play is portrayed as a primitive but extinguished impulse; culture is shaped by its vestigial remains. Whilst there is some discussion of improvisation as a form of play in the context of music and literature (see Berliner, 1994, for an ethnomusicological study of jazz extemporization; and Fertel, 2015, for a study of improvisation in literature), playfulness seems to have been neglected in academic research into visual arts and crafts creativity, perhaps because of the dominant historical focus on product rather than process (see Müller, 2012). Some play theorists have been categorically dismissive of the role of play in art and design creativity. Huizinga, in his monograph *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, for example, asserts: 'It is impossible to assume that the aimless meanderings of the hand could ever produce such a thing as style' (1949, p.168). For reasons explored in the previous chapter, research in the domain of arts for health reflects the conventional view of creative making as orderly, deliberative, and controlled rather than playful or subject to the vagaries of chance.

The observation that playfulness is conducive to, or a feature of, artistic creativity has often, however, been made by artists themselves, particularly those who have reflected on moment-to-moment dimensions of their creative practice (see for

example Milner, 2010 [1950]; Hockney, 1993). The conception of play as an effective catalyst for creative thinking is also commonplace in contemporary business and design innovation contexts (see for instance Schrage, 2013; Brown, 2009) as well as in the popular literature on creativity (for instance Nachmanovitch, 1990; Cameron, 1992). Aligned with these more experiential accounts, there is a growing and interdisciplinary body of theory, referenced in Chapter 2 (Sennett, 2008; Gauntlett, 2011; Ingold, 2010b, 2011; Hallam and Ingold, 2007; Malafouris, 2008a), that emphasizes the ludic, improvised, heuristic nature of manual creativity. Tools, suggests Sennett (2008, p.273), 'can perform complex work only because we have, as adults, learned to play with their possibilities rather than treat each tool as fit-for-purpose'. Ingold (2011, p.217) draws out 'itinerant, improvisatory and rhythmic qualities of making', challenging the notion of manual skill as the tidy imposition of the maker's will on her materials according to an established plan. Understanding creativity as an emergent property of assemblages of beings, materials, processes, and practices necessitates 'read[ing] creativity "forwards", as an improvisatory joining in with formative processes, rather than "backwards", as an abduction from a finished object to an intention in the mind of an agent' (Ingold, 2010b, p.3). Given the methodological individualism that still dominates in creativity research, this remains 'a second, fragile line of theorizing' (Müller, 2012, p.2). It is, however, consistent with a view of playfulness from the perspective of evolutionary biology as an adaptive 'positive mood state, in which the individual is more inclined to behave (and in the case of humans, think) in a spontaneous and flexible way' (Bateson and Martin, 2013, p.13).

In this chapter I use field notes to examine the development, characteristics and consequences of these flexible and spontaneous inclinations. In Section 6.2 I explore factors, both cultural and personal, that were barriers to ad-libbing and experimentation. In Section 6.3 I describe qualities of the groups that made them safe metaphorical playgrounds, firstly in terms of their social dynamics, and secondly for creative experimentation. Lastly, in section 6.4, I describe the development and repercussions over time of more adaptable and playful states of

mind, which I identify as having a go, making a mess, improvising, bricolage, rule breaking, experimentation, and innovation.

## **6.2. Barriers to creative spontaneity**

In the settings in which I worked, more heuristic and opportunistic orientations towards making and design required a considerable amount of cultivation. Although they ultimately greatly increased creative confidence, they were initially sustained with difficulty, especially given the predominance of feelings of shame and failure, the tendency to stick with the familiar, and to adhere to rules—sometimes explicit but often tacit, unarticulated or arguably unconscious—concerning the right way to do things. One participant commented to me, ‘I’m fifty-four and I’m just learning to play’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 09/04/13). Participant commentaries on playful and oblique approaches to making reflected cultural prejudices against playfulness, as well as past experiences in which free, playful creativity had been discouraged.

### *Cultural pressures*

Where participants responded to the impulse to proceed experimentally, for the fun or excitement of it, they often became ‘apologetic at just wanting to “play around”’ (field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 10/03/14). This disparagement of creative play can be understood in light of an enduring ‘individualistic modernist conception of creativity’ (Montuori and Purser, 1995, p.75) in which the creative impulse belongs to ‘gifted’ individuals or is achieved through years of specialized education, rather than being a general human endowment or propensity for knocking something together or trying out something new. It seemed evident that for most participants, creative or artistic education at school (and sometimes in further or adult education) had reproduced these cultural assumptions, being oriented towards product rather than process, and ‘correct’ ways of doing things rather than innovation or experimentation. One participant says, for instance, ‘that school instilled the idea in her that everything should be done just so, to a careful plan’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/10/13). Playfulness was seen as trivial, because too easy, as in an earlier field note extract (Pendon Crafts Group,

31/03/14). Experience in the groups was often contaminated by associations with school and adult education as structured (and assessed) learning, as evidenced below.

Attitudes may also have reflected a cultural tendency, evident in much academic and philosophical writing as well as social representations more generally, to see childhood and not adulthood as the appropriate setting for play. Woodyer (2012), for instance, notes the instrumentalism of developmental accounts in which play's function is reduced to preparation for adult life, 'positioning adult play as merely a remnant of childhood forms' (p.314); Caillois' monograph *Man, Play and Games* exemplifies this trend in describing play in adulthood as 'an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often money' (2011 [1958], pp.5-6).

### *Developmental pressures*

In addition many participants made it clear, in what they spontaneously recalled about early experiences of making, that their understandings of creativity had been shaped in childhood by influential and powerful others who had disparaged play and discouraged experimentation. A playful attitude to creativity had been frowned upon or stamped out in ways that were often shaming. The damage done to the ludic creativity of the child in these moments was often perpetuated in the present as if the critical others concerned formed an internalized, inhibiting audience. The following field note extracts are typical of many occasions on which memories of earlier making experiences were triggered by activities in the present:

'My teacher told me I shouldn't be allowed near a sewing machine when I was ten, and for decades after that, I didn't dare sew or make anything.' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 13/11/12)

She says she thinks a design of this type could be used for embroidery, then adds that her mother used to embroider, and taught her as a child, although she then adds rather darkly and with what sounds like resentment, that her mother 'was a hard taskmaster', a real perfectionist who had insisted that the back of the work must look as beautiful as the front, and she says, 'I haven't done it since'. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 10/06/13)

Kate reminds me that she went to college to do illustration . . . and in some ways this experience was undermining—she was taught by someone very gifted at water colour who wanted to make his students carbon copies of himself. Her first experience of printmaking was unhelpful—she'd assumed she'd love it but a tutor told her he was disappointed in her and had expected her to do better. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 04/11/13)

She shows me the poinsettia she's prodded and says that's the bit she's least pleased with, because it's a bit irregular—she thinks her father, if he had seen it, would have said 'if you call that a poinsettia you'd better think again'. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 05/11/13)

Some participants reported that in their families of origin, creative play had been reserved for a single member of a family, often described as 'the artistic one' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/03/13); in other families, opportunity to play had been withdrawn from one person in order to create leisure time for others:

I was kept at home a lot. Because my mother was always ill, and I was kept at home to help my mother, so I missed a hell of a lot of schooling. Though my dad was very creative, I felt as if sometimes he was alright doing his own thing, he was very busy in his shed and all of that, but he kept me doing the things that . . . so as he could go and do the things he wanted to do. (Interview, Gayle, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/07/14)

### **6.3. The group as a safe playground**

As evidenced above, for many participants, creative play had been spoiled in childhood in ways that made it a source of anxiety in the present; historically, to make or create playfully was to risk angering a teacher, disappointing a parent, eliciting contempt or rivalry from a sibling, or appearing selfish. In addition makers were quickly reminded, when taking a more experimental approach, that creative play was intrinsically risky; playing around with ideas and materials involved some suspension of responsibility, control and rationality, and committed the player to an uncertain future in which the artwork's survival, at least in its present form, was at stake. Such risk taking could only be countenanced if a basic level of safety was guaranteed. What was required, in psychological terms, was a 'protective frame', or 'play space . . . cut off from the world of serious consequences, especially from trauma and harm' (Apter, 2014 p.8). As noted in this and other research concerning shifts in motivational states, such a setting potentially 'turns one towards playful action, action for its own sake, within that

space' (ibid, p.8). My observations suggest that this safety was fostered both generally, through maintenance of an accepting and respectful group culture, and more specifically by providing encouragement and concrete strategies for creative experimentation.

### *Facilitating interpersonal safety*

The importance of a protected space was acknowledged by participants and other group stakeholders. The GP connected with the Hellan group, for instance, spoke of it as 'a safe environment . . . and a chance, within that safety, to socialize; a chance to gradually expand their confidence in what they do' (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Crafts Group, 12/01/14). Participants in this group felt that this sense of safety depended on the referrals-only pathway to membership, which ensured considerable homogeneity; some participants felt the presence of men would be problematic, and most shared the opinion that 'it would change it completely if you just had people walking in' (FN/HCG/070513). As a downside, safety created in this way had the potential to encourage self-fulfilling perceptions of a damaged self that was in need of cloistering, something that was of concern to the Hellan group GP:

Yeah, I think after they make the first step after being maybe very isolated and alone, that actually after that you might get too comfortable and actually it's good to be jogged a little bit sometimes, isn't it. In my heart of hearts, I'd rather the group was more diverse, I'd rather it was more balanced in terms of gender and age. (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 12/01/14)

This form of protection was arguably not essential, since in the Pendon group, members of the public were quite literally free to walk in and out at any point in our sessions. In this group, participants also talked about feeling safe, but articulated this in terms of a predictably friendly and supportive culture and the reliable presence of 'someone running things who knows about mental health, who'll understand that you have some days when you don't feel so well' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 09/12/13). My facilitator colleague and I both saw the creation and preservation of a supportive and respectful group culture as an important part of our role: there could be 'maybe psychological problems or issues that are going on . . . but when they can do it in a safe space like that . . . I do feel

that it's down to the person leading the group, having that sensitivity, enough to deal with that' (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 22/11/13). The emotional labour entailed for facilitators in this empathic responsiveness will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9. Very occasionally it was necessary to step in to moderate a conversation where there was potential for offence to be taken. More often it was a matter of behaving to each individual with warmth and respect; this interactional style was easily adopted by the collective as an aspect of the protective frame for which they shared responsibility. Under these conditions, participants could attend even if feeling fragile: in the worst case scenario they could 'go in the kitchen and have a cry, and then they'll come back in, and they've got over that, and then they can come back next week, and know, "I'm safe to come here because people allow me to be me"' (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 22/11/13). Similar feelings were expressed by a participant in an interview:

So why does it feel safe? . . . I think it's partly because you're not going to be criticized, whether it's just or not, you're not going to be criticized. People are very accepting of you, they take you at face value, which means that they trust you . . . so you've got this assuredness about the group, I suppose, that you know that you're in a safe place. (Interview, Faith, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/04/14)

Group conversation was one medium that reflected and contributed to this protective frame. My field notes record many registers of talk that are unrepresented in interview material about crafting for health. Field notes, furthermore, draw attention to distinctive characteristics of conversation carried out while crafting. Having hands and eyes actively engaged in making freed participants from the obligation to interact through talk. Participants noted the difference that this made, for instance 'the importance of being able to come and talk or not talk as you please—"you can make yourself a bit separate and stay in your shell, or at least, you're actually listening to the conversation, but you don't have to join in"' (Field note, Hellan Craft Group, 07/05/13). This freedom from pressure enabled rather than extinguished talk. The fact that hands and gaze were occupied, furthermore, released conversation from some of its ordinary functions of space filling, acquaintance making and moment to moment maintenance and performance of identity (Goffman, 1956; Butler, 2005). Crafted objects under construction became subjects for chat, freeing people from the necessity of talking about themselves; as one participant put it, 'Here, people ask you, "what are you

doing?” rather than, “what do you do?” (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 20/07/14).



*Figure 6.1. Talking and making in the Pendon Crafts Group  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2013)*

Paradoxically, the unforced quality of talk in these settings seemed to make it easier rather than more challenging to discuss difficult things, as here:

At one point there’s a whole-group discussion about Caroline and her hoarding—she talks about what a grave problem it is for her and how impossible it is to sort out. The responses from others are extremely sensitive and tactful and there’s a minimum of advice giving. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 07/07/14)

Empathic talk was supported by making, since the spacious quality of interaction permitted pauses more conventionally filled by solution finding or the pressure to achieve some kind of resolution. Talk that took place without any obligation to arrive at a destination also became playful in its own right; it included registers of silliness, free association, banter, joke telling and ribaldry. At times there was collective hilarity at the turns it took, as in one session where a whole-group conversation traversed enemas, electrocution, undertaking, terminal illness and episiotomies:

Cath tells us that another group she was in specified topics of conversation that were forbidden (sex, politics and the like) and says, ‘It’s lovely to be in a group where you can talk about anything you want to!’ She tells us that in [yet] another group she had to leave the room because of a fit of the giggles; and she and others seem on the verge of helpless laughter at numerous points today. I’m watchful to see nobody is troubled by the flavour of the conversation, but everybody seems to be really enjoying it. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 30/09/13)

The qualities of freedom and safety combined in talk in this setting were conducive to expression of a ‘backstage’ self (Goffman, 1956, p.69) not normally on display.

Such talk potentially provides ‘an arena where norms can be subverted and challenged and alternative selves explored’ (Coates, 2000, p.241).

### *Facilitating creative safety*

This culture of interpersonal safety was a necessary prerequisite for a more playful and experimental attitude towards making. Less experienced or more inhibited participants, however, needed task-specific encouragement in approaching their creative practice in more flexible and adventurous ways. This encouragement was required in three main areas: firstly, acceptance of imperfection; secondly, abdication of responsibility; and thirdly, tolerance for uncertainty.

Concerning the first of these areas, as noted in Chapter 5, participants were often aware of the trouble that their rigidly high standards were causing them; they volunteered that ‘perfectionism can get in the way of creativity’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 30/10/12), and that creative activities were avoided elsewhere for fear of ‘making a mess or getting it wrong’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/12/12). As facilitators we countered these fears by encouraging attitudes more conducive to a curious, open-ended approach. Typical of such interventions are the following:

Today at the end of the session she gets slightly preoccupied by the fact that the pink outer border is slightly wider on one side than the other. We have a discussion about how we tend to be hypercritical about our own work and are negative about it on account of things others don’t even notice. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/10/13)

I assure her that these minor imperfections will either disappear as she progresses the work, or there will be easy ways of sorting them out. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 04/11/13)

I mention the decorating I was doing at home at the weekend and my own indecision about whether I was doing a good enough job. Others can relate to this problem with internal self-talk and I say I think this kind of making can be a way to get comfortable with what human minds do, and be less troubled by it. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 04/11/13)

Later on, I comment that even the back is beautiful, and she says ‘it’s not as neat as it should be’. She retells the story of how her grandmother taught her and her siblings to embroider and how she was fanatical about the neatness of the back of the work. We have a brief conversation about perfectionism not being very useful or very necessary for most things. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 12/11/13)

She's unnecessarily anxious that she hasn't hooked it densely enough, but is easily reassured. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 25/11/13)

I point out that the imperfections are part of the handmade quality of what she's making, and she seems to accept this. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 09/12/13)

I'm also anxious to reassure her that this is at least partly a matter of practice—if this isn't something you do all the time, who would you know where to start? (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 06/01/14)

She tells me at one point that she's dissatisfied with elements of it—she notices now that she's left big gaps between the pieces, particularly in certain places—she wonders about removing some pieces to replace them with larger ones, but also comments: 'this is my problem—my perfectionism'—she seems to be commenting both on her life and her creative process. We talk about how her aesthetic preferences may have changed since she began the piece; how she could make changes to it at this stage; but also that it will work well whether or not she does this. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 31/03/14)

Such forms of reassurance might be summarized as: 'others won't notice'; 'it'll sort itself out'; 'you'll be able to sort it out'; 'perfectionism isn't useful'; 'it's fine as it is'; 'handmade is good'; 'it'll come with practice'; and 'it'll work either way'. These types of intervention were ubiquitous, and part of the maintenance of a safe frame in which there were no punitive or humiliating consequences when things went wrong. Participants remarked on the importance of a protected domain in which imperfection was safe; one participant for instance 'flags up that it's really important that this is a situation in which you don't have to get anything right—there's no pressure to do anything perfectly and you can always have another go' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 12/05/14). Initially this was not entirely trusted, and participants frequently seemed to seek permission to relax their exacting standards, but over time, the feeling of safety was internalized by individuals who became able to reassure themselves (and each other). One participant, for instance, traces a template onto stretched hessian and 'the line is a little uneven—she jokes to me, "it's a bit wobbly, like me!"—but also, "it's fine, it doesn't matter, it's good enough"' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/09/13). Here the crafted object, as a surrogate for body or self, mirrors its imperfection, but this becomes the occasion for acceptance and humour.

The second attitude that supported the development of a more playful approach to making was abdication of responsibility. For many participants, the initial feeling

that imperfection wasn't ok was accompanied by a weighty sense of responsibility. Participants reflected conventional representations of making in assuming sole authorship of their work. This often amounted to a feeling of culpability when things were not going to plan. Situations were rarely understood as the product of chance, or dependent on other (human and material) agencies. As facilitators we actively encouraged a group culture in which participants could allow happenstance and serendipity a role, and some credit, in the evolution of the artefact. This fostered an enabling suspension of self-criticism. Crafts materials and processes lent themselves easily to the introduction and celebration of chancy, accidental aspects of creativity, since they were often capricious or not subject to any high degree of control. This was particularly the case when technical apparatus like an etching press was involved. Here, the project was at some point helpfully handed over to a piece of equipment, and was thus out of the hands of its maker. Participants, submitting to this forced relinquishment of control, were able to enjoy the element of surprise, which not infrequently worked in their favour. This was something that AFHC's director had observed in the organization's work with crafts in other settings:

So she thought she'd try printmaking with him. And it transformed him, because he just couldn't believe—that peel-off, that reveal—and you see what's there; he then started to work on a much bigger scale and it was just amazing, really. (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14)

Chance in the form of an erring collaborator (in this case me) could also result in happy outcomes:

There's also an unintended result with her first print of her vase drawing; I seem to have blotting paper muddled in with the printing paper, and the printed image on this paper is watery and smudged, although the result is unexpectedly beautiful, like a Chinese watercolour, and she likes it. She seems slightly less resistant to the hit-and-miss nature of the process today. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 02/06/14)

Activities could also be engineered to harness a high level of chance whilst resulting in very pleasing work. Randomly spot-dyeing wet silk with pipettes, or dropping ink onto wet paper, for example, reliably produced aesthetically captivating results although control over the outcome was extremely limited.



*Figure 6.2. Experimenting with properties of water and ink in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

The particular materials used, if not too precious, could reduce burdensome feelings of responsibility and this had been identified as an aspect of AFHC's work with crafts elsewhere:

And the other thing, I think, about crafts is something about the materials. Although you have very lovely materials and use them, there's something people don't feel quite so precious about the material, particularly if you can have things that look like scraps of fabric or scraps of felt... it's not quite so difficult for people to think that they might be working with something that, you know, if they don't get it right they're not going to have wasted loads of lovely material. So Mel who did this printmaking, she uses, when she started people off doing it, she uses that polystyrene material—you can just draw into that with a pencil, so again it's very: 'ooh, I've made a mistake' and you can just chuck it away, it's very easy for people to think that they can just play. (Interview, 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14)

Many materials lent themselves happily to reworking and experimentation, again lowering the stakes:

Yeah, it doesn't have to be absolutely perfect because you can keep redoing it, going back to it. And maybe that's the same with some of the other crafts—collage-type things, collage as well is something that a lot of our facilitators like to use, because again you're presenting people with some materials, and by you choosing the materials that you give people, you'd be setting people up for success, really, by the range of things that you offered them. Collage, textiles, etcetera, you can work over it and do it again, and it hasn't got to be a finished piece in that time. (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14)

An onerous sense of sole authorship was also undermined when participants were given permission to be inspired by and to borrow from the work of others. The creative process could be kick-started by encouraging participants to appropriate elements of photographic or other source material, or to use found objects, and it was easy to demonstrate that professional artists and designers are also

(unapologetically) thieving and acquisitive in relation to a body of existing works. Makers were thereby saved from reinventing the wheel, and not left feeling dependent on what they often perceived as their inadequate personal resources.



*Figure 6.3. Making use of printed source materials in the Pendon Crafts Group  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

Participants quickly acknowledged the merits of this abdication of authorial responsibility. One participant admits, for example, ‘that the day she had most fun with the fabric dyeing was when she was feeling a bit rubbish, very unfocused, and did it with an attitude of ‘I don’t give a damn’—the results were lovely’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/10/13). Another ‘says it’s come up better than expected, and there’s an acknowledgement that the final result is outside of her ultimate control’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 24/02/14). Participants learned to lower the stakes and spread the risk in their making by having a number of things on the go: ‘I sense a real feeling of relief in her. She’s released herself from the obligation to make the tree piece turn out right, to have it be the single definitive piece’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/06/13). They also recognized the role of process in throwing something helpfully unpredictable into the works: ‘She says printmaking processes have a very freeing effect on her—this is something to do with the constant presence of accident—not knowing how things will turn out’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 10/03/14). The development of a piece of work was thus increasingly seen as having a momentum and character of its own. Participants described themselves as witness to the emergence of the work rather than its author; the language of ‘turning out’ and ‘coming up’ used by makers implied a recognition of the multiply determined nature of the work’s progression.

Once ideas of sole authorship had been discarded the task became that of selecting from available possibilities, and harnessing the workings of chance and the intrinsic properties of materials to best effect. With this suspension of control and culpability, making could become pleurably fluky; it required vigilance, opportunism, and the willingness to exploit what happened by chance—a crafty, entrepreneurial stance reminiscent of what De Certeau (1984) talks of as ‘la perruque’. Such a state of mind might be contrasted with the ‘neoliberal guilt’ (Miller, 2015; Cain, 2016) produced when ‘responsible’ individuals are expected to ‘*internalize* the consequences of [their] actions . . . and self-sufficiently bear the costs of [their] choices’ (Young, 2011, p. 10)

In addition to acceptance of imperfection and an abdication of control, a third attitude that supported creative playfulness was increasing tolerance for uncertainty in the face of ‘those facts that stand in the way of the will’ (Sennett, 2008, p.215). In my coding, I adopted Keats’ term ‘negative capability’ for the state of being ‘capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts’ (1899 [1817], p.277). A willingness to let the work take its own mysterious route to an unknown destination allowed makers to profit from the accidental and dance with the real-time affordances of their materials as these presented themselves. Again facilitation could greatly aid cultivation of this attitude. It often took the form of straightforward encouragement to persist in a state of ‘not knowing’:

Kate seems to want to come up with a successful design before starting to glue stuff down, but she can’t arrive at anything that appeals to her. I encourage her to treat this as play rather than attempting to ‘go straight to go’—perhaps we have to play with some new languages for quite some time before we know what we want to do with them, or what they are fit to say. I’m also interested by—and say something about—my own experience of how grouting transforms the work in a way that’s not entirely predictable, and this amounts to a refreshing arrival of chance upon the scene—perhaps we have to let go of knowing whether it’s going to be any good or not. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 20/01/14)

Participants’ understandings of crafts creativity as the shepherding of materials along a predetermined route towards a certain destination can be seen as part of a wider cultural assumption that ‘the intention is the cause, the artwork the effect’ (Ingold, 2013, p.96). Participants quickly acknowledged, nonetheless, not only that prior certainty was impossible (a participant tells me, for instance, that ‘she’s

never sure how it's going to look because its appearance changes every time she puts a new colour down': Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/03/13), but that possibilities were enlarged when certainty was given up. One participant, for example, 'can imagine a couple of smaller flowers or a stem or leaves around the main one, but she decides she'd like to keep her options open for the time being, and to get started on the main motif' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/10/13); another is 'happy to be experimental with the prints themselves, for instance taking a couple from one plate without re-inking, since the paler second print would work well as a base for watercolour' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 26/06/14).

The role of facilitation in enabling participants where helpful to be more accepting of imperfection, to abdicate responsibility and to tolerate uncertainty—in short, to adopt a more playful approach—underlines the relational nature of such achievements.

#### **6.4. Playful engagements**

Encouraged to adopt this more aleatory and uncertain version of creativity, participants found that it was pragmatically useful as a way of keeping the creative process on the move, and alleviated some feelings of anxiety or failure. A more heuristic approach did not eliminate the experience of frustration, but enabled a more creative relationship with difficulties when they occurred. In coding field notes, I identified the most distinctive practices of more flexible making as 'having a go'; 'making a mess'; 'improvisation'; 'bricolage'; 'rule breaking'; 'experimentation'; and 'innovation'. It would be an oversimplification to imply a sequential relationship here, as sometimes all of these features of creative behaviour were simultaneously present. In other cases, a movement could be described, for instance from having a go at something, to deliberately or accidentally getting in a mess, to resolving the messy situation through improvising a solution; or from experimentation to the fortuitous discovery of a technical or design innovation.

*Having a go*

'Having a go' can be seen as the most immediately visible result of the changes in disposition described above. Having a go was something done for its own sake and out of a sense of challenge or curiosity, rather than in order to achieve a predetermined end result. The phrase itself was in constant use by my participants (and the facilitators I interviewed) to describe the movement from anxious inhibition to playful engagement with process and materials. Facilitators played a role here, too, in offering encouragement: 'because she showed us and we've all sort of had a go at it, and she'll say oh come on, you know, I want you to have a go at it, that's been good, because you don't know what you can do until you try, do you?' (Interview, Gayle, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/07/14). Facilitators had to exercise judgement concerning when to be tenacious in this encouragement, and when to step away. A number of participants expressed gratitude for the persistence the Hellan group's facilitator:

And Faye doesn't take no for an answer, does she! Like, ooh, come on, you can do this, just have a go at it, and then you realize, ooh, this is quite good, I can do this. I mean that's been on several occasions that things that I've done, you know, 'I won't be able to do that', you know, but yeah . . . (Interview, Gayle, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/07/14)

At other times, encouragement involved a mixture of teaching and reassurance, as where I persuade a participant 'to think in terms of "having a go" and relying on trial and error as essential to the learning process—if she doesn't like it, it's not a massive investment of time, and she can start afresh' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 22/10/13). Increasingly, it was enough to provide demonstrations or samples of what it was possible to do, as on one occasion where 'there's much admiration of the prodded Christmas wreaths that Faye has made as samples of the kinds of things they might like to make. These seem to work as a real incentive to have a go' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 03/09/13). It was notable too, that a mood of excitement was generated between peers when one participant was trying out something new. As one participant experiments with watercolour for the first time, for instance, 'several members of the group come and look over her shoulder. Joni says she thinks she'd like to have a go. Everyone's surprised and enthusiastic' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 01/04/14).

Many participants articulated the feeling that this new willingness to have a go in the making sphere was impacting on other areas of their lives. One participant who was re-engaging with education and employment told me ‘that the group has been very important to her in starting to get out and do new things’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/03/14); another told me ‘I’m more willing to try things now—I don’t just block it out that I can’t do it, and I’m more open-minded that maybe I can, um, not with everything! [laughs]—but yeah, it has, it does make a difference’ (Interview, Joni, Hellan Crafts Group, 20/05/14); a third participant talked about having the courage to go away with family members, something she had previously avoided:

It’s helped with all them sort of things, really, to sort of get out and don’t ever say, no I can’t do it. You know, because if you don’t have a go, you never know, do you, what you can do? So yeah, really, it’s helped with my confidence in all I suppose of the rest of my life. (Interview, Gayle, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/07/14)

### *Making a mess*

Having a go immediately opened the door to a range of new experiences in making. Equipped with a tolerance for imperfection and a willingness to take creative steps without a map or clear knowledge of their destination, participants frequently rediscovered the creative potential in making a mess. A number of participants described how messy play had been discouraged in childhood, and linked these experiences to adult inhibitions: ‘my mum and dad would never let us make a mess, that was another thing. You know, you were almost too scared to have a go’ (Interview, Gayle, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/07/14). Encouraged by a group culture that saw muddle as a lively and generative place of possibility, they started to endorse positive representations of mess as therapeutic; one participant for example recalls, in relation to her own work, ‘a nursery nursing training which dealt with the needs of inadequately parented children and stressed the importance of messy play’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 12/05/14). It was notable that the acceptability of mess served to energize the language participants used to describe what they were doing, as where a participant talks about ‘having been able to “slap the paint on” and not having to worry about how it was going to turn out’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 07/05/13). Alongside this enlivening freedom from care, there was often a more adventurous wish to introduce

something random into a process that was unfolding with too much predictability. As Sennett (2008, p.226) suggests, ‘made difficulties embody the suspicion that matters might be or should be more complex than they seem; to investigate, we can make them even more difficult’.



*Figure 6.4. Messy drypoint printmaking in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

### *Improvising*

Mess making, as the capacity to produce, enjoy and profit from a muddle, naturally encouraged a more improvisatory state of mind, since to explore or unravel a muddle once you are in one is often an ad hoc, heuristic procedure. Participants became increasingly comfortable about making things up as they went along, which meant that they were attentive to the actual possibilities in each given moment and began to relinquish the conviction that there was a ‘right way’. A participant who was initially very reluctant to embark on a mosaic without having planned it to last detail, for instance, talks when it’s half finished about ‘adding an unplanned flower to balance the arrangement now she sees how it looks—she’s starting to be more responsive to the emergent characteristics of her work’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 28/04/14). Another participant, who initially had been quite paralysed by the idea of making a mistake,

decides that part of the trunk needs to change. I feel happy to see her chopping out part of the drawing with scissors, moving shapes around, and adding bits and pieces—she seems to be engrossed now, and not at all precious about what she’s done, although there are odd moments of panic where she experiences dissatisfaction. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 09/07/13)

Although help—and often permission—were initially required to make the transition, once makers stepped out of a goal-focused approach and into the mode of improvisation, relief was apparent:

She expresses a bit of frustration with what she started two weeks ago—she regrets having started something so ambitious. I suggest that she doesn't need to go on with this piece at all, that she could start something much smaller, and indeed have a number of pieces on the go all at once. I talk about how that can reduce the paralysing investment in any one piece, and suggest she try approaching the next piece playfully and messily. Nadine seems relieved and says 'I was worrying about the piece I'd started—I knew I didn't really want to go on with it, and that feeling was so strong that it made me not want to come to the group—I had to make myself - I'm really relieved that I can just start something else'. It's enjoyable to watch her during the rest of the session - she chooses a small slate tile to work on and selects a range of coloured tiles, playing around with them until she has a colour combination she likes; then she starts cutting them and gluing, and gets immersed, working much faster than before and making really good progress with a geometric design. At the end of the session she comments on how pleased she is with what she's done. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 27/01/14)

Participants reported that their confidence with this heuristic approach increased over time and was transferable from one medium to another:

Abby says she thinks playing with the water colour has changed the way she can approach this [applying dyes to silk] and that she wouldn't have been this relaxed before; she would have felt she needed to know what she was doing before she started out, whereas now it's like the paint, she can put one colour down and then another next to it and just play. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/03/13)

As Nachmanovitch (1990, p.6) suggests, 'in a sense all art is improvisation', and its stable end products are "doctored improvisations" that have been revised and restructured over a period of time'. From a prospective rather than retrospective vantage point, 'only through continuous improvisation can an inflexible design be accommodated to the realities of an erratic and unforeseeable world' (Müller, 2015, p.72). This can be observed as a feature of all making, however ostensibly formulaic. Even in the case of painting by numbers, as Knott (2011, p.94) points out, the prepared materials and outlined framework constitute 'a permeable jig that is weak in its attempt to impose certainty'. In coming to enjoy improvisation, therefore, participants were participating in, instead of fighting against, the ineluctably fluid nature of creative making processes.

### *Bricolage*

In making things up as they went along, participants became noticeably less precious and more enterprising in their willingness to assimilate whatever materials were available to the task at hand. In this opportunistic state of mind, participants experienced themselves as resourceful and the materials available to them as abundant; one participant for example talks of ‘how rug hooking is a low-cost craft because so much can be recycled or obtained for little or nothing—she buys old tee shirts to use for fifty pence a time from the charity shop’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 01/04/14); others collected materials from the beach, the woods or the street. In coding my data, I labelled this eclectic approach ‘bricolage’, the everyday French term for the construction of something out of whatever materials come to hand, also applied in a broad range of sociological and aesthetic writing in the context of, for instance, architecture, fine art, qualitative research, and the evolution of cultural forms (see Rogers, 2012 for an overview).

The quality of bricolage in what participants produced was highly visible in the crafted object; in the orange, yellow, and mauve rug-hooked textile under construction by the participant talking in the excerpt above, for example, strips of fabric from a fluorescent boiler suit—the recycled workwear of one of our participants—nestled against fleece fabric from a charity shop sweatshirt and felt scraps donated by AFHC. Mosaic, especially, encouraged the throwing together of disparate materials so that beachcombed shells and rocks, manufactured mosaic, and broken china recycled from damaged items or found in the garden were combined in novel configurations. Bricolage occurred in less obvious contexts, too, as where a participant making greeting card pictures of birds perched on branches picked up twigs from outside and wired them onto her cards to substitute for stickers that she had used up (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 09/04/13). The satisfactions of this eclecticism echo De Certeau’s description of bricolage as a form of ‘making do’ that rather than being quiescent, is an opportunistic and dynamic appropriation of the personal, cultural and material affordances of the given moment (De Certeau, 1984, p. xviii). Whilst such bricolage can at times be decisively directed to the achievement of particular ends, it also has a ludic aspect in which the demand for particular materials is suspended and whatever is at hand

is 'brought into play'. The capacity to throw together materials in this ad hoc way is analogous to a creative relationship to the more general 'thrownness' (Heidegger, 1962 [1927]) of situated embodiment and cognition: a condition of being 'thrown into something, delivered over to something, given over to something from which we have to start and with which we must deal', and which 'is never neutral or undetermined but always has some definite content already' (Withy, 2014, p.62)



*Figure 6.5. Combining a variety of found materials in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

### *Rule breaking*

These crafty, opportunistic and acquisitive states of mind were associated with decreasing deference towards the rules that had governed participants' assumptions about making and design. The existence of these rules was evident in the way that participants sometimes positioned facilitators as the enforcers of an unwritten design discipline:

She seems to want to defer to authority [on a design decision]. I suggest she just tries something out and that there isn't a right or wrong way—she can pull petals out and replace them if she's unsure about the result. This seems to get her going, although at the end of the session, she still seems uncertain about the flower—'I'd like to make it even bigger but Faye said no'. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/10/13)

As facilitators, we often pointed to the insubstantial nature of these rules and encouraged participants to ignore them:

I say that it's about finding out what she loves, that there aren't any rules, that it's very much a matter of personal taste; that some people produce beautiful muted

palettes, very restrained, and others like [designer] Kaffe Fassett love rich, chaotic colour, Fassett's maxim being 'if you don't like the colour you've got, just add more'. Em seems reassured by the idea that there aren't any rules, and more interested in the possibility of thinking about colour, enlarging her confidence with it. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 24/09/13)

Given this encouragement, makers started to offer themselves greater freedom, as when I comment to a participant 'that there aren't really any rules with painting', and she replies, 'No—or at least you can make your own' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 07/05/13). Participants commented with some excitement on the possibilities that opened up once these unnecessary strictures were disregarded or re-authored:

It's easy to engage her with the Bonnard book that I brought to inspire her—she can see he's not following any rules and his paintings and drawings of the landscape are very personal records of being in a place; she comments that she can see he's not trying to make a photographic likeness; that he puts bits of colour where you wouldn't expect it—she likes the idea that she too could put bits of colour just where she felt like it, in the same way that Bonnard puts bits of orange in the sea; she also likes the idea that she could do a tree as a single mass instead of feeling that she had to do all the branches; and she really likes the way that one of Bonnard's cats is just made up of black and white and orange splodges—she says she would have felt she needed to draw its ears right and put in all the details. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 16/04/13)

As in other spheres, a process of internalization took place, so that participants started to offer these permissions to themselves and to report the new liberties they were taking to peers and facilitators, as when a participant shows me 'she's introduced a bright flash of yellow behind the tree and talks about how she had to remind herself she didn't have to be literal about the colour' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 07/04/14). Similarly, a participant volunteers, 'I'd have felt before that I'd have to get all the pieces the same length, whereas now I see it doesn't matter' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 09/04/13).

The group was also a place in which analogous issues of rule following, uniformity, and difference could be explored in relation to the materials of personhood, as when one participant's critical comment about a local man in women's clothing elicited responses from others asserting that 'that's what builds a community—that people can accept each other's differences' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 27/01/14). Participants' talk suggested that assertion of difference or

contravention of norms had generally been framed as risky in the light of previous experience; for instance a participant talks unhappily about ‘having been perceived as “creative” by her family, and this came with the identity of being “a bit different”’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 06/01/14). Inevitably many of these unwritten rules had had major consequences. One participant who had exceptional drawing skills, for instance, had studied graphics as a school leaver:

She adds that she could have gone on to do a degree, but that ‘nobody in my family went to university’. It’s not clear whether she made any use of her graphics training, but she says sadly that it’s useless now anyway because the whole industry is now digitally based and she doesn’t have the skills. I say she could use her exceptional skills as a fine artist now, and she says wryly, ‘Oh, that wouldn’t be allowed with my working class background!’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 16/06/14)

A number of instances already cited document moments where participants recognized a strong relationship between the internal rules they were following in making, and those that governed their practice of everyday life. The group offered a space of freedom in which to articulate and potentially to challenge these imposed and self-administered restrictions.

### *Experimentation*

A capacity to rewrite or disregard the rules was conducive to a pragmatic and experimental state of mind dominated by an attitude of ‘let’s try it this way and see how it works’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/11/13). Experimentation could be engaged in playfully for its own sake, but also lent itself to problem solving in relation to specific goals. When making was framed as experimental, the stakes were helpfully lowered. A participant talks for instance of ways of ‘testing some of these stitches on something less daunting and less personal than her own barely begun, high-stake textile projects’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/03/14); another

is excited by the prospect of being able to go on working on the same print, and elaborates the drawing . . . the elegant simplicity of the first print is lost and I think she appreciates that, but she seems really unanxious, happy to experiment and to learn. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 05/05/14)

Encouraged to treat their creative practice as research, participants built experimental methods into their making with increasing confidence and independence. A participant for instance happily goes through ‘a great number of modifications to the design, including trying out fish and flowers and ivy leaves in one area, all of which she has now rejected in favour of a plain background’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 16/04/13).

### *Innovation*

Strategies that involved trial and error frequently resulted in fortuitous innovation; serendipitous technical and design solutions could be adopted in the work in progress, or adapted whenever useful in the context of further projects. One participant, for example, impulsively introduced some delicate speckled colour into a black and white print by sprinkling sharpenings from the lead of an orange pencil onto her work before putting it through the press (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 02/06/14); another experimented with adding colour with minute torn pieces of tissue paper (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 30/06/14). Both techniques were developed in further work. Such experimentation became more goal-oriented when used to address an existing problem. Another participant, for example, needed to introduce fine lines in a medium (rug hooking) not naturally suited to them: ‘She’s trying to find a way to do the aerials on the houses, which appear in her source image. She seems rather robustly experimental in her approach—“I’ll see if it works this way, and if it doesn’t I’ll pull it out and try something else”’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/06/13). Some weeks later my field notes document that she had found a way to produce the required filigree line ‘by working back to front—the back of the hooking forms a neat running stitch which is just what’s required. She jokes to Faye, “it’s going very slowly, but I’ve invented a whole new technique here!”’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 30/07/13).

Innovations were helpfully catching in that they were picked up, adapted and developed by other members of the group, as where a number of participants started to introduce variations of monotype printmaking procedures on drypoint printing plates (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 16/06/14). The collective could

be seen to be innovating together, albeit without deliberate intent, even when working independently. Every interesting development expanded the horizons of possibility for every member of the group; and novel ideas would develop in one direction rather than another partly as a consequence of others' affirmative responses. Talk of individuals as solo producers or innovators leaves out of the account the lively mess of material and personal interactions from which playful innovations emerge. As Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (2015, p.74) suggest, 'When we look at the complete "life span" of a creative insight . . . the moment of insight appears as but one short flash in a complex, time-consuming, fundamentally social process'. It proves helpful, therefore, to think of the group as a fluid, interactive system that can be more or less conducive to the free elaboration of creative potential:

Innovative action is necessarily intersubjective action, forged in the complex and unstable relations between brains and bodies. Its model is not the sovereign who decides on the exception but the language or form-of-life that changes through what might be called a non-sovereign decision, at once distributed and diffuse, or, if you like, an exception-from-below. (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005, no page no.)

## **6.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has disrupted a familiar static and 'entitative' (Müller, 2015, p.5) account of the comfortable and challenging affective dimensions of crafts creativity by situating mood states in the context of longer-term making processes in which they ebbed and flowed. Whilst the complexity and heterogeneity of this flux makes a tidy 'temporal stratigraphy' (Malafouris, 2008a, p.31) of making processes impossible to achieve, the sequential dimension of creative affectivity has been emphasized. Countering a further tendency in creativity research to focus on designs and products, this chapter has foregrounded episodes of muddle, mess, and uncertainty that are routinely part of creative making. An adequate account of making needs to acknowledge unpredictability even in the 'constricted space between where the teeth of the saw meet the edge of the plank' (Ingold, 2011, p.54) or within the 'permeable jig' (Knott, 2011, p.94) of kit-based making. Field notes evidenced the flexibility, improvisation and opportunism demanded in responding to 'matter on the go' (Bennett, 2010, p.49), even in ostensibly simple

tasks. This requirement for playful adaptability increased exponentially as makers became autonomous designers with ambitious plans.

The chapter also emphasized that makers and materials exist within social and relational contexts that are crucial to the development, or erosion, of an enabling aesthetics of serendipity and fortuity. In Section 6.2, I described the cultural and relational factors that were obstacles to playful approaches to making. In Section 6.3 I described, again in social and interactional terms, qualities of the groups that made them safe as playgrounds for creative discovery. This emphasis on transactions within the group, both between group members and between participants and facilitators, was maintained in identifying key aspects of playful creative behaviour in Section 6.4. Creative playfulness emerges not as an intrapersonal trait, but as a property of a safe setting in which relationships were enabling and materials were presented in a way that invited participants to explore.

Throughout this discussion, makers' adaptive, flexible behaviours have been characterized in terms of playfulness. As noted above, the canon of monographs on play is of limited helpfulness when discussing playfulness in the context of adult creativity. Highly relevant, however, is the conception of playfulness from an evolutionary point of view as 'an evolved biological adaptation that enables the individual to escape from local optima and discover better solutions' (Bateson and Martin, 2013, p.5). Such a conception provides a useful bridge between crafts creativity and creativity in everyday life (p.85):

Many of the conditions that enhance the generation of new ideas are precisely those generated by play and, in particular, by playful play, in which play is accompanied by a positive, light-hearted mood that fosters divergent thinking and the connection of previously unconnected thoughts. Positive social interactions are potentially important in generating the right mood. So too is freedom from burdensome constraints and the availability of a stress-free (but not excessively relaxing) environment. Intrinsic motivation and fluency of thought are enhanced when curiosity is aroused and the individual is looking for surprises. Immediate success or failure are irrelevant to the activity, at least while it is in progress. The essence of play involves entering many blind alleys that often lead nowhere but occasionally lead somewhere really interesting.

The possibility of serendipitous discovery in play suggests its potentially transformative or political dimensions. Whilst Gelber (1999) asserts that the work ethic is reproduced in leisure activities, it can also be claimed that play 'continuously squeezes through even the smallest holes of the worknet' (Schechner 1993, p.42) and is 'a form of micro-power or "vitality" that can be inhabited' (Malbon, 1999, p.148). Whilst centred in the present moment, play also has a future orientation since it contains the 'spark of recognition that things, relations, and selves could be otherwise' (Katz 2004, p.102). Such sparks were in evidence when participants told me, for instance, 'I had no idea I could do this!' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 25/11/13). Woodyer (2012, p.322) concurs that this makes playing potentially a site of personal or social change:

Through its playing with limits, experimentation with rules, roles and meanings, and mimetic behaviour, playing contains transformative potential. It is an area ripe for rupture, sparks of insight and moments of invention, which present us with ways to be 'otherwise'.

The playfulness I observed in the groups had the potential to transform making from a goal-oriented, rule-bound, and sometimes anxiety-laden activity into a fluid and experimental dance that materialized new creative and relational possibilities. It was, nonetheless, in constant dialogue with more strategic, goal-oriented action directed by prior intent. The relationship of an aesthetics of fortuity to the sustained, ends-related, deliberative agency involved in conceiving, planning, and executing a project from start to finish is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# VISION, AMBITION, AND ACHIEVEMENT IN CREATIVE MAKING: AN AESTHETICS OF AGENCY

### 7.1. Introduction

Chapter 6 explored fortuitous, improvisatory, and playful aspects of creative making. These spontaneous diversions formed part of longer sequences of sustained intentional action directed towards the production of finished pieces of work. The project, as a temporal unit, typically began with an objective, even if not clearly defined: 'I'd like to make X', and ended at the point that an artefact, not always like X as originally conceived, was felt to be completed. This conception of the start-to-finish production of an item as a temporal unit must allow for the fact that projects sometimes stopped and started, were carried out collaboratively, ran concurrently with and were influenced by other projects, or underwent radical changes of direction. Considering the project as a unit facilitates consideration, however, of the important roles played by perceptions of agency and intentionality.

The word agency as conventionally used conveys the 'ability or capacity to act or exert power' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012); 'to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions' (Bandura 2001, p.2). These commonsense usages however, take human agency as a given and ignore the fact that 'we may well have a very real sense of agency or ownership without in reality owning or causing our act whatsoever' (Malafouris, 2008a, p.23). As noted in Chapter 2, conventional assumptions about personal autonomy are weakened when the cultural, political, and developmental determinants of personhood are considered (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Butler, 2005). The role of conscious intentionality as a precursor to action has also been challenged from the perspective of cognitive neuroscience with the assertion that the neurological impulse to perform an act demonstrably precedes the experience of a conscious intention connected with it (see for instance Howhy and Frith, 2004). From this point of view it has been suggested that perceptions of self as agent are heuristic

fictions (Wegner, 2002). More broadly, the tendency to locate agency in individuals' heads and to declare it a distinctive feature of persons and not other forms of life or matter has been subjected to critique (Clark and Chalmers, 1998). This chapter will use field notes to examine how perceptions of agency and intentionality featured in the making process, and in participants' understandings of themselves, and will give equal weight to the role of non-human collaborators in the making partnership. Observational material is used to augment, enrich, and complicate the conventional account of creative agency that appears in most literature on arts for health. Sustained observation of a 'taskscape' or field of action 'that exists not just as activity but as *interactivity*' (Ingold, 1993, p.163)—between actors, a setting and materials—produces an extended account of agencies that are situated, social, distributed, performative, and in flux.

In Section 7.2, I briefly review ways that agency is constructed in the arts for health literature, in the field of creativity research, and in material culture studies. Agency is seen in most work in arts for health as an intrapersonal capacity that can be strengthened through creative activities. Some work in the field of creativity research proposes a much more systemic, social, and relational view of creative action. Distributing agentic powers across a still wider field, agency has also been theorized in the material culture studies literature as a property of material as well as human participants in making processes. In Section 7.3 I return to field notes in order to develop the discussion of material agency that was begun in Chapters 5 and 6 in relation to frustration and fortuity respectively. When long-term making processes governed by guiding intentions are considered, the material world can be seen not only to irritatingly confound or serendipitously divert agentic intentions, but to extend, stimulate, and be inseparable from them. Fine-grained observation results in a fluid account of the negotiation of influence between minds, bodies, and material as well as human partners. In Section 7.4, again with reference to sustained observation, I develop an anatomy of this negotiated agency as manifested in goal-directed activities such as practising, reflecting, imagining, planning, deciding, reproducing, and reinventing. The emotional and practical consequences of this increasingly skilled collaboration with tangible stuff will be set aside for consideration, through the eyes of participants, in Chapter 8.

## 7.2. What agency? Whose agency?

### *Creative agency as personal*

The theme of strengthened agency (encompassing a variety of dimensions such as confidence, self-esteem, and willingness to engage with new projects) emerges fairly strongly in the literature on arts for health. Matarasso's early study (1997, p.26), for example, quotes a respondent as saying, 'it made me realize that I'm capable of doing anything I put my mind to, whereas before I never thought I could do anything', and the report concludes: 'Participation in the arts is an effective route for personal growth, leading to enhanced confidence, skill-building and educational developments which can improve people's social contacts and employability' (p.6). In a recent review of the evidence base for arts in mental health, Van Lith, Schofield and Fenner (2013) note a number of studies that identify empowerment, 'related to an increase in independence and capacity building, which resulted from participation in a strengths-focused practice' (p.1319) as an important benefit of creative activities. Secker et al.'s 2007 questionnaire-based outcome study, for instance, found statistically significant improvement on an empowerment measure 'comprising scales assessing self-worth, self-efficacy, mutual aid and positive outlook' (p.34).

In the small interview-based literature specific to crafting for health, participants also report increased self-efficacy, confidence, and capacity to take action. Reynolds (2000, p.11) noted that for participants (in this case women suffering from depression) 'needlecraft process and products provide self with evidence of own mastery/competence' as well as 'a visible record of lasting achievements'; similarly, Burt and Atkinson (2012, p.58), in their study of amateur quilting, described their participants' 'enhanced feelings of satisfaction, mastery and confidence'. Some authors of this literature identify sources of these feelings in the specifics of making itself: in Grace, Gandolfo and Candy's study of women at home with young children, for instance, the value of craft was 'strongly related to the process of "making" which involves setting themselves a challenge, gathering the necessary materials, learning the skills and process, and then utilizing their creativity to accomplish the goal they set' (2009, p.244).

The version of agency that appears in this literature is the intuitively plausible, naturalistic one; that is to say it presumes the unitary, separate, autonomous nature of personhood, with agency understood as an intrapersonal state or trait. Agency is seen as an ordinary capacity and only problematized to the extent that it can be impinged upon by, for instance, adversity, depression, or illness. This conception of personal autonomy reproduces neoliberal assumptions central to the academic and policy-making assemblage around wellbeing described in Chapter 2. Few questions are posed about the partial, illusory, social, or distributed nature of the power to act, and the limits to agency posed by embodiment and culture are often disregarded. No active characteristics are attributed to the material world. Intentionality is portrayed, furthermore, as directed single-mindedly towards consistent end points; little acknowledgement is made of how ostensibly focused volition in practice amounts to the 'agentic management of fortuity' (Bandura, 2001 p.11). Neither do these studies provide much account of the microgenesis and trajectories, in creative activities, of affects such as ambition, tenacity, or pride in accomplishment.

### *Creative agency as social*

In the field of creativity studies, there have been attempts to replace an intrapersonal, context-independent model of creative agency – the legacy of early modern philosophy and romanticism (see for example Watson, 2005) – with 'a systems view of creativity that recognizes a variety of interrelated forces operating at multiple levels' (Hennessy and Amabile, 2010, p. 569). Bourdieu's situated view of cultural production (1993) emphasizes that what is produced by cultural players is dependent on the rules of play and existing cultural products in a particular field; this 'presents itself to each agent as a space of possibles, that is as an ensemble of probable *constraints*, which are the condition and counterpart of a set of *possible uses*' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 235). Similarly Csikszentmihalyi (1988) considers the interaction of a person, a domain (symbolic aspects of culture), and the field (the social context) whose validation is required in order for a cultural product to be judged as creative. A number of ethnographic studies (see McIntyre, 2012) harness these systems models of creativity and conclude that contextual factors both limit and enable creativity; 'constraints do not necessarily harm

creative potential' but 'are built into the construct of creativity itself' (Sternberg and Kaufman 2010, p. 481). In spite of this focus on the contextual factors surrounding creative process and products, little attention has been paid in the field of creativity studies to the contribution of nonhuman actors or the material context. (For an exception, see Meany and Clark 2011, p. 225, who examine the 'confluence of human and nonhuman agency' in using a human-computer interface to generate comic dialogue.)

### *Creative agency as distributed*

As noted in previous chapters, a body of literature with roots in science and technology studies and the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari redresses this neglect of non-human agents (e.g. Latour, 2005; Law, 2008; Bennett, 2001, 2010; see Whatmore, 2006 for an overview). This literature contests a mode of seeing in which 'the world remains untroubled and untroubling, waiting impassively for us to make up our minds and making no difference' (Whatmore, 2003, p.92) and underlines the significance of materials and the physical environment as 'actants' (Latour, 1996) in their own right. In this view, agency is distributed across a broad cognitive-embodied-relational-material field. Countering the cultural tendency to portray matter as inert and passively acted upon by human agents, these writers portray a world of human and nonhuman entanglements and assemblages:

Thing-power materialism figures materiality as a protean flow of matter-energy and figures the thing as a relatively composed form of that flow. It hazards an account of materiality even though materiality is both too alien and too close for humans to see clearly. It seeks to promote acknowledgment, respect, and sometimes fear of the materiality of the thing and to articulate ways in which human being and thinghood overlap. It emphasizes those occasions in ordinary life when the us and the it slips into each other, for one moral of this materialist tale is that we are also nonhuman and that things too are vital players in the world. (Bennett, 2004, p.365)

This 'vital materialism' (Bennett, 2010, p.17) has been harnessed in the fields of anthropology and cultural geography to produce less human-centred accounts of how things variously come into being, enter into alliance with other things, metamorphose and disaggregate (see for instance Edensor, 2011; Ingold, 2004); in what follows, it serves in understanding 'thing-power' (Bennett, 2010, p.2) as inseparable from, rather than in opposition or supplemental to, human agency.

### 7.3. Collaborating with material partners

In the previous chapter I pointed to the role of ‘matter on the go’ in playful, experimental and chance-driven aspects of creative making. In the rest of this chapter, I consider how matter matters in intentional, ends-directed creative design and agency, using field notes to support the idea that human and material agencies are thoroughly entangled.

#### *Makers articulating material agency*

Participants’ ordinary-language descriptions frequently expressed a tacit, commonsense perception of materials as lively and characterful. Amongst many examples, one participant talks about a collection of fabric strips ‘making suggestions’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 08/04/14) about what she might do with them; another talks about how the crocheted blanket which she had given to her bedridden grandmother hundreds of miles away could ‘give her a hug for me’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/12/13); others describe rice paper as ‘giving’ in facilitating the emergence of beautiful marks (Interview, Faith, 15/04/14), and oil paint as ‘unforgiving’ in its heavy stickiness (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 01/04/14). As noted in the material on frustration, one of the key ways that participants got stuck was in failing to acknowledge the necessity of negotiating with materials as collaborators. As a result, perhaps partly of the everyday acknowledgement of active dimensions of materiality, but perhaps also as a result of the fact that successful facilitation in this context involved supporting successful collaborations between individuals and their materials, participants often spontaneously articulated the role of materials in the progress of their work. A participant talks, for instance, about ‘how she’s made several changes to the original plan she had for her mosaic on the basis of how the materials behaved’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 13/01/14); another tells me:

handling the materials and thinking about the approaches available forces her to recognize that combining materials of different thicknesses here will be a big problem . . . but when one door closes, lots of others open; she thinks about how she can build a pattern from lots of white tile fragments instead’. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 15/04/14)

Here a participant recognizes the degree to which her materials are co-designers of her work:

Abby lays out the fabric pieces that she dyed some months ago now. The project for which she produced them is stalled, probably because she has tried to arrive at certainties in her head and on paper rather than through practice and with her hands. The fabrics are a range of variously mysterious and iridescent colours—turquoises, indigo blue, moss green and gold. Set out in horizontal strips, they take on the appearance of a landscape. Abby says she’s amused that she prepared these all so carefully with a particular outcome in mind—the house picture that she was going to do—and that all of a sudden they’re making suggestions, as it were, about how they could make a completely different picture . . . She likes the way that the irregularities in colouring read as landscape textures, and sums this up concisely: ‘the fabrics tell their own stories, don’t they?’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/07/14)



*Figure 7.1. Abby's silk strips in the Hellan Crafts Group  
(Photo: Sarah Desmarais, 2014)*

Whilst observations in earlier chapters have testified to how often materials could manifest a frustratingly intransigent dedication to their own ways of doing things, on multiple other occasions materials were perceived as enabling. Participants commented appreciatively, for instance, on ‘effects that created themselves’ when painting dye onto silk, and the fact that ‘watercolour produces lovely effects all on its own’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 01/04/14). Paradoxically, the helpful qualities of materials often manifested themselves in the unplanned rather than predictable ways in which they behaved, since they achieved things on behalf of makers that the latter would have neither imagined nor accomplished through unilateral imposition of a design. Rather than removing creative practice from a realm of intentionality and purpose into one of ‘playing about’, however, these

accidental achievements often became the basis for new projects involving an active revision of plans:

She's changed her plans for the silk that she dyed as a background for the tree piece she was planning to do; she no longer wants to applique on top of this as some of the beautiful marbled patterning she achieved with her hand-dyeing will be obscured—she has the cloth with her, and gets it out to point out to me some of the lovely effects that have resulted—some of the marks read as little flowers or faces. She'd like perhaps, to add a minimal amount of hand-embroidery to these pieces to bring out these patterns. The heavier cloth that she'd dyed with the intention of appliquing it onto the silk she plans now to use for the new landscape applique project. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 01/04/14)

These observations illustrate that whilst makers often had a clear vision of what they intended to make, materials were constantly intervening, and in so doing, produced new sets of possibilities that were responded to with further decision making. In practice these aspects of the making process were so entwined that it makes no sense to describe them as discrete stages. Whilst choices were made with some conception of an end result in mind, the envisaged ends were being constantly modified in response to new states of affairs emerging from a flux of material and human activity in which human and non-human agency are impossible to disentangle.

### *Materials extending makers' agency*

Tools were an important part of this active assemblage of human and nonhuman forces. Most of the activities that were facilitated made use of craft-specific equipment—needles, rug hooks, embroidery frames, crochet hooks, glass cutters, palette knives, and a printing press, for example; these tools extended the agency that could be exercised by human actors, for instance in making it possible to pull a strip of one fabric through the weave of another, or to squeeze the fibres of a sheet of damp paper into fine ink-filled scratches on a Perspex plate. In some cases tools were personalized by modification, as with crochet hooks adapted for painful hands. In other cases they were produced from scratch by participants themselves. A collagraph printing plate, for instance, constructed from layered card with the addition of sandpaper and plant materials, and a drypoint plate made from engraved Perspex, were effectively highly personalized tools with which to impress paper with a design when inked up and rolled through a press.



*Figure 7.2. Printmaking with an etching press in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

A growing and interdisciplinary body of literature (for example Clark, 2001) argues that the conventional line drawn between tool user, tool, and environment is arbitrary, and that tools can usefully ‘be seen as continuous and active parts of the human cognitive architecture’ (Malafouris, 2008b). Simply holding a tool has been demonstrated to alter the functional architecture of the brain; for instance the cognitive mapping of near and far space is altered when holding a stick (Berti and Frassinetti, 2000, p.415). Consistent with this, my observations evidenced the striking effects of tool use on the capacity to imagine and to plan, as will be demonstrated below. Beyond this, any given crafts technology—the assemblage of skills connected with mosaic for instance—could become a tool for thinking or seeing. A new medium would become a lens through which bits of the visual world were reinterpreted in imagination, generating endless new possibilities, as when a participant tells me that ‘since she started doing mosaic, she’s become slightly obsessed; her mind keeps churning over how she’d translate such-and-such an image into mosaic’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 03/03/14).

### *Entanglement and enchantment*

If the notional boundaries between makers and tools were leaky, so too were those between tool and crafted artefact. Materials constantly shifted role. Paper, for instance, was at one moment a surface on which to print (and therefore part of the print produced) and, at another, a tool to wipe ink from a plate – an extension of the hand; and graphite molecules one second indisputably part of a pencil were, in the next, transformed in its application to the rough surface of paper to become part of a drawing. This kind of observation invites the development of a language

of ‘something/happening’ (Whatmore, 2006, p.600) rather than one of discrete objects. The blurry extensions and transformations of things in this context make the flow, transformation, and entanglement of material streams particularly perceptible, and this aspect of creative making—acknowledged by participants in the extracts above—may be one element of its potential for enlivenment. Bennett (2001, p.5), in arguing for an enchantment-inducing vital materialism, describes its affective dimensions thus:

The overall effect of enchantment is a mood of fullness, plenitude, or liveliness, a sense of having had one’s nerves or circulation or concentration powers tuned up or recharged—a shot in the arm, a fleeting return to childlike excitement about life.

This dynamic, recombinant muddle of actors and things, and its potential for enchantment and transformation, are obviously not specific to making practices; they reproduce on a small scale the more general muddle of everyday life, in which individuals are entangled with material and conceptual flows of shifting opportunity and constraint, and steer their way through them, simultaneously acting and being acted upon, transforming their interpersonal and material environments, and being transformed themselves, ‘in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.38). The groups I observed were environments in which the skilful navigation of these material and life currents could be practised without risk, and potentially re-enchanted.

#### **7.4. An anatomy of project-based making**

The skills I observed in use in the effective orchestration of projects added up to a kind of pragmatism or flexible and practical intelligence about how best to get things done. In the sections that follow I explore how crafting exercised important purposive modes of engagement such as practising, persisting, and reflecting; how making and designing involved a range of practical decision-making and problem-solving skills; and how participants used their design and making skills to both reproduce and break with tradition. Here too, observations contradict the idea of an inert and passive material world shaped and mastered through industry or the simple acquisition of skills.

### *Practising*

Some making, as described in the previous chapter, was carried out in a playful and haphazard, open-ended spirit. When participants came across techniques that led to pleasing results, however, they often wished to reproduce them, and this entailed the practice of whatever process had been stumbled upon. At other times, the acquisition of skills depended on practice from the start. Rug hooking, for instance, could be challenging to learn, and required some tenacity since at first loops of wool or cotton were hard to pull through the hessian base fabric, and easily got pulled out again if tension was applied from the reverse at the wrong moment (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 22/10/13). At these times, practice was often undertaken in order to acquire and become fluent in a new skill, rather than to produce something in particular.

It was typical for participants to rehearse two competing discourses about the value of practice in the realm of arts and crafts creativity, and for the two to struggle for ascendancy in the same pieces of talk, as here:

I give her a sketchbook, which she accepts although she's cynical about my assertion that I can teach her to draw, saying 'I've been through all that before'. However, when this conversation goes further, she tells me about a friend of hers who has assured her 'drawing is just practice; you just draw a little bit everyday and little by little, you get better'. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 09/12/13)

According to the 'lone genius' (Montuori and Purser, 1995) conception of creativity often endorsed by participants, no amount of practice could make good a lack of 'talent'. At the same time, as above, the door was open to the hope that the opposite was true. Facilitators had an important role in supporting this hope and presenting conceptions of creativity that opposed the 'inborn talent' one, as here:

Em looks at what Gayle is doing and is still doubtful about the idea that anyone can learn to do this—she compares it to singing, which she also believes she can't do. I say I wonder if it isn't more like driving, and that we don't expect people to be able to do that without some basic instruction and familiarity. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 01/04/14)

Facilitators also played a crucial role in supporting the tenacity that it took to 'try, try again'. The facilitator qualities that made a difference were summarized by one participant who thought I was 'a good teacher' because I was 'enthusiastic and

don't leave people to struggle on their own but stay with them; she attended a jewellery class at one point and felt they were all just left to manage without help after the first few sessions' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 07/04/14). Pragmatically, supporting tenacious practice also meant being an effective teacher of new practical skills. This involved at times acknowledging openly to participants that sometimes when it was hard to master a skill, this was because the instruction offered by the teacher (myself) had been confusing or inadequate.

It seemed likely that participants' experiences of practising in the context of early relationships had also had considerable impact both on levels of skill and on motivation to practise in the present. Participants were sometimes lacking basic making confidence of the kind generally acquired during primary school years through repeated practice, as on one occasion where a participant was stumped at what to do with pencil lines visible on felt cut-outs, although these could easily have been trimmed away or avoided by cutting just inside the lines (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/03/14). Practising is a relational activity in early childhood; parental support of autonomy has been shown to play a key role in acquisition of competencies (Joussement, Landry and Koestner, 2008). Such support has been conceptualized as 'scaffolding' (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976, p.90). Observations in these groups suggest that the development of skills was a social achievement here too. It required the presence of a supporter and witness for whom achievements mattered, and who could not only enable but respond to each small increase of competence in a helpful way—that is with interest and enthusiasm, but without pressure or criticism. Where the later development of fundamental practical skills is concerned, my observations are consistent with the idea that scaffolding continues to be relevant in adulthood (Bickhard, 2013); its importance undermines an individual agent-based view of creative and manual competence. Along these lines, Dickie, Cutchin and Humphry (2006, p.91) argue against viewing occupation as a type of 'self-action', and suggest that 'the primary focus is placed on the transaction—the active relation—that integrates person and situation'. The relationship of practice and habit to performative dimensions of wellbeing will be examined in Chapter 8.

Alongside the support to persevere offered by facilitators, the Hellan group offered distinctive opportunities for the development of tenacity as a consequence of collective projects directed towards sales or exhibition, sometimes requiring large-scale production of, for instance, cards, bunting, or rug-hooked hessian for a banner. Such projects were a pretext for repetitive practice, provided motivation in terms of contribution to the group as a collective, and perhaps reduced the loss of face connected to being a beginner at something, by severing the connection to a personal agenda. One participant, for instance, 'has done loads of bunting and says how much it has helped to do something repetitive like this again and again' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 28/05/13); in the course of her production on behalf of the group she became confident enough with a sewing machine to use it for her own projects and with great pride produced some 'Happy Birthday' bunting for her daughter (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/06/13).

Whilst practising a new skill was at times frustrating, at others it could have a beneficial impact on mood. It was well suited to answering the need expressed by a participant in a low mood who said 'I want something to put my mind into' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 13/11/12) and this was particularly the situation, described in relation to flow experiences by Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.52), when 'the challenges are just balanced with the person's capacity to act'. Practising was also satisfyingly purposive: as Sennett (2008, p.175) suggests 'doing something over and over is stimulating when organized as looking ahead'.



*Figure 7.3. Rug hooking in the Pendon Crafts Group  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2013)*

Whilst with increasing practice, competencies become tacit, continuous micro-reactions to contingency remain a feature of manual skill, even where they occur below conscious awareness. Ingold (2011, p.61), for instance, examining the phenomenology of craftsmanship, notes:

The skilled handling of tools is anything but automatic, but is rather rhythmically responsive to ever-changing environmental conditions . . . In this responsiveness there lies a form of awareness that does not so much retreat as grow in intensity with the fluency of action. This is not the awareness of a mind that holds itself aloof from the messy, hands-on business of work. It is rather immanent in practical, perceptual activity, reaching out into its surroundings along multiple pathways of sensory participation.

These observations suggest that many of the perceived mood benefits of crafts activities may be less to do with relaxation or the analgesic qualities of repetition, and more to do with an optimal, taut, and satisfying engagement with a world that constantly proffers tiny challenges, often at a subliminal level. Picturing creative action in this way allows one to understand agency as something that often goes on tacitly, at the level of Giddens' 'practical consciousness' (1984). As Jonsson and Persson (2006) suggest in an analysis of flow theory, however, a balance is required between activities that are challenging and those that are well within existing competencies; crafts creativity is a field in which the level of challenge relative to capacity can potentially be adjusted with ease.

### *Reflecting*

The tenacious practice described above would have been of less consequence without the capacity to reflect on process and results. Such reflection was the means by which participants' activities became vehicles for learning, and it was consistently encouraged by facilitators. Participants demonstrated a reflective capacity most often in relation to some dissatisfaction with how work was progressing, and it seems likely that when work was proceeding without difficulty, their attention was often directed to other things like conversation.



*Figure 7.4. Reflecting on work in progress in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

Sometimes the emergence of a capacity for critical reflection represented a substantial shift from habitual attitudes of hopelessness, passivity, and indifference. One participant, for example, after insisting week after week that he planned to throw away his work, considered for the first time what he might change about it instead. In the moment described, the work becomes subject to his perceived agency, rather than out of his control:

‘I’ve run out of blue tiles—I can’t stop that blue there or the picture won’t make sense. I should have done this blue a bit differently so that it reads as a cloud’, etc. He goes through a moment of ‘I should just throw it away, I’m fed up with it’, followed by ‘I want to take these tiles off and redo that bit’—Angie next to him says ‘don’t you dare! It’s fine—just keep going’—but I see something very positive in his engaging his critical faculties to see what needs to change, rather than saying it’s pointless. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 03/03/14)

The following extracts from field notes are further evidence of how reflection, arising from the wish that things might be otherwise, could give rise to constructive critical assessment that often led to reworking or redesign:

She’s executed [a rug-hooked hanging] with tremendous care, the loops very densely packed. When I comment on the precision of the execution, she comments that she feels the loops are a bit too densely filled in—next time, she’ll do them a bit looser. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/06/13)

Gayle continues to work on her rug-hooked houses picture. She has decided that the attempt to reproduce the filigree aeriels on the rooftops in this medium isn’t going to work, and tells me she’s decided she’s going to replace them with chimney pots and perhaps smoke coming out of them. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/06/13)

Amanda has also brought something to show me—a photo of the hands mosaic that she had told me about previously . . . She expresses slight regret that she didn’t

leave the two holes already in the slate as a means of hanging the piece. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 09/07/13)

She talks about her design ideas—she wants to do tulips in a vase—she’s traced some tulips from something that looks like a Clarice Cliff design, but having tried them within the template shape, she sees they are the wrong proportions—too vertical for this format. She also has a photograph of tulips in a vase—this works better in the space, although she doesn’t like the vase—she thinks she’ll replace it, using a vase she owns as a motif. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 16/07/13)

Em talks about how often she had to rework the background area; it started off geometric, then she replaced this pattern with a repeated floral motif, then found this was too busy and undid it to replace it again with her geometric stripes, which she redid on several occasions in order to eradicate unwanted effects that came about through the placement of the colours. What comes across is her satisfaction that her tenacity and perseverance led to this pleasing result—she can see the inevitability and the usefulness of the repeated trying and trying again. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 03/09/13)

I see her work a bit of the background [of a rug-hooked textile piece] and then pull it out and start again, because she’s decided she’d like the slightly finer texture produced by using thinner fabric strips. This is without frustration. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 25/11/13)

The unexpected, unwelcome and not-quite-right thus played a crucial role in the development of making and design skills, painting a more complex picture of hobby crafts skills acquisition than the banal one of getting better at something simply by doing it mindlessly again and again.

Spontaneous collaborative reflection between peers was also a feature of the groups, and can be understood as a way that the reflection supported by facilitators became internalized by participants and then circulated as a property of the collective. It was common for participants to ask everyone in the room for thoughts on work in progress, leading to whole-group deliberation and assessment, as when ‘she and all of us are reflective about the difference it makes to view the piece from a distance and how the sunflower sings out against the more sober background’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 03/09/13). For participants who were often socially isolated, or suffering from what Dickie, Cutchin and Humphry (2006, p.86) describe as ‘occupational deprivation’, the groups thus provided a positive experience of having one’s efforts, and by extension oneself, reflected upon or mirrored constructively and respectfully. Reflection on work in progress tended to institute itself naturally as part of a group

culture, and its formalization might have been resisted—one participant told me she had disliked use of a reflective diary encouraged in another AFHC group, as it made her feel as if she was at school (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 15/10/13).

### *Imagining*

Whilst one or two members of both groups consistently worked from cross stitch or tapestry kits, there was constant opportunity to use imagination in developing personal projects. Commonsense understandings of creativity often depict imagination in an ordinary role (Gaut, 2003). I place it here in this microgenetic account, conversely, in order to emphasize that in my observations, an imaginative capacity did not arise *ex nihilo* but *ex materia*—out of or in tandem with reflective manual practice. Some participants were initially resistant to developing their own designs because of a fixed belief that they were not creative, or that they had no design aptitude; they endorsed the assumption that imagination was necessarily a precursor to creative making, and that coming up with an idea must come before engaging with the materials themselves. As noted previously, participants often came unstuck when they spent a lot of time manipulating ideas in their heads without manipulating materials with their hands. On some occasions, simply suggesting that design skills could be taught was enough to lead to some imaginative thinking, as when I ask someone if she'd like me to help her with some drawing and design skills, and 'she looks doubtful, although expressing some interest, starting to muse, "if I could make my own designs, I'd base them on flowers and leaves, that's always what I've liked best"' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 28/05/13). More often, however, imagination was stimulated by concrete manual engagement. This participant, for example, is experimenting with and enjoying a new rug-hooking technique, 'proddy', and as she handles the materials and sees what she can do with them, her imagination goes into overdrive:

For a couple of minutes Abby becomes fascinated by playing with the effect of moving different coloured sample flower centres between prodded flowers and noting the startling effects this has on the colour relationships and overall effect. She talks about her daughter's wedding which is planned for next year, and a couple of times says with an intense absorption and excitement, 'you've got me thinking now', or 'this is making me think'—she and her daughter are crafting most of the things for the wedding (they have already made all the invites for the wedding), and her daughter would like a silk bouquet rather than a fresh flower

one. She wonders about using the proddy techniques to make the bouquet out of a variety of white and cream silks, nets, and iridescent fabrics (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/09/13).

A sense of possibility connected with the potentials of materials was often fostered collectively. In connection with proddy, for instance, on one occasion when everyone is engaged in their work, 'most people seem to be thinking out loud about the uses to which they could put the technique' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 03/09/13).

As noted above, a number of participants reported seeing their visual surroundings afresh as potential source material for creative projects. This tended to happen as a response to acquiring some confidence in handling a medium. For example, one participant, in spite of initial misgivings, had produced a large and ambitious rug-hooked landscape. Possessing the practical knowledge that allowed her to represent her visual experience in this medium transformed the way she saw her immediate surroundings, which she now viewed as potential source material for further pieces of work:

I live right by [the green], and there's a whole swathe of buttercups completely round it, and I looked at it the other day and I thought, I need to take a photograph of that, because that would make a nice picture. And I'd never thought like that before'. (Interview, Joni, Hellan Crafts Group, 20/05/14)

Imagination, as the capacity to think the previously unthought, was provoked here by growing familiarity with a body of practical knowledge.

### *Planning*

Imaginings that originated in manual engagement with a medium often developed quite naturally into firmer plans, entailing (unlike the free play of imagination) numerous provisional commitments and considerable self-organization. As with imagining, planning was greatly helped by engaging with materials from the outset. When planning stayed in the abstract it could be discouraging, as where one participant is 'thinking very imaginatively and creatively about using a combination of embroidery, applique and silk painting techniques, but as lots of these are still unfamiliar to her, it's a very ambitious and daunting project' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 23/02/13); later on, when the picture concerned has

hardly progressed because she is resisting the need to get stuck in, she reports 'she feels a bit discouraged by all the planning involved' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/10/13). Observations highlight that planning was more than simply thinking ahead; it required the practical application of discipline-specific skills, such as those involved in transferring or enlarging a motif. Here, for instance, a participant is using tracing skills that she has just been taught, and which allow her to manipulate the elements of, and thus plan, her composition:

Abby is surrounded by her photographic images and is tracing. I go and have a look and she shows me how she's going about planning her picture. She's taken elements—rocks, foreground, lighthouse—from a number of photo and illustration sources. She has traced these, and is wondering about the relative sizes of the elements. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 08/04/14)

Other domain-specific skills involved in planning and design were sampling (making small exemplars in order to try something out), swatching (collecting and mounting colour samples to see how they work together) and sketching (often simply thumbnail scribbles to get a sense of something). Although visual planning strategies like these were easily taught, they were often initially unfamiliar to group members; before they were equipped with them, makers assumed that they lacked a nebulous something described as 'talent', and that this lack prevented them from designing independently.

Where planning was effective, it harnessed practical strategies and took account of the characteristics of materials. Beyond this, it had a quality of flexibility, and acknowledged that the unpredictable evolution of the work would dictate changes to the initial blueprint. Participants were forced to confront the unworkability of conventional 'construction kit' notions of making, already noted, in which a set of materials is put together according to a blueprint. When they stopped trying to make their projects conform to this model, they were able to access a state of 'corporial anticipation' described by Sennett (2008, p.175) as 'one step ahead of the material', so that a workable plan was provisional in the extreme, and easily amended later on, as where a participant wonders how to continue with her textile piece:

She'd originally conceived it as to be incorporated in a patchwork, but now she's concerned that the join between the cross-stitched textile and unstitched fabric will look clumsy—instead she's thinking of making a cross-stitched border with shell motifs, and thinks she'll design her own. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 08/04/14)

A preliminary, cerebral, and abstract conception of planning fails to acknowledge the degree to which it required the pragmatic organization of self and materials. It was commonplace for participants to take home what they needed to continue a project between sessions. For example, one participant 'asks me for a Perspex plate the size of [a completed print] to take away—he wants to work on this at home and to produce a companion piece' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 26/06/14); another 'borrows the cotton and some extra material, saying it would be nice to do this in the evenings since the weather is bad' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 28/10/13), and a third, convalescing from an illness, 'has asked for the materials to be dropped off at her house so she can continue planning the project' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 30/07/13). Participants also acquired materials from elsewhere between sessions, for instance 'a sturdy metal biscuit tin, the right dimensions to store and transport her prints—she says "I saw that tin and thought: that's exactly what I need to take to the crafts group to keep my prints in"' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 09/12/13). In looking ahead, participants expressed a hopeful and active commitment to the future life of their projects, highlighting important affective dimensions of creative planning. The facilitator of the Hellan group noted that such preparation potentially countered preoccupation with current difficulties and identification with illness:

There's a great sense that people want to keep giving to the group – 'oh, I've got this at home, can I bring it in?'—I'm getting bombarded with things—'oh, I'll take that for the group', or 'I'll do this for the group'. We're also having a stall, but that, to me, is again that step of responsibility and community, it's organization, it's getting people to think beyond what might be wrong with them into . . . I can see people are taking steps forward a lot, big time. (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13)

Participants also flagged up the helpful emotional consequences of having a making plan. Creative intentions produced hopefulness in circumstances that seemed otherwise bleak. One participant, for instance, described to me at length the hoarding that made it impossible to do any creative work at home, and even (an apt metaphor) to access the fireplace in order to light a fire. In the same piece

of talk, however, 'she does mention that she'd like to get herself a small etching press, and to sell the mangle that she's been using to print with; and she asks me the name of the washable oil-based ink we've been using' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 02/06/14). Another participant describes how an empty bank holiday was transformed because 'she could look forward to the group and was actively planning what she would be doing during the two hours—a weaving with pieces of driftwood. Her preparation included going to the beach and collecting her materials' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 07/05/13). In these cases the plan was a weave or drift of thinking that provided some connection to a valued future.

### *Making decisions*

Translating planning into action involved a continuous process of selection from a range of technical, functional and aesthetic possibilities. Much of this no doubt took place either outside of focused conscious awareness of participants, or without verbalization; research identifies 'an intuitive mode in which judgments and decisions are made automatically and rapidly', underpinning more conscious and deliberative judgments (Kahneman, 2003, p.697), and questions the extent to which prior intentions have causal effects (Wegner, 2002). Creative decisions were often nonetheless the subject of discussion, whether with facilitators, between peers or as 'thinking aloud'. The following are typical examples from my field notes:

She ponders for a couple of minutes about whether she wants to make a big or small wreath—the former is what attracts her, but the smaller one will be less demanding. She decides to follow her enthusiasm and go for the big one. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/09/13)

Nadine is about to grout her [mosaic], and we think together about the appropriate colour of the grout. She makes use of her recent experience of grouting to make a reasoned decision about this. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 24/02/14)

She's used Faye's hand-dyed wool for [leaves], and the fabric is so uncrushable and the colour so tonic that she's considering replacing some of her other leaves that were done with fleece rather than wool. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/03/14)

Difficulty with decision making is one of the diagnostic criteria for depressive disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), and was reported by a number of participants in both groups. Consistent with this, design and making

decisions were often not straightforward, as for one participant who tells me dispiritedly that ‘there’s too much choice when she looks at all these lovely ideas’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/06/13). Participants at times found it easy to retreat to a position of passive submission to facilitator expertise:

Alice has moved on with her rug hooking. The blue is expanding around the roses, although she seems uncertain if she likes it—I recall her seeming to defer to Faye’s suggestion about introducing the blue. I ask her about her plans for the border. She defers here again to Faye’s expertise—‘I’m waiting for her to tell me what to do’. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 09/07/13)

When decision making was wobbly, it required some scaffolding in order to prevent its collapse:

I have a long chat with Gayle about the image she’s composing on the basis of an image traced from an enlarged photocopy. She’s decided to enlarge the horizontal strip that represents the sandy beach, and wants to know if this will work. She’s also unsure about how to represent a quayside on which a house stands, and we think about this together. She’s very thoughtful about how the whole thing will read, but needs some support—it’s clearly quite a new task to make these kinds of decisions about design. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 25/03/14)

Support often consisted of encouraging participants to trust their own preferences and intuitions, emphasizing that it was fine to try something out and that there were no dire consequences if the attempt didn’t work, and teaching pragmatic, design-specific strategies to aid decision making:

Alice has finished the rose and leaf motifs of her rug-hooked cushion cover and is now trying to decide what colour she should use for the background. Throughout the making, she’s been thinking about creams and beiges for this. Now Faye is showing her how she can place some fabric in the gaps and look from a distance to get a sense of what the effect will be, and it seems that if she uses a pale colour for the background, her pale roses will disappear into it. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/06/13)

As here, where a solution had to be found to the problem of the disappearing roses, decision making was not always necessitated simply by a plethora of potential, equally satisfactory, directions in which to take the work. As with many other aspects of the creative process, it was often driven by imperfections and minor (or major) dissatisfaction. Agency, in this context, was about relating productively to disruption; as Richards (1996, p.101) suggests,

we should pay as much attention to the question of how life 'flows'—of how social agents recover from mistakes and random disturbances and lurch onwards without their whole performance grinding to a halt—as to the notion of cultural construction.

At its most benign, problem solving was experienced as a stimulating challenge, as for a participant who 'says she really enjoys the "cutting and sticking" phase [of mosaic]—it's like the pleasure of solving a puzzle' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 03/03/14). At other times, problems, like those described in Chapter 5 under the heading of frustration, were thorny. The more participants accumulated successful experiences of problem resolution, however, the more robustly they approached new challenges, the more they were able to rely on accumulated practical wisdom, and the more they anticipated challenges before they became critical; for instance, a participant 'thinks ahead, wondering how easy the glued fabric is to remove from the paper template, and what happens if you [accidentally] sew the paper in with the fabric' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/10/13).

Participants could be seen to be growing in confidence about their own technical solutions and aesthetic judgments, as where a participant starts to appropriate photographic source material to her own ends instead of feeling she has to copy it faithfully: she comments 'I don't like that bit of colour there—I'm going to change that', and then 'starts to go through her own photos and notices a taste for cool colours—"I can see now why I don't like that red—it's just not me"' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/12/12). Such talk actively challenged the idea that such choices should be arbitrated by 'experts', and accomplished a subtle redistribution of creative agency. As participants became more assured, they were readier both to ask for the thoughts of their peers and to contribute their opinions in discussions with them, so that facilitators were not positioned as the only experts in the room. For example, a participant 'asks for feedback from the group about whether her houses piece should have a black border, and if so, how thick—there's a consensus that one row of black will work well' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 05/11/13); another participant muses to her neighbour, as if thinking aloud to herself: 'That green's a bit watery, isn't it, and that green and blue together clashes a bit' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 14/04/14). In these interactions, creative

practice became democratized through forms of talk, encouraged by facilitators, in which group members started to position themselves as competent judges, and to reduce the power differential created by the presumed specialist expertise or creative giftedness of facilitators.



*Figure 7.5. Using white grout for a white sail in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

### *Reproducing and reinventing*

These observations highlight the degree to which creative agency was discursive and negotiated achievement. Decision making took place not only in interaction with materials but also in a relational context that included norms of taste, beauty and standards of production that were both receptively internalized through cultural membership and actively reproduced within the groups. Even where decision making took place ostensibly autonomously, it had as its inevitable background an imaginary audience (Baldwin, 1997) of others, an actual audience of group members, and a specific cultural 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1993). This being so, it is interesting to interrogate field notes for evidence of the extent to which tastes and creative ambitions were shaped by social and commercial pressures, and whether participants had leeway to contest or extend the conventional vocabularies of amateur crafts practice.

Crafting at its least adventurous in these groups took the form of work from kits purchased from crafts shops or online; particularly in the Hellan group there were a few members who returned frequently to kit-based making unless strongly encouraged to try something else. The group's facilitator also used a kit-like

approach on occasion (providing prefabricated elements for construction of a specific item that she had designed), although this was usually in the service of making goods for sale, or increasing creative confidence through strategic limitations. Most members of both groups, when encouraged, did break away from kits and started to design their own projects, and this in itself, arguably, entailed the rejection of some externally imposed prescriptions.

Once participants had stepped out of the at least moderately circumscribed world of the kit, however, it could potentially be argued, alongside Greenhalgh (1997, p.37) that amateur crafting offered them ‘a rarefied form of household husbandry’ and an almost equally constraining set of restrictions. Craft, particularly in the Hellan group, was often performed according to convention; that is to say that if it was Christmas, miniature knitted stockings, holly-decked cards and poinsettia wreaths would be constructed, and if it was Valentines Day, then participants would produce cards with hearts. Potentially, the organization of activities around traditional and commercial festivals committed its members to a set of normative enrolments promoting the ostensibly self-evident merits of, for instance, Christmas, romantic love, motherhood and shopping. It would be inaccurate, however, to suggest that these prescriptions were always passively accepted. The group provided a space in which these traditional activities could be questioned and reinvented as well as reproduced. These two participants, for instance, had both left abusive marriages:

Joni and Em are card making too, albeit without much vigour—Joni jokes to Faith, ‘Let’s go and see what’s going on in the card factory’—referring to the kitchen where the embossing and dye-cutting machine is out on a counter. Joni jokes to me across the table in a grim tone, ‘I don’t know why we’re doing this really—neither me nor Em is fond of Valentine’s Day!’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/02/14)

Similarly, although Christmas necessitated the energetic production of festive cards and decorations, the fact that members of both groups sometimes contested or ignored normative social practices around the festival can be seen as a challenge to the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2004). Members were able to articulate considerable ambivalence about the festive season (e.g. Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/12/12; Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 06/01/14) in

spite of pressures to conform, and it seems likely that for some, this was the only place they could do so. Out of curiosity, I resisted the temptation to organize the activities of the Pendon group around seasonal celebrations, and waited to see if anyone would suggest this. It was notable that over a year, not one person (apart from my volunteer colleague) suggested making anything related to Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day or Easter. Because projects were not set and my secure funding meant there was no pressure to produce goods to sell, members seemed to be able to ignore pressures to mark these occasions, or to make certain kinds of object. It was also evident that they were not dependent on these familiar cultural props to provide a rationale for their work. The organization of projects around personal and alternative cultural meanings will be explored in Chapter 8.

Beyond noting that participants questioned convention in commenting on or eschewing traditional vehicles for amateur crafts production, it is necessary to challenge the norms that construct 'kitsch' and hobby crafts as poor relations of the fine arts in the first place. The broad historical determinants of this relation were outlined in Chapter 2. As Milling and McCabe (n.d., p.3) note, 'amateur arts are frequently neglected or denigrated by the value structures of formal cultural provision'. With few exceptions, hobby crafting has been relegated within academic discourse 'to the level of all that is bad in art, design and craft' (Turney, 2004, p.268), only recently becoming a subject of academic interest; and in popular culture, amateur making continues to be mocked as 'kitsch', 'homely' and 'old-fashioned, requiring little skill or design flair' (p.267). The lack of fondness I sometimes experienced for kit-based crafts can easily be understood as my own unreflective performance of taste as a socially differential practice, as analysed by Bourdieu (1979). Binkley (2000), similarly challenging an essentialist account of taste and artistic quality, points to the valuable work done by 'kitsch' as 'a general corrective to a general modern problem, that of existential and personal disembeddedness, loss of assurance in the continuity of life and one's place in the world' (p.149). Harriman (2007) signals the way that contemporary crafts professionals have flagged up their conceptual and intellectual allegiances with the fine arts in order to distinguish themselves from amateur makers: 'This intellectualization of fine craft goes hand-in-hand with the denigration of hobby

craft. Thus the tacit hierarchy between Art and Craft is transferred to divisions within Craft and pervades the world of makers' (p.476). Harriman identifies the construction of these hierarchies with the cultural valorization of 'appropriative' individualism, masculinity, professionalism and the intellectual over 'distributive' collectivity, femininity, domesticity and corporeality. If the cultural and historical construction of these differences is ignored, she argues,

we will continue to impose our vision of a universal crafts ontology on makers who exist in distinctly different socio-cultural and economic realities—thus taking away the Other's agency to express their own experience and make their own reality... and we will blind ourselves to the potential of seeing new modes of creativity. (p.483)

The makers that feature in her ethnography, as well as in my study, persisted in practising chosen forms of hobby crafts in spite of their expressed awareness of 'hobby craft as a belittled practice' (p.476) and can thus be argued to be contesting norms as much as complying with them, even when making from kits. Parker (1984, p.11), similarly, points to the paradoxical nature of domestic arts that, 'employed to circulate femininity in women . . . also enabled them to negotiate the constraints of femininity'.

Potentially, the groups I worked with offered simultaneous opportunities for adherence to tradition and for 'quiet activism' (Hackney, 2013). Participants could choose to challenge or comply with a variety of hegemonies, concerning, for example taste; repetitive production; the limited affordances of the market; the commodification of entertainment; constructions of mental health and social acceptability; and cultural beliefs about creativity and design competence as elite or innate skills. The make-up of the Pendon group, furthermore, challenges a clear-cut distinction between amateur and professional creativity. Three long-term members of this group, as well as some short-term visitors, had received art school training and were considering renewing their professional relationship to the arts, and their skills and experience formed part of the creative capital of the group. In addition, as Milling and McCabe (n.d., p.5) point out, 'amateur participation in creative cultural and artistic activity is the facilitating precursor to the acquisition of aesthetic knowledge, skills and activity out of which all professional practice emerges and to which it must relate'.

In the groups, participants expressed their creative agency through both reproductive and innovative forms of craft activity. Numerous definitions of creativity rely on conceptions of novelty and usefulness, whether objectively ascertained or constructed through retrospective consensus (see Kaufman and Baer, 2012 for a summary), thus reinforcing a notional divide between the existing materials of culture and those that arise out of them. Observations highlight, however, that the distinction between imitation and originality is not clear-cut. Breaking the mould required that there be a mould in the first place, and this broken mould was rarely discarded but instead harnessed in the production of more distinctively personal work.

Participants' talk reflected the indeterminate position of the crafts in relation to cultural tradition and innovation. Crafts creativity was often depicted as traditional, vernacular, domestic, or recreational, and the low value of amateur and vernacular making seemed rehearsed at times in participants' unwillingness to price their goods in a way that reflected the work that had gone into them, or that even reflected the market value of, say, a greetings card (e.g. Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 26/11/13). The aim of producing cards that looked as much like commercial, factory produced ones as possible implicitly devalued the quirky, idiosyncratic, opportunistic, playful eccentricity of hand making. At the same time, however, participants noted the connection and blurry borders between crafts and the fine arts. When working on their own projects, for example, they would find inspiration in images of work by painters or textile artists, and identify with practices that were professional, expressive, and innovative (e.g. Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 03/06/14).

Perhaps because of these indeterminate boundaries as well as, for some, a lack of knowledge about how professional artists and designers work in practice, there was often some confusion around the status and legitimacy of copying. Some participants were excited by the possibility of making copies of things they might otherwise have bought: 'You see things in shops now and you think, I could be doing that, you know' (Interview, Gayle, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/07/14), and here, feelings of agency were clearly connected to ownership of the skills for

reproduction, rather than independent design. Others had absorbed, probably from childhood or previous art education, a strong prohibition against using ideas not their own. One participant says apologetically, for example, that ‘she knows she mustn’t copy’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/06/13); and a few participants describe using a light box or paper for tracing as ‘cheating’ or ‘not really drawing’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 01/04/14; Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 12/05/14). This inhibition concerning reproduction was unhelpful and unrealistic, since almost all creative work (with the possible exception of outsider art) uses or builds on the existing canon, and design, making, and representational skills are almost always acquired through imitation of existing models. Participants were offered encouragement to see that paradoxically, a style of work or a personal ‘handwriting’ identifiably their own could only develop through profligate borrowing and stealing, and that student and professional artists, makers and designers also proceed in this way, often making extensive use of tools like Photoshop. The same idea is expressed in a quotation attributed to Picasso: ‘I begin with an idea and then it becomes something else. After all, what is a painter? He is a collector who gets what he likes in others by painting them himself. This is how I begin and then it becomes something else’ (Livermore, 1988, p.154).

The Hellan group facilitator and I both encouraged participants to acquire and use imagery from a variety of sources, including their own and published photographs and reproductions of fine and decorative arts, and we also taught drawing skills alongside tracing and enlarging as simple tools for manipulating imagery. Observations show that such borrowings consistently took on an independent life under new management, as in the following typical examples:

Gayle is using an image of houses from a greetings card as inspiration for her rug hooking, but is also starting to break away from it, replacing some of the colours with others that she prefers. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/03/13)

Abby last night found an image online of a tree she liked that she printed out and will modify—by elongating the trunk; then she can use it as a template for her embroidery. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 16/07/13)

Nadine finds an image in my mosaic book, which she partially uses, although in the end substantially modifying it. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 06/01/14)

Innovation was just as dependent on convention when it was a straightforward or irritated repudiation of it, or when it was a surprising composite of different media and vocabularies:

Today Eric sits with his mosaic in front of him without working on it, and I assume he's completely stalled, so I'm surprised and pleased when he tells me towards the end of the session that he has a new idea for it—he doesn't want to complete the background in mosaic but in oil paint, which will give him more freedom. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 02/06/14)

The development of new material out of old was thus always a process of appropriation, excision, rearrangement and step-by-step metamorphosis. Where innovation or inspiration occurred, it emerged out of messy confluences of the familiar, the fortuitous and the frustrating, in processes quite inconsistent with a model of creation *ex nihilo*. What was observed fits, rather, with a creative agency in which 'what we do when we attempt to make the world is to "tune in" to processes already in motion' (Richards, 1996, p.105) – a subtle achievement but one—returning to the starting point for this anatomy of project-based making—that became easier, in these groups, with practice.

## **7.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has continued the investigation of creative making as a situated matter-maker partnership with a temporal architecture. The unit of analysis was extended from the episodes of experiment and exploration described in Chapter 6 to the notional creative project, stretching from the formulation of an 'intention to make' to a made object rooted in this intention. The unit of the project, as a projection of aspiration into a desired material future, provided a useful vehicle for investigating the role of agency in making in a crafts for health context. Section 7.2 noted limitations of the naturalistic, intrapersonal conception of agency implicit in most arts for health literature, and suggested the usefulness of more transactional accounts of creative agency, including those that describe it as dependent on 'the effects of a special kind of hybridization in which human brains enter into an increasingly potent cascade of genuinely symbiotic relationships with knowledge-rich artifacts and technologies' (Clark, 2001, p.2). Section 7.3 captured

participants' perceptions of the very active role that materials played in the creation of their work, and emphasized that this entanglement with materials extended or constituted as much as thwarted the powers of makers; agency was precisely the capacity to skillfully intervene in a dance in which the energies of matter and makers amplified one another, rather than cancelled one another out. The leakiness of boundaries between tool users, tools, and the 'inert' matter shaped by them was drawn out, as well as the potential for enchantment in this world of hybrid forms. Section 7.4 sketched an anatomy of project-based making, using observations to evidence the roles of practising, reflecting, imagining, planning, decision making, reproduction, and reinvention in creative deliberation. The relationships between these activities were portrayed as reiterative, transactional, and looping rather than linear; field notes were used to emphasize, for instance, that imaginings and plans arose out of manual engagement rather than *ex nihilo* or simply as the products of cogitation. Relational aspects of the groups were described as key to the experiences of agency that materialized.

Chapter 8 will describe these experiences of agency and other perceived benefits of crafting for health from the perspective of participants. It will, nonetheless, complicate a straightforward emic account by considering the performativity of these understandings, and the role of the crafted object as a locus for them.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### AFFECTIVE PRACTICES: PERFORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF AGENCY AND CONNECTION IN CREATIVE MAKING

#### 8.1. Introduction

In chapters so far, I have followed Sennett's recommendation (2008, p.7) in treating 'cloth, circuit boards or baked fish as objects worthy of regard in themselves', not least because such artefacts are constitutive of human being and doing, rather than simply the residue of pre-existing cultural norms, technologies, and practices (see Malafouris, 2008b). The talk I have reported has mostly been related to making processes themselves. This approach has allowed action and matter to speak at times louder than words, and has allowed meanings in excess of those most immediately intended by participants to emerge from informal speech (without any implication that such meanings were disavowed, repressed, or in need of interpretation—see Bondi, 2005). The making eventscape I observed, however, included spontaneous talk, both direct and indirect, about makers' understandings of the connections between crafts creativity and positive states of mind. Such talk also occurred in interviews carried out with participants. It would be possible to treat such talk, as in much other research in arts for health, as evidence concerning the intrinsic merits of creative making. To present this material thus would be to rely on what has been described as the 'representationalist assumption' (Price, et al., 2013, p.16) 'that language has a single core function, namely, to "represent how things are"' (Price, 2011, p.305).

Representational underpinnings are self-evident in positivist epistemologies based on a 'correspondence' theory of truth but are also necessary, at the other end of the scale, in forms of social constructionism that assert that we have nothing but culturally contingent and arbitrary representations through which to relate to an inaccessible real (see Hacking, 1983; Price et al., 2013). The latter position is sometimes accused of an unproductive idealism (Barad, 2003), and reproduces a Cartesian split between subject and object, mind and matter, and culture and nature. A non-representational (Thrift, 2008) or agentic realist (Barad, 2003)

approach counters by emphasizing the inseparability of mind and matter and their mutual co-production. The real here is something in which agents of all kinds are steeped and into which they seep through every pore; it is not obscured by a veil of representations with dubious purchase on their referents. Representations participate in this flux, producing effects, rather than standing apart as signs that correspond indirectly to notional things-in-themselves:

Boundary-making practices, that is, discursive practices, are fully implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity through which phenomena come to matter. In other words, materiality is discursive (i.e., material phenomena are inseparable from the apparatuses of bodily production: matter emerges out of and includes as part of its being the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries), just as discursive practices are always already material (i.e., they are ongoing material (re)configurings of the world). (Barad, 2003, p.822)

Consistent with this much more performative and less representational ‘onto-epistemology’ (op cit, p.829), I will here treat participants’ commentaries as just as constitutive of the practices and impacts of crafting for health as descriptive of them. Much literature about crafts for health sees crafting as productive of good feelings, and participants’ retrospective assessments (often the main source of data) are understood as descriptive of and evidence for the source of these feelings in the essential characteristics of particular practices. A more performative account might elucidate, instead, a complex world of intentions, fortuity, and materiality, tied up in distinctive ways with talk that enacts states of agency and connection; such talk is productive of varieties of wellbeing rather than merely descriptive of them.

As Esterhammer (2001, pp.xi) notes, the concept of performativity ‘is notoriously resistant to clear explication’, not least because it is used to do a variety of things in a range of contexts. The understanding of performativity discussed here has roots in the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1975) concerning speech acts, or utterances that produce effects, not only in terms of persuasion or direction, but enactively. Understandings of how utterances, and more broadly discourse, produce ‘the subject-positions of speaker and hearer, the establishment of their relationships to one another and to the external world’ (Esterhammer, 2001, p.xii) have been further developed in ways variously understood as epistemic (Foucault,

1970), transactional (Bruner, 1986), discursive (Harré and Gillett, 1994), narrative (Bruner, 1991), and performative: Butler, for instance, examines how gender is 'performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its result' (1990, p.25); and Moss and Dyck (2002) analyse the way identity in chronic illness is stabilized through iterative performance of cultural scripts. The discussion of identity extends Austin's original focus on speech to the realm of action, since personhood is consolidated around practices in which language and action are intertwined.

This stance invites the close observation and interrogation of material practices themselves for the role they play in the construction of personhood, and facilitates analysis, here, of the distinctive material conditions in which agency and connection were cultivated in these groups. Considering activities and talk organized around the crafts and wellbeing in these contexts as performative offers some novel and useful possibilities for understanding and intervening in what takes place in creative making groups. This approach, however, in no way undermines, contradicts, or claims to interpret equally experience-near participant understandings of their doings and becomings.

Since the practices and dissemination of research can also be considered as performative, the merits of different descriptions of social worlds can be considered in terms of what each makes it possible to enact, as well as what each offers as conceptual leverage for thinking and potential intervention at particular sites and moments in a 'world on the boil' (Ingold, 2010b, p.94). This redescription is potentially ethically significant (see Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, 2013; Bennett, 2001; Law 2004). Pieces of research are 'socially located, noninnocent, and therefore political performances. This suggests that they don't offer simple descriptions, but make a difference' (Law and Singleton, 2000, p.767).

Section 8.2 of this chapter will take the discussion of agency in the preceding chapter as its starting point, and examine how feelings of agency were produced, amplified, and consolidated in actions and talk organized around making. Section 8.3 will take a similarly performative and non-representational approach to affects concerning belonging and social connectedness, showing how distinctive forms of

inclusion and participation in and beyond these groups were enacted and produced through talk and engagement, in contrast to their conventional description (for instance in Putnam, 2001) as direct consequences of group belonging. Section 8.4 will address the potential transferability of these new perceptions of agency and connection to everyday life more broadly, focusing on performative dimensions of talk about habitual registers of affect, their transformations and their reproduction in other settings.

## **8.2. Materializing agency**

Speakers in the groups I observed positioned, presented, and realized themselves through multiple self-ascriptions. The performativity of talk as self-fulfilling prophecy was particularly evident where participants disavowed competence, actively talking themselves out of engagement and producing the conditions they seemed to describe, as here where the Hellan group facilitator recalls a participant's initial inertia:

At the start of her making that piece of work: 'I can't possibly do this, I wouldn't know where to begin'—'this is far beyond my capabilities'—but through her working through the processes she's proved to herself that she's more than capable, and within very little time she was flourishing, just from a little bit of guiding her through the processes, she then took control, she started to make decisions, and the process . . . her natural ability came out. (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13)

Although the facilitator, here, employs a commonsense perception of achievement as resting on a 'natural ability', the participant, recalling the same events from her perspective in an interview, focuses on their performative dimensions in emphasizing the role of doing in gaining a new skill: 'I mean I'd never have done half the things I've done, if she hadn't, you know, told me to go a bit at a time, not doing the whole thing, like with the rug hooking' (Interview, Joni, Hellan Crafts Group, 20/05/14). Similarly, another participant tells me that 'the group has changed her life, that in becoming a printmaker, she's discovered who she is' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/07/14). This statement underlines the identity between 'being' and 'becoming' highlighted in thinking creativity from a performative perspective. It would be easy to understand these affirmations, as in much arts-for-health research, as straightforward reports about the intrinsic

benefits of making activities. Important dimensions of these practices disappear from view, however, when such material is framed in this way. Talk about the essential characteristics of crafting loses sight of the very distinctive relational and material contexts that facilitate such experiences. The narratives above are more than pieces of recollection; they typify the way that even notionally purely descriptive talk is also constructive. In Massumi's words (2002, p.10):

The retrospective ordering enables precise operations to be inserted along the way, in anticipation of a repetition of the movement - the possibility that it will come again. If the movement does reoccur, it can be captured . . . It comes to a different end. The back-formation of a path is not only a 'retrospection'. It is a 'retroduction': a production, by feedback, of new movements.

These creative 'retroductions' are more possible under some circumstances than others. This awareness makes it possible to consider what might constitute effective and ethical practice in such interventions, something that will be considered further in the concluding chapter.

Participants often talked about how their activities within the groups contributed to feelings of growing competence and self-esteem. With some individuals, change in the nature of self-descriptions was observable over short periods of time. When one participant attends the group for the first time, for instance:

She is sad and uncertain-looking. She faces away from the rest of the group when she talks to me. I show her what other group members have been doing and she's interested in the mosaic. I ask her if she has done any crafts before and she says no, adding with great sincerity and sadness, and tearfully, 'I haven't done much of anything in my life' (she is probably about sixty). She says the couple of other times she's done creative things, they haven't gone well and it's lowered her confidence. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 15/04/14)

Over successive weeks this participant's confidence about her creativity expanded rapidly, as she was implicitly invited, step by step and through action, to challenge her view of herself as inactive and ineffective. Many small moments in which she experienced herself as skilled and capable, for instance where 'she has a moment of indecision about whether she should fill in the background to her main flower petals . . . but then makes a decision about this and is then pleased with the result' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 05/05/14), supported a nascent sense of self as resourceful and active. Six weeks after her first attendance, the same participant

talks eloquently to Jayne [from AFHC] about how the group has transformed her life. She tells her that for years she has barely been out except to shop. She talks about how it has built her confidence to be trying something new and finding she can do things that she didn't expect to succeed at. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 26/05/14)

Such talk can be seen less as a description of transformation, and more as a declaration around which old understandings of self can be destabilized, and new aspects of identity practised and consolidated. On a collective farewell thank-you card to me at the point of my departure as facilitator, this participant added the note, 'thank-you for unlocking the door to a new future' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/07/14). Membership quite concretely unlocked a door in ending her personal isolation at home, and also served as a way of performatively reorganizing identity as a space that gave onto new vistas and suggested new possibilities. This participant still attends the group a year later, and whereas she initially felt dependent on a lift from a friend, she now makes her own way on public transport. Amongst many similar examples concerning an enlarged sense of personal potential, a participant says 'she can't believe how many new things she's learning . . . you can spend most of your life thinking you can't do something, and it's easy when you find out how' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 04/11/13); another 'volunteers that the great thing for her is the discovery that she can do things she didn't think she could' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 25/11/13).

A sense of capability was often organized through speech from moment to moment around the execution of a new skill as it became progressively consolidated. For example, a participant shows me what she's doing at a sewing machine; she 'reminds me that it is her daughter's machine, and that her daughter, having tried to teach herself how to use it, has given up . . . She says now with pride, "I'll be able to teach her how to use it now"'; she then sorts out a technical problem with a bent needle, and I note:

an almost visible aura of competence, pride in knowing how to sort these little difficulties out. She points out it's this kind of thing that discouraged her daughter, and also mentions that her husband is really proud of her having learned to use the machine. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 28/05/13)

This talk, as a speech act, positions the speaker as able and persevering, in part by constructing a mirror, in the form of a witness (her husband), in which she sees herself reflected as capable. Bringing this mirror into play allows her to assert her competence on the basis of something wider than her self-assessment, making it something robust and extensible. The role of an affirmative audience in hearing these declarations is important. As Hyden, Lindemann and Brockmeier (2014, p.76) suggest, self-attributions 'do not denote given objects of the material world but rather indicate unstable meaning constructions ascribed to and negotiated among individuals who, in the process, are defined and redefined by others and by themselves'. This more performative conception of affect undoes the presumed link between mental illness and a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963) as its cause. From this point of view, the affects associated with competence are forces that drive individual development and becoming, rather than expressions of some essential identity.

Acquiring crafts skills encouraged identification with distinctive communities of practice in which expertise was the norm, and ownership of a body of specialist knowledge was consolidated through talk. One of my participants, for instance, reports her pleasure in watching strangers who were admiring her rug-hooked picture on display at the surgery whilst 'trying to figure out how it was made' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 25/03/14). Expertise was also frequently enacted through the sharing of skills with others, as where one participant 'talks about learning to make Suffolk puffs and then teaching some friends to make them too' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 22/01/13). Participants often shared their skills within the groups (for example, Field notes, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/10/13 and 11/12/14). Peers were important in being the supportive audience before whom the development of skills took place. Work in progress was almost always in full view on the table top in front of the circle of group members, and whilst this visibility was exposing at times, it offered multiple opportunities for validation, both unsolicited and invited, as where one participant lifts up her work to show: 'she's pleased with the neatness of the back, and jokes about this to the group— "Look how neatly I've done it!"' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 22/10/13).

Affirmative group responses provided a looking glass in which participants saw themselves reflected as capable and productive.

Whilst the contribution of skills development to self-efficacy might be observed in any number of arts-for-health or adult education settings, the previous example points to the distinctive role of the crafted object itself as a locus for talk consolidating feelings of agency. As the Hellan group facilitator noted, 'crafting produces stuff you can show' (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13). Talk in which crafted objects served as tangible evidence of skill and creative potential is ubiquitous in my field notes. In some of this talk, the object is a demonstration to self of agency and worth, and is occasionally kept as something of almost talismanic significance. One participant tells me 'I never thought I would ever make something like this [a handmade card]—I'm keeping this one to remind me I can' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 13/11/12); another turns down the would-be purchaser of her first textile piece as 'it's good to keep these things' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 28/05/13). More generally the piece of work was the locus of spoken evaluation by others; as that which could be viewed and praised, it was a safely displaced, circumscribed, visible, portable and relatively enduring representation of self in its aspect of agent and creator. The object's position as a stand-in for self was directly articulated in some talk; for instance I note that a participant's 'mosaics reflect glints of light from their uneven surfaces and seem to sparkle—someone says to her: "like you"'. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 31/03/14). The work functioned most immediately in this way within the groups themselves:

Towards the end of the group, Gayle calls out to the group as a whole and turns her work to show everyone her chimney pots—she's obviously pleased with the results and there is appreciation—and playful applause—from others. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/16/13)

The print is lovely, with crisp, incisive lines, a graceful composition, and a pleasing haze of plate tone from the ink left on the surface. She's really delighted, and goes over to [experienced printmakers] Caroline and Rachel to show them what she's done. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 05/05/14)

Annie continues working on her large crocheted bedspread which has grown considerably even in the last two weeks and is very impressive. It's admired by everyone. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 08/10/13)

Alice says what's nice about the group is that when others like your work, 'you go home with a warm glow inside'. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 25/02/14)

Participants also often reported the reactions of family members to things they had made, and the admiration of close kin seemed to have particular importance:

This reminds her that her son asked her about the whereabouts of a rug-hooked mat, her first rug hook project—normally it's under a plant pot, but last week it wasn't—he asked her what she'd done with it, said how good he thought it was, and said his partner would like to do that—would she show her? (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 16/07/13)

She wants to do another large rug-hooked piece like the one that was so successful and so much appreciated by her daughter. Joni goes on to talk about this daughter and how Joni's new craft skills are admired by her—'She's very impressed by me!' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 25/03/14)

The objects that were admired (and reports of how they were admired) served to establish a positive reflection of self in the eyes of others who had often been witnesses, as is the case in the examples above, to previous difficulties. The appreciative comments of friends were also frequently reported, as were those of strangers, and the latter were valued for their objectivity:

Last week her friend had used the cloth for guests who came for tea and they had commented on how lovely it was, and told her friend to tell Mary how 'clever' she was. Mary is evidently very pleased at this. (Field note, Hellan Craft Group, 28/05/13)

The value of showcasing work to a larger audience through exhibition in community or civic spaces, as a much more public and carefully orchestrated performance of competence, was evident when I showed Pendon Group members prints that I had framed for our end-of-year exhibition: participants were filled with surprise and excitement, or moved to tears, at the sight of their own work presented in this way (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 30/06/14). A similar observation was made by the director of AFHC, recalling a participant who was initially extremely self-denigrating about what he produced:

One of his prints we used on the poster to advertise the exhibition—we had a massive poster done—a huge, A0 size poster, and he, it was amazing to see the man, he was, he stood, he had his photograph taken in front of his work; he was so proud and so pleased with it. And, you know, that was really important. And it was almost that . . . seeing him change over time with that project, but almost that poster up outside . . . and the private view and his work on the wall was that

external acknowledgement, that had the biggest impact on him. (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14)

The power of a tangible and durable ‘form for thought’ is noted in Parker’s 2010 introduction to her seminal history of domestic needlecrafts:

The processes of creativity—the finding of form for thought—have a transformative impact on the sense of self. The embroiderer holds in her hands a coherent object which exists both outside in the world and inside her head. Winnicott’s theory of mirroring helps us understand how the experience of embroidering and the embroidery affirms the self as a being with agency, acceptability and potency . . . The embroiderer sees a positive reflection of herself in her work and, importantly, in the reception of her work by others (p.xx).



*Figure 8.1. Finished work on display at the Pendon Craft Group’s end-of-year exhibition (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

In these groups, items of work, both finished and in progress, served as sites around which talk about agentic, competent, and creative selves was organized, and through this talk, efficacy and competence were enacted. Regarding agency as enacted and constructed out of the raw ingredients—social, cultural, material—of a given setting helpfully bypasses the undecidable issue of the extent to which agency is illusory, or conversely has some objective correlate in states or traits of individuals. In pragmatic terms, talk about agency was immediately generative of new material and relational possibilities. These observations suggest that such groups provide settings conducive to experiences of agency, and that the material objects produced are salient as hubs around which agentic self-worth and confidence are talked into being.

It is relevant to ask in this context to what extent talk and feelings of competence necessarily reproduce or become subsumed by neoliberal discourses of responsible self-management. It has been argued that the 'ideology of competence serves very well to justify an opposition which is rather like that between masters and slaves' (Bourdieu, 1998, pp.42-43) and underpins forms of oppression that are based on a meritocratic social neo-Darwinism (Siisiäinen, 2000). Attributions such as a diagnosis of depression 'enclose those whom they characterize within the limits that are assigned to them and that they are made to recognize' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.122), but so too does the 'happiness imperative' (Ahmed, 2010) central to some contemporary representations of wellbeing. One problem of such versions of wellbeing is that they rest on the eradication of discontent and thereby make their iterative performance impossible. It is, however, possible to imagine (performatively) with Cvetkovich in her discussion of 'public feelings', 'a vision of hope and possibility that doesn't foreclose despair and exhaustion' (2007, p.467). Making is particularly apt as an activity around which to performatively organize alternative forms of agentic wellbeing, since it offers a model of the necessity of constraint, frustration, muddle, improvisation, and collaboration as aspects of individual agency and creative freedom.

### **8.3. Materializing connection**

The tight relationship between experiences of agency and connection is reflected in existing ethnographic research that describes mental health-oriented arts projects as 'protective *non-clinical* social spaces within which people cultivate positive versions of self-identity, further enabled by an inclusive sociability with others around them' (Parr, 2006, p.158). The relational nature of identity has been emphasized in relation to my observations. Most interview- and survey-based research into the benefits of arts for health also highlights the importance of social aspects of such groups as places where friendship and peer support are available (e.g. Hacking et al., 2008; Matrix Insight, 2010). Many similar reports were produced in the present study, as where the facilitator of the Hellan group tells me:

and then I notice that they start to make connections not just within the group—that leads them outside the group, because they've started to meet up for cups of tea, and they ring each other, and it's almost like a support group that's growing all the time. (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13)

As here, groups are often portrayed as bounded entities. Where connection between groups is discussed, it is often depicted in 'bridging' terms as if between distinct islands of social activity. Perhaps as a consequence, connection is often theorized in the arts-for-health literature in terms of Putnam's conceptualization of social capital. This locates virtuous social connection in civic activity organized through membership of voluntary associations and governed by trust (2001). This account of social capital has been criticized for providing no account of conflict between groups with different interests, nor between civic society and state (Siisiäinen, 2000). It results, furthermore, in a rather static and essentializing description of groups as spaces with insides and outsides, generative of 'bonding' (within-group) and 'bridging' (between-group) forms of social capital. As Parr notes, 'pairing creativity and belonging is an uncertain and unstable endeavour' (2006, p.162), making Putnam's model a poor fit for arts in health at a number of levels. In this case, for example, the crafts in their aspect as vernacular, domestic, and popular, are paradigmatic of a kind of belonging and insidership, whilst simultaneously enacting the role of 'other' in relation to high culture and fine art (Harriman, 2007). As noted in Chapter 3, furthermore, strategies of inclusion in arts for health can be productive of difference, for example when they invoke the category of 'mental health problems'. As Rose (1997) suggests, the bounded communities invoked in some participatory arts work may define themselves in terms of lack, and such descriptions may intensify perceptions of intractable alienation.

In my observations, experiences of belonging were achieved as much through insertion and extension into broad and fluid networks as through containment and 'inclusionary belonging' (Parr, 2006, p.152). The Pendon group's position as a node in a network of other community activity was evident through its temporal proximity to the community café whose activities usually overlapped ours, and which many members attended. As previously noted in discussing safety, some participants in the Hellan group did see it as a bounded space productive of a

particular kind of containing and inclusive (as well as exclusive) belonging. Whilst such talk may have served to maintain a consistent sense of self as in need of protection, participants' talk, as demonstrated elsewhere, also positioned them as valuable members of a broader social network through their contributions to friends, families, the surgery, local shops, crafts fairs, and museum.

Such interconnectedness is usefully examined through the lens of a diverse economies model (Gibson-Graham, 2008) that aims to 'repopulate the economic landscape as a proliferative space of difference' (p.615), by encompassing alternative market and non-market (as well as traditional) transactions, labour, and enterprise. The groups provided the means through which participants branched out through their active contribution to a broad network of social and economic activity. Like many arts-for-health projects, the two groups were linked directly to an arts-for-health organization (through which they were in contact with each other) and indirectly to their funders. They also had active connections with other community organizations (the surgery, the café) that were the source of their memberships. In this case they were also linked to a university through my research, and contributed to through my AHRC-funded labour. Diverse economic links were also forged through these being, specifically, crafts groups: ones that took in materials of various sorts – found, recycled, and bought, natural and manufactured – and transformed them into objects that become gifts, vehicles of communication, saleable items, objects of exchange, or testimony to the skills of the maker. Our materials budgets (around one thousand pounds per group per year) were exchanged for a wide range of materials—scissors and needles, quilting hoops, hessian, mosaic materials, tea, and biscuits—bought from local businesses and online through specialist retailers. Straightforward exchange of funds for goods was not the only way that the groups acquired materials, however. Local businesses donated resources—for instance a considerable quantity of mount board from a local picture framer—and through me, the Pendon group also received donations from a Homebase store and a mosaic workshop in London. AFHC also recycled materials left over from other groups by giving them to us, and the Hellan group's facilitator and I not infrequently shared and exchanged materials. In addition, there were donations from members, predominantly in the

form of old clothing for textile crafts, and broken crockery for mosaic. Group members also acquired their own raw and recycled materials—dried flowers, driftwood, shells, and sea-glass—found on local beaches.

Once material components were thrown together in this way, they became tangled up in novel assemblages. As Ingold (2011, p.14) suggests, it is less interesting to take stock of the world's contents than 'to *follow what is going on*, tracing the multiple trails of becoming, wherever they lead'. Through the intentions of makers and the demands and affordances of the materials themselves, old tee shirts became rug-hooked cushion covers; sea-glass and old teacups were transformed into mosaic panels; and black ink and white paper metamorphosed into representations of familiar landscapes and local fauna. Threads of conversation wound their way circuitously around these material interweavings. The particular role of crafted objects and making activities in creating the conditions for easy, unpressured social connection was explored in detail in Chapter 6. The social ease participants were able to enact in the groups was supported by the crafted object as a flexible prop around which a range of friendly interactions (information and skills exchange, curiosity, admiration, self-disclosure) could be organized without risk. Material objects and processes facilitated the cultivation of connection through talk, so that, for instance, a participant who had struggled to develop friendships in other social situations ('I used to get angry when I got treated like I was mentally retarded just because I didn't say very much in groups') found it easy to do so in the crafts group, 'the one place I can go in the world where I know everyone will be pleased to see me' (Field notes, Pendon Crafts Group, 12/05/14; 16/03/15). Making, thus, had distinctive effects on talk. It was inevitably the case, too, that talk in the form of feedback, shared ideas and information exchange had substantial effects on what was produced.

These discursive and tangible threads were combined in many finished pieces of work. As one participant expressed it, 'the final product is the input of so many things' (Interview, ID, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/04/14). There was little that was final about the finished object where its effects were concerned, however. The variety of ways that materials came into the groups was matched by the diversity

of their onward journeys once they left them. As nodes and prompts for social interaction, crafted objects were mobile and continued to produce new connectivity beyond the borders of the group when they were taken away to be displayed, sold, gifted, or exhibited. Some of the items produced were exchanged for money, and this happened either for the benefit of the groups themselves, or as a form of personal enterprise, creating networks of monetary transaction. Where these novel assemblages of materials, imagination, and labour were not for sale, their effects were also inevitably social, not only because they demonstrated to self and other newly discovered or reclaimed skills and agency, as above, but because they inveigled themselves into extended social networks in which they continued to have aesthetically pleasing, useful, comforting, or symbolic effects. One participant described her work as ‘something beautiful which is then out there in the world and can give pleasure to others’ (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 26/05/14). In this sense crafted objects were not only seen as representative of their makers’ agency, but as extending it by acting on their behalf in a mesh of relations that connected makers to others, some of whom they would never meet. Participants followed and reported on these onward trajectories with pleasure, telling me for instance where they had installed objects in their homes, and who had appreciated them:

Mary tells me about the poppies she recently embroidered: she took them home and framed them, and they were sitting on a chair when her neighbour came round and admired them. This neighbour is very helpful to Mary, driving her to hospital and so on, and so Mary gave her the picture as a way of saying thank-you. Mary talks more generally about this neighbour’s admiration of her needlework—it’s she who has the strawberry tablecloth [also her work]. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 01/04/14)

As here, beyond conventional economic activity, there existed a lively non-traditional economy of gifting and exchange. Objects often entered into circulation as gifts, as a means of barter, or a way of expressing gratitude. In one session before Christmas, for instance, ‘I’m presented by Faye with a gift from the group—some bunting and a hair tie that group members have made’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 17/12/12). Another participant tells me, ‘I like the “gift” side of making crafts—I have lots of friends who help me out, and making things means I can offer them something back’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 30/10/12). Gifts

also functioned as expressions of care, for instance in the example already cited concerning a participant's grandmother in a care home in another country, who was the recipient of a crocheted blanket and a rug-hooked picture. Gifting thus embedded makers in meaningful transactions far beyond the notional boundaries of the group.

In addition to this intimate and personal giving, participants of the Hellan group also donated work, individually and collectively, to the surgery, local businesses and a museum, and such donations performed the function of exhibition as well as connection. The links thus formed were complex. During the collaborative making of a quilt produced to commemorate the First World War, for instance, participants brought in and shared contemporaneous family photographs. The activity thus situated participants in 'a diachronous narrative mesh' (Rosenberg, 2013, p.12) as well as tying them to a locality through the quilt's permanent display. A similar web, uniting haunted geography, local history and paternal affect, is created when a participant considers basing a mosaic on a photo he has taken of

a mine that he visited where a hundred years ago a sixteen-year-old girl had died in an accident. He's moved by this story and links this to his having a daughter of his own, and his protective feelings towards her. He tells me he visited the grave of the mine girl on the anniversary of the day she died, and placed flowers on the grave. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 14/07/14)

These rhizomatic and dynamic forms of connectedness and belonging are a better fit with Bourdieu's conception of social capital than Putnam's: 'the volume of social capital possessed by a given agent . . . depends on the size of the network of connections that he can effectively mobilize' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.249).

My field notes also evidence significant and sustaining narrative connections, often temporal, located in crafted objects in a much less public way or even secretively, as in this instance where a participant was talking to me in private about her work:

Sylvia has put together a bold design with two fish motifs, which she's borrowed from a pattern book, and some lettering that spells out 'go peacefully'. She's working out the capital lettering herself using graph paper, and there is also a

sweet pea motif. She tells me that the whole piece is a ‘memorial’ to her husband, who was also a Pisces—hence the two fishes. They shared a birthday; also they used to grow sweet peas every year, and would have a competition to see whose grew highest. The ‘go peacefully’ was the motto of a friend who has also now died; it’s also meaningful because she thinks it’s what her husband would say to her if he could speak to her now. The whole piece, therefore, has great personal significance to her, she says. ‘I wouldn’t necessarily talk about that in the group—although sometimes we do—nearly everybody here has lost someone’. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 23/02/13)

The location of personal meaning in crafted objects is generally overlooked, perhaps through implicit comparison with the fine arts, which are more often understood as cathartic and expressive. My observations suggest, in contrast, that the crafted object was a usefully covert vehicle for the expression of intense affective connection, often to those deceased, or to an imagined future. Relatively conventional imagery could be harnessed to symbolize events and relations that were too personal to articulate, without wearing one’s heart on one’s sleeve. Such connections could be hidden, alluded to, or shared only partially or selectively, as here:

She talks about the central tree motif as representing the onward growth of her family—‘I changed it from the round tree I started with to this pine tree that goes right out of the top of the picture, because it represents my family going on into the future—and that water there, that also has a very private meaning to me, I know what it represents, and when I look at it, I’ll know what it is’—there’s satisfaction that the picture has private meaning, that it’s not going to be explicit to others. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/03/13)

Such image making was both a representation of a felt connection, and a consolidation of it; it constituted a form of internal connection work, which, embodied in the object, then branched itself out into the world.

#### **8.4. Transposable inclinations?**

As already noted, themes of agency and connection are common in the arts-for-health literature, although research tends to represent feelings of efficacy as intrapersonal states and traits, and feelings of connection and belonging as automatic properties of group membership, assumptions that have been challenged here. In a research culture often preoccupied with producing evidence of the long term impacts of participation in community- and primary care-based

arts interventions, the question of whether such feelings are transferable to other areas of life is often raised (see for instance McCarthy et al., 2004). Psychological and educational research concerning transferability of learning is often invoked, often not very decisively; as acknowledged by Macpherson, Hart and Heaver (2012, p.5), 'how learning in the arts transfers to learning and behaviour in other contexts remains contested research terrain'. The performativity of participants' beliefs concerning the transposability of these affective potentials is rarely discussed.

Taking participants' beliefs on this subject into account allows performative dimensions of habit (both declarative and enactive) to be considered. As Dewsbury notes, 'habits fashion who we are and signal the potential for extending ourselves', and their investigation enables 'understandings of how situated and broadly landscaped activities hold who we are and change who we can become' (2015, p.31). Habits do not have to be understood as resting on stable traits, which have effects only once established. A focus on habit works against views of body and mind as underpinned by stable essences: 'We are habits, nothing but habits . . . there is no more striking answer to the problem of the self' (Deleuze, 1991, p.x). Habits can be framed as iterative and increasingly automatic performances that both produce a self and are the means by which it is possible to 'get free of oneself' (Deleuze, 1988, p.96). Habits are potentially transferable from one setting to another, particularly when individuals understand them as being so. From this point of view, the benefits of these groups can be understood in terms of their potential for facilitating changes to habits of self-attribution and habits of interaction between selves and worlds, rather than simply in terms of the immediate and intrinsic distractions, comforts, and satisfactions often reported in connection with making and belonging. As Atkinson and Scott (2015, p.78) observe, 'the ways in which the creative arts engender these effects remain under-theorised'.



*Figure 8.2. Work in development in the Pendon Crafts Group  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

As noted above, particularly in Chapter 5, participants often spontaneously observed that affective habits that produced difficulties with making also occurred in their activities elsewhere, for instance in relation to perfectionism or fear of trying something new. Participants' language reflected a conception of crafts creativity as analogous to everyday creativity more generally. One member comments, for example, 'I'm starting to realize this group isn't just about crafts—it's about how you live your life'; and when we talk about drawing as something as valuable at the level of process as product, she says, 'it's what people say about life, isn't it—it's better to travel than to arrive' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 12/05/14). In an interview, another participant says,

the variety in tapestry of the stitches and colours, that's life, isn't it? . . . life on the canvas if you like, the way it interacts, interweaves and how all the colours go together, you don't think they're going to and they do, and you might have to put something in between to sort of calm one colour from the other or make them merge, but you do that. (Interview, ID, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/04/14)

Being part of the group was perceived to develop skills beyond those strictly related to making and design: 'It's all a learning curve—I mean not just learning about what you're doing; you're learning about the people that you're with—the changeability of people' (Interview, ID, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/04/14). Learning a skill in one domain was also seen to have indirect repercussions in other areas: 'I also find that whatever you learn, you can apply it to something else, another material, another way to live, another part of life. It's not just tied to what you're doing' (Interview, ID, Hellan Crafts Group, 13/04/14). Another participant

comments that sewing and crochet have improved her maths—she's had to make calculations and it's given her the confidence that she can do this. I reflect back that making things can build confidence in surprising areas. She replies by telling me that she's thinking of getting a volunteering job in a charity shop. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 24/09/13)

It was particularly in the area that combined feelings of efficacy and social ease—something that might be glossed as confidence—that participants articulated the transferable nature of what they gained from the group, as in the following examples:

She used not to have any friends, and now she has people she can meet up with outside the group. The first time she came, she kept herself to herself, was too scared to talk to anyone—she would never have been the one to get up and offer to make tea, she says. Now she's started doing other new things, like starting to go swimming again. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 13/11/12)

She says . . . that the group has been very important to her in starting to get out and do new things. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/03/14)

It has a knock-on effect . . . I'm more willing to try things now—I don't just block it out that I can't do it, and I'm more open-minded that maybe I can . . . (Interview, Joni, Hellan Crafts Group, 20/05/14)

It's helped in all them sort of things, really, to sort of get out and don't ever say, no, I can't do it. You know, because if you don't have a go, you never know, do you, what you can do? So yeah, really, it's helped with my confidence in all I suppose the rest of my life. (Interview, Gayle, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/07/14)

The assertions of confidence above (some of which are fairly tentative) can be seen as declarative habits in formation. These start to produce new habitable landscapes as they are repeated and tried out in new contexts. As Dewsbury suggests, 'specific landscapes can be seen to intensify bodily dispositions effecting profound changes, whereas landscapes of familiar everyday living can stultify the capacity to be open to such affirmative transformations' (2015, p.31). The particular social and material conditions most favourable to the habitual enrolment of new modes of speech and action are, however, rarely foregrounded in research into arts for health. Viewing change in terms of habit shifts attention away from the search for essential properties of making, belonging and personhood and towards creative activity as something that 'trips participants out of a performative habitus . . . in ways that enhance rather than harm a capacity for subjective wellbeing' (Atkinson and Scott, 2015, p.79). Transformation, here, rests on the destabilization and re-aggregation of alternative, increasingly habitual

performances of identity through 'a fluid system of repetitions and modifications that dissolves . . . completeness' (Hayden, 1998, p.18).

The fact that 'notions of habit are acutely apparent in activities related to training, therapy and other techniques of the self' (Dewsbury, 2015, p.31) again raises the question of whether such movements are always enacted in the direction of normative self-improvement. Ways in which participants were able to contest normative prescriptions were discussed in Chapter 7. There is scope here to see potential for the development of habits of unapologetic difference, creative activism, and confident non-compliance alongside habits that serve as technologies for managing and disciplining the self, and to argue that craft making provides distinctive opportunities to develop the former in safety, not least because of the concrete invitation it offers to imagine things otherwise, or in Knott's words (2011, p.269), to 'rebuild the world in a different register'.

## **8.5. Conclusion**

This chapter started by noting the essentialism and representationalism that underpin much research in arts for health. In this literature, both emic and etic versions of events tend to be invoked with the intention of providing an account of 'how things really are'. A challenge to this way of thinking was offered through non-representational perspectives that consider the performativity of language, that is, the capacity of language to carve up a world in such a way to produce the artefacts it ostensibly describes. Human beings 'pack the world into words' (Latour, 1999, p.247) for particular purposes, in everyday as well as scientific and academic contexts. From this point of view, 'telling' is an activity that produces its objects. To take a performative orientation in ethnographic research is to acknowledge that how participants express themselves is powerfully constitutive of the landscapes they inhabit, and that research is just as performative in producing worlds (Law, 2004). A performative stance in ethnographic research makes no claims to invalidate or interpret participant accounts (and would be incoherent if it did so). A justification for creating more performative versions of the production of social reality was offered in terms of their ethical potential. As

suggested by Gibson-Graham (2008, p.621), research involves 'creating a world where particular kinds of facts can survive'; it is the virtuous potential of such facts that is 'to be argued for, questioned, defended, decided, without the comfort of just being, already and before thought, real and true' (Edwards, Ashmore and Potter, 1995, p.35; see Price, 2003, on the value of 'truth as convenient friction'). What the way of thinking outlined here might offer pragmatically in terms of how to intervene on a particular eventscape in order to support or amplify these processes will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Section 8.2 examined how social interaction, organized around the activity of making and the crafted objects that resulted, was a means of producing (and not merely describing) feelings of competence and self-efficacy; and how the field of social relations and material transformations in which talk took place was particularly suited to speaking habitual and transposable dispositions into existence. It emphasized that matter is not merely a referent or prop for conversation and action, but is intimately tied up with it. Section 8.3 dealt with feelings of belonging in similarly performative and enactive terms, and proposed that affects of connection, rather than simply located within the notional container of the group, could be seen as part and parcel of the groups' activities in 'diasporic' networks of community activity extending far beyond their fuzzy peripheries. Such diverse and dynamic economies of material transformation, contribution, and exchange produce webs 'in which places are not spatially bounded but are the product of interactions with other places' (Rose, 1997, p.3).

Consistent with this extended notion of belonging, section 8.4 considered how personal transformation within the group became established beyond it in other settings and spheres of action. Habits were considered performatively as the vehicle through which changing dispositions were portable and came to be articulated in a more generalized everyday creativity. From this point of view, creativity and health are already kindred:

Creativity is the active, experimenting manifestation of desire shaped within a network or assemblage of bodies, things, ideas and institutions; while health is the capacity of a body to engage with this assemblage. It is consequently unsurprising

that there is a relationship between creative activity and health: in this ontology both are aspects of the same phenomenon. (Fox, 2013b, p.495)

Understanding creativity and health in this way reduces the burden placed on linear causality in explaining their relationship. Considering the consolidation of habits of creative vitality as a gradual and relational achievement draws attention, however, to the potentially protracted temporal dimension of habitual reorientation. The implications for practice will be drawn out the concluding chapter, as well as in Chapter 9, which will situate the groups I observed within the broader world of interventions using the crafts to support health and wellbeing.

## CHAPTER NINE A PATCHWORK ECONOMY OF UK CRAFTING FOR HEALTH

### 9.1. Introduction

Almost exactly three years after starting my doctoral programme, and on the day I completed a second draft of this chapter, I received an email from AFHC's board of trustees, stating:

It is with great regret that we have to announce the closure of Arts for Health Cornwall and Isles of Scilly. We have taken this difficult decision after an assessment of the financial forecast position. This indicates the organization is no longer sustainable.

The distressing collapse of this exemplary arts-for-health organization highlights the paradoxical situation in which this and similar bodies find themselves under current economic circumstances. On one hand, such organizations are key players in community health ecologies; their crucial role in the development of health services that offer 'more than medicine' (Langford, 2013b) is a constant refrain in an expanding literature from think tanks and innovation units concerned with the future of health and social care, and will be examined below. The value and importance of their work is celebrated in awards such as the King's Fund/GlaxoSmithKline Impact Award (to AFHC in 2010, and to CoolTan Arts in 2015) and the Guardian Public Services Award (to AFHC in 2009). On the other hand, such organizations struggle to find the resources to meet running costs, with many continuing their work on a hand-to-mouth or make-do and mend basis. AFHC, at the time of its closure, for instance, had a variety of projects under way, including a three-year programme to bring art to older people in care homes in the South West, for which they had been awarded funding of over a quarter of a million pounds from the Arts Council and the Baring Foundation at the beginning of 2014, but no adequate sources of funding for ongoing organizational overheads. This chapter will explore the precarious existence of a range of organizations working with the crafts in a mental health context, and explore the dangers—exemplified by the collapse of the partnership organization in this CDA—as well as the opportunities present in the current organization of the field.

Performing an accurate mapping exercise concerning the extent of work using the crafts for health is made difficult by the absence of a robust umbrella framework or comprehensive organizational database for the arts and health in the UK. This lack is in part the result of patchy and unreliable funding for the sector as a whole (see Dose, 2006). Small projects may also resist affiliation with larger organizations or networks (Interview 1, Jayne, AFHC, 30/07/13). The difficulty of mapping activity in the field of crafts (and arts) for health also results from the non-professionalized status of such work. Unlike highly regulated professions such as art therapy whose collective activities are visible through the documented employment of a compulsorily registered membership, arts facilitation is a vocation with no official training body, no formal or compulsory membership, no unitary ethos, no ethical framework, and no formalized external or internal quality control (Raw, 2013). Existing attempts to survey the broader field of arts for health (e.g. Clift et al., 2009) note the existence of many hundreds of projects, but these include a variety of art forms, as well as active (participant) and passive (spectator) forms of cultural engagement. There have been attempts to evaluate participatory arts work in a mental health context in economic terms; Hacking et al. (2006, p.125), prior to the 2008 financial crisis and its aftershocks, concluded that

participatory arts and mental health activity is a vibrant strand within the wider English mental health economy. There were indications in projects' responses, however, that the wide range of activity reported is achieved with limited resources. Even projects with established funding sources appeared to be relying on opportunistic bids to maintain their activity and our estimated national annual spend of £7 million per 100 projects is something of a drop in the ocean compared to the cost of poor mental health in England, estimated at £77 billion each year.

Interventions using crafts activities, here defined as those that involve making and design (but excluding those whose prime focus is personal expression, like fine art painting or art therapy) represent a fraction of this notional economy. It is probably, however, a proportionally significant one, reflecting the current popularity of craft (Gauntlett, 2011; Hackney, 2013) as well as its historical linkage to the various educational, therapeutic and community agendas described in Chapter 2. The most complete extant database of UK arts for health projects (National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2015) is far from comprehensive since it relies on organizations to register their projects. As an indication,

however, 725 arts for health projects were found when searching for all art forms using the terms ‘workshops’, ‘residencies’, ‘artist-led participant work’, and ‘work in GP/primary care settings’. When art forms were narrowed down to visual arts and craft, 546 results were returned; and for crafts alone, 357. Whilst indicative, survey exercises of this kind inevitably overlook a huge number of projects, many of which will have a short lifespan or remain entirely beneath the radar. Further limitations of conventional economic assessments of the sector’s activity are also suggested by analysis, in the previous chapter, of the diverse economies produced by the diasporic activity of such groups. The economic context in which such projects operate is, moreover, unstable and subject to rapid change (Castells, Caraça and Cardoso, 2012). As Neilson and Rossiter (2005, no page number) point out in relation to the creative economies more generally,

there is little empirical correspondence between the topography of ‘mapping documents’ and ‘value-chains’ and the actual social networks and cultural flows that comprise the business activities and movement of finance capital, information and labour-power within creative economies. Such attempts to register the mutual production of economic and creative value are inherently reductive systems.

Given these difficulties, it is not the aim of this chapter to produce a map of crafts for health activity in the UK. Instead, analysis of fifteen interviews carried out within nine arts for health organizations using crafts interventions in a mental health context will create a broader context for the groups in which I worked. (How these organizations were chosen and how interviews were conducted was described in Chapter 3, and identities of interviewees, their roles, and characteristics of their organizations are recorded in Appendix 4.)

In Section 9.2, I describe characteristics of the nine organizations, and how they understood the economic and policy context for their work. Interviews with practitioners and stakeholders in these projects reveal many shared experiences and conceptions of organizational strengths and difficulties, as well as some significant philosophical conflicts and divergences. In Section 9.3 I report on what interviewees perceived as the distinctive merits of using the crafts in their work, and link these to my own findings. Interview material and field notes are used in Section 9.4 to examine the practical, emotional, and economic challenges routinely faced by facilitators in such work, as well as the dual hazards and opportunities of

an economy dominated by volunteer labour. Section 9.5 uses interview material to illustrate difficulties currently encountered in initiatives to address psychosocial problems through social prescription, or NHS referral to community groups. Lastly, Section 9.6 looks at ways that the field of crafting for health offers a space of freedom and possibility in spite of the precarity and potential risks that burden organizations under current conditions.

## **9.2. Nine UK organizations using crafts for health**

### *Locations*

Five of the nine organizations whose members I interviewed were in London, one in Manchester, one in Exeter, and two in small towns in rural Surrey and Cornwall respectively. Some limited their work to a defined area; for instance Claremont's services were only open to residents of the London Borough of Islington, and AFHC's work all took place within Cornwall. AFHC had strong links to a larger regional body, Arts and Health South West. It would be misleading to see all arts for health organizations and projects as neatly nested within larger frameworks however; many choose to work independently (Interview 1, Jayne, AFHC, 30/07/13). The siting of these organizations in towns and cities reflects the reliance of such organizations on extensive partnership working. As has been noted in relationship to social enterprise, location is significant in allowing organizations 'to pursue certain social goals, access avenues of funding and generate community "buy-in"' (Munoz, 2010, p.305); similar issues have been researched in relation to cultural infrastructure, the creative economies and interactions between cultural production and consumption (Comunian, 2011). The location of these nine organizations also reflects issues of accessibility for participants who may be reliant on public transport, struggling financially, or finding it difficult in other ways to attend. A number of my interviewees (for instance the previous facilitator of the Hellan group, and the director of Creative Response) talked about groups that had folded because affordable space could only be found in remote or unsuitable locations.

Nearly all sites facilitated numerous connections with other community organizations, and these links were actively fostered. Claremont and CoolTan, both large organizations running full and varied programmes of activities for many participants, occupied self-contained spaces with integral workshop and office space on busy London thoroughfares in lively neighbourhoods, in Claremont's case on church property. Artlift and Mindlift, as supported learning projects designed to give participants with mental health difficulties access to adult education, shared a space with mainstream adult education facilities in Lewisham. This linked them to a wider community setting, but was problematic in other ways; both organizations felt that they competed with mainstream provision for resources, space, and a place in the timetable. Such difficulties highlight issues of power and conflicting interests overlooked in Putnam's 1995 conception of civic society (see Siisiäinen, 2000). Double Elephant, a community printmaking project, was housed in the basement of a lively Exeter arts centre, and thus linked by proximity to a range of cultural activities. Creative Response, running a full programme of art and crafts-based activities, was similarly linked to a key community resource through sharing a building with the town's library. The organization Sweet Cavanagh, a social enterprise producing jewellery made by participants in recovery from addictions and eating disorders, was located on weekdays in a rented room within the walls of a London church. Other organizations connected their groups to community settings through weekly 'pop-up' residencies; the referrals-based and community groups with which I was involved through AFHC were typical examples, taking place in a community centre and church hall respectively, whilst AFHC's organizational headquarters occupied a unit in a business hub housing a dozen small creative businesses.

The involvement of churches in the subsidized provision of space in three of these cases is characteristic of the 'post-secular' (Habermas, 2008) engagement of faith-based organizations in community welfare provision. In the case of Sweet Cavanagh, church activities were very much in evidence, since the space was also used by the Sunday school. The church hall that hosted the AFHC craft group I facilitated communicated much less about the church agenda, being a kilometre away from the church itself, with church signage and leafleting a minimal

presence. Whilst religious organizations have been represented as co-opted, willingly or unwillingly, to fill the gaps produced by 'roll-back' neoliberalism (see for example Peck and Tickell, 2002), this conception has also been criticized for overlooking the way in which faith-based organizations 'rework and reinterpret the values and judgments supposedly normalized in the regulatory frameworks of government policy, bringing alternative philosophies of care into play' (Williams, Cloke and Thomas, 2012, p.1496). Such reworking involves negotiations between a range of individual and organizational stakeholders motivated by a variety of agendas, as in the case of the Pendon church hall, whose development as a community resource had been championed by two activists on the church hall committee. These individuals were motivated by community, rather than religious, commitments; other members of the committee wished to see the land sold off. Ultimately, petitioning by the users of the hall, including the crafts group, was decisive in preserving it as a community space (Interview, Annie, Pendon Church Hall Committee, 30/06/14).

Start, running a diverse programme of arts and crafts activities on NHS premises in a large Victorian building in Manchester, was not obviously connected by proximity to other community organizations, although its unusual position as an NHS project gave it extensive links to other services. None of the other projects ran in a designated healthcare setting, although this had been explored by AFHC in previous work, particularly in their Arts in Primary Care project (see Bennett and Bastin, 2008), and thought given to the pros and cons of siting pop-up groups within general practices or medical centres. In principle, this positioning made such groups highly accessible to those who needed them most, and also allowed the groups to perform a service for the professional communities that inhabited these spaces; at the same time, they presented a somewhat medicalized version of arts for health that potentially confirmed participants in roles as patients and recipients of help. In the case of the Hellan surgery group, a decision had been made by GPs setting up the group to locate it outside the surgery and within the community, so as 'not to be very overtly medical' (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 10/12/13).

The organizational and community connections described by interviewees ranged from the very local (at Claremont, for instance, Christmas dinner was cooked for participants by trainee chefs from Jamie Oliver's restaurant down the road) to the national and international (CoolTan, for example, saw their work as part of a much broader movement to challenge the stigma surrounding mental health, and all interviewees saw themselves as part of a wider world of arts-for-health work); at the same time, facilitators understood their groups as spaces of sanctuary, for instance as 'a safe place for them to come on a weekly basis' (Interview, Luky, Mindlift, 11/02/14); and as 'a community that is supportive and trusting, governed by somebody who is encouraging and responsive', which 'makes and builds that safety' (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 16/09/13). These observations underline that 'community, in the context of community arts, is . . . best conceived as a complex and uncertain spatiality' (Parr, 2006, p.159); more broadly they illustrate 'the complex ways in which people with serious and enduring mental health problems are re-occupying community spaces in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.' (op cit, p.163).

Beyond the important impacts of location noted above, practical and sensory dimensions of these environments were significant. Mindlift and Artlift were competing for basics like storage space and designated art workshop space with mainstream adult education, and space was equally an issue where showcasing participants' work was concerned; they were unusual in having little opportunity to make a mark on their environment. Most other projects engaged in active place making through decorating their environs, permanently or temporarily, with works made in the group. This provided an opportunity for showcasing as well as accomplishing the transformation of 'thin or designated spaces into dynamic thick places' (Duff, 2010, p.882). CoolTan, for example, occupied 1970s office space, but the workshop areas and open-plan office were arranged around a large central lobby used as a gallery; this was in permanent use to exhibit current work by participants and served as a lively communal hub with sofas, tables, and chairs. The interior at Claremont was hard and rectilinear and would have been impersonal in ambiance, but was abundantly decorated with artwork and posters. Such places had vibrancy especially when inhabited, and can be conceptualized at

least partially in Oldenburg's terms as 'third places' of sociality beyond home and work, animated when 'the right people are there to make it come alive, and they are the regulars' (1989, p.33); moreover, 'every regular was once a newcomer, and the acceptance of newcomers is essential to the sustained vitality of the third place' (p.34).

Projects with in-house workshop space benefitted from their own disorganized but romantic aesthetic—a pleasurable and visually alluring muddle consisting of specialist equipment, materials (the smell of linseed oil, clay, or printing ink often hung about such rooms), and works in progress. The presence of presses, kilns, and other equipment underlined the specialist nature of participants' activities. It seems likely that the evocative and unusual visual and olfactory impacts of such rooms acted as affective prompts, engendering a sense of belonging to a community of experts. As one facilitator interviewee noted in relation to printmaking, 'they're very specific skills, but it gives you a sense of confidence, doesn't it, to know about things other people don't know about, and also to be connected with an art form that's very old' (Interview, Catherine, Double Elephant, 28/07/13). Whilst it is tempting to think of the atmospheres of such locations exclusively in terms of such subjective impacts, more complex understandings of affective atmospheres observe their occurrence 'before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities, and in-between subject/object distinctions' (Anderson, 2009, p.78). Atmospheres, moreover, 'are unfinished because of their constitutive openness to being taken up in experience', and 'are resources that become elements within sense experience' (p.79). They embody a sense of promise, because they communicate 'the store of action-potential, the dispositions and agencies, potentially enactable in that place' (Duff, 2010, pp.881-882). The enchanting and transformative potential of such rooms, and the way they enlivened and were enlivened by their inhabitants, invites a reading of place not as a static location or haven, but as a dynamic field in which material and ideational streams are united, transformed, and projected into the future (Massey, 1994).



*Figure 9.1. Creative atmosphere as an affective prompt in the Pendon Crafts Group(Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

### *Histories and funding*

For reasons discussed in Chapter 2, the 1980s and 1990s were a time of rapid development in the arts-for-health sector (Selwood, 2002). Such work has traditionally relied on funding from government-sponsored and charitable bodies including ACE, the NHS and the HLF. Consequently, the fortunes of the arts in health are linked to those of the national and global economy more generally. The 2008 collapse of the financial markets and subsequent crisis of global capitalism resulted in a significant 'aftermath' for such funding bodies (Castells, Caraça and Cardoso, 2012). ACE, for instance, suffered a 29.6% reduction in its grant-in-aid in the four years from 2011/12 to 2014 (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2011). Many arts-for-health organizations are now challenged to continue their work, not least because funding is only available for well-defined, time-delimited projects whose anticipated outcomes are demonstrable, quickly achieved, and match priorities established by funding organizations in line with government policies (see for example House of Commons, 2015). Under conditions of discursive neoliberalism and economic uncertainty, these policies are characterized by 'an increasing emphasis on wellbeing that is actively produced by the choosing consumer' (Sointu, 2005, p.256). Arts-for-health organizations are heavily dependent on the 'precarious' labour common in the creative industries (Morgan, Wood and Nelligan, 2013). Longer-term, open-ended, or experimental projects with aims that are radical or less well defined suffer in comparison, and arts-for-health organizations are often challenged to meet their day-to-day running costs.

These circumstances are reflected in the histories of the nine projects selected, and most poignantly in the closure of AFHC. My inquiries elicited accounts, across the board, of muddling through with frequent funding crises, relocations, or changes of direction. The organization with the longest history was Claremont in Islington, which was founded in 1907 as the Christian Mission of the Claremont United Reformed Church; since 1998 it has been run as a secular charity and has adopted a community arts-for-health model providing services for older Islington residents. Seven other organizations were founded between 1990 and 2001 under relatively propitious economic conditions; only one (Sweet Cavanagh) had been founded since 2008. Most projects began as informal interventions carried out by groups or individuals; CoolTan, for instance, was originally a self-help venture run out of a squat (a former suntan lotion factory in Brixton), and Sweet Cavanagh grew out of its founder's own experiences with crafting in recovery from an eating disorder. Creative Response, CoolTan, and Double Elephant had all relocated at least once in response to funding or other vicissitudes.

The independent organizations were constituted variously as charities and limited companies, not-for-profit community interest companies, and in the case of Sweet Cavanagh and Double elephant, social enterprises (a model that 'enables nonprofits to expand vital services to their constituents while moving the organization towards self-sufficiency'; see Alter, 2007, p.1). As in the case of post-secular care, some friction has been noted between 'the "place" that government has defined for social enterprise' and its potential for 'the creation of new spaces of environmental and social justice within the capitalist system' (Munoz, 2010, p.303; p.307). Irrespective of organizational framework, interviewees described a patchwork of funding coming from ACE, the NHS, the HLF and a plethora of other charitable and government-sponsored organizations; CoolTan, for instance, had sought and received grants from 25 funders over the previous year. This funding was generally short-term and for specific pieces of work, and thus contributed little to core funding. When it came to unrestricted funding, there was enormous competition for one-off sums; the King's Fund/GSK Impact award won by AFHC in 2010 and by CoolTan Arts in 2015, for example, offers up to twenty health charities an unrestricted award of between £3,000 and £40,000, but hundreds of

applicants are turned away (The King's Fund, 2015). Whilst the three projects set up within mainstream medical or educational services seemed superficially less compromised by financial difficulties, they had also suffered from changes of direction, threats to their continued existence, and an ongoing battle to secure the resources they needed. My interviewees at Start spoke, for instance, of the continued need to justify their existence to NHS managers, and of problematic changes of culture depending on whether clinicians or artists dominated in the team. Such difficulties had as their context an economically jeopardized health service in which the cost effectiveness of such interventions was a major issue (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13).

Many of my interviewees expressed concern about the consequences of structuring their work around insecure long-term funding or small grants. At a personal level, they felt ground down by the constant work required to bring in funds. In organizations run by sessionally paid artists, fundraising often amounted to unpaid work (Interview, Catherine, Double Elephant, 15/07/13; Interview, Michelle, CoolTan, 12/07/13). My interviewees experienced disappointment in relation to successful projects that folded because further funding couldn't be secured, and anxiety about current projects as well as the futures of their organizations. Worry about funding had a contagious effect and project organizers tried to keep it from their participants: 'I don't want them to have to think about it, because where money issues come up, people get frightened' (Interview, Michael, Creative Response, 03/07/13).

Interviewees were concerned about the impact on clients when services were time-delimited or curtailed through lack of funds. Most described the majority of their participants as suffering from serious mental health difficulties or 'severe and enduring mental distress' (Interview, Michael, Creative Response, 03/07/13). Seven of the organizations considered their client group to be individuals under secondary care (for instance daypatient or outpatient psychiatric care or community mental health teams) or referred from tertiary care (specialist and intensive psychiatric treatment). The two other organizations, Claremont and AFHC, did a considerable amount of work in primary care and community settings,

but in practice high levels of psychological distress were encountered in their work, not least because these services were offered in areas, urban and rural respectively, of high economic deprivation and social isolation. Most interviewees felt that time-delimited work was unrealistic, wasteful, and potentially damaging. They were nonetheless under pressure from their funders to effect a quick turnaround; Creative Response's main funder for instance, wished to constrain them to offering a thirteen-week programme; Arts Lift were restricted to offering their services to participants for one year only; and Double Elephant, at the time I spoke to them, were negotiating to become part of a consortium that would have committed them to a time-limited approach. Given the level of distress encountered, producing lasting change through interventions that were short by design or curtailed in an untimely way was seen as wholly unrealistic:

It's the lack of understanding that people have about how long it takes, and what happens to people on a journey, it's not a straight trajectory from being really down and we get straight up and we'll be fine, and once we're fine we're going to be fine forever. I don't think they really think that, but that's how they commission. They commission on the basis of oh well, six weeks of this and six weeks of that and then you're out the door. It's like, it's just not how it is, is it? (Interview 1, Jayne, AFHC, 30/07/13)

Along with conviction about the impossibility of a 'quick fix' came regret at the resources that were wasted and the opportunities that were missed when services were delivered in this way. The facilitator I interviewed at CoolTan felt that 'some of the amounts of money are so tiny, they're better to give one project a bigger amount of money, where you can have the staff that are there for a decent amount of time' (Interview, Michelle, CoolTan Arts, 12/07/13). Creative Response also raised the issue of false economy:

The whole thing of giving somebody eighteen months is a different cup of tea, I know it sounds like a lot of money to some people, it does sound like a lot of money, but if you are doing it then you are making a real investment that's going to pay off. (Interview, Michael, Creative Response, 03/07/13)

The risk of damaging clients from whom services were withdrawn too soon produced high anxiety:

Somebody who we'd kept out of hospital for ten years, within four months of all her funding being cut, she'd committed suicide, and she hadn't gone to hospital for ten years. If that isn't obvious what we were providing for her, I don't know what is. (Interview, Michelle, CoolTan Arts, 12/07/13)

Some of this talk reflected feelings of powerlessness, couched in terms of conflict between community and hegemonic powers (see Rose, 1997). This embattled stance was tempered, however, by recognition that offering open-ended participation came with its own problems, one of which was dependency. This issue was actively considered by AFHC, for instance, in relation to the Hellan group, partly because a similar project – Arts Response – had been discontinued due to lack of funding, at some emotional cost to participants. When groups broke down, people were 'on their own. And they're now at home ill, or they can't get out, or that gave them a sense of somewhere to go. But then, on the other side, they can't become too reliant on that either, so it's very difficult' (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13). There was also the perception that a group with long-standing members can become 'quite a closed group, and that new people can come in and feel very excluded' (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 10/12/13). The point was also made that groups could become unproductive for their participants: 'there would be a danger, wouldn't there, with recurring funding that was just signed off by someone, that the group could stagnate and no-one would know' (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 10/12/13).

Interviewees at Start similarly raised problems they had encountered in the past with dependency and stagnation:

And it was very successful from the point of the people using the service, they did love it and did flourish. But really, about five or six years down the line it became obvious that there were... the risks were becoming apparent, that it was hard to know what to do with people, how to move them forward, how to disengage people productively from the service, because we were doing more harm than good by doing that. (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13)

In response to this sense that clients became unproductively stuck as perpetual patients, Start had redesigned the service with much more emphasis on forward development:

We don't have a set time limit, but we talk very early on about the fact that being at Start is about engaging with the process of trying to develop and evolve skills to enable them to become more resourceful and self-reliant, and leave Start more tooled up emotionally if you like. It may be that their aspirations have changed, they've identified aspirations and then they're very focused about where they're heading as they go through Start. (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13)

They thus avoided the potential danger of running a funded service that no-one ever leaves, although they admitted, like most others, that the resources their clients could access once they finished the programme were limited: 'It's all just been cut, all the creative stuff's been cut from adult ed. There is WEA [Workers' Educational Association], which is still quite low cost, but compared to adult ed there isn't very much of it' (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13). These difficulties highlight the changed context in which arts for health organizations are operating in a period of economic crisis, due to diminishing grants, welfare reforms, and 'unprecedented cuts' in spending on social care and adult education (Local Government Association, 2014, p.6; University and College Union, 2015; Flinders, Dommatt and Tonkiss, 2014). There was thought, at Start, about how to help individuals become independent makers: 'the idea of the homework is to build independence in between sessions, so you've shown people that what they learn in the room is portable beyond the room, and actually belongs to them' (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13).

Most of my interviewees, however, wished to see such groups as an ongoing, open-ended form of support. The director of AFHC, for instance, envisioned

in every major town in Cornwall and in some rural areas as well . . . an at least weekly opportunity for somebody to come along to a group and have a go at some craft activity and be part of that for a long period or a short period, without any pressure to have any qualification or do anything else. (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14)

The organization, had it survived, would have been well placed to implement such a vision, which had effectively been piloted as part of this CDA. AFHC had been unsuccessful, in its last year of operation, in securing a grant from ACE to put the project in motion. AFHC's director, however, noted that when the organization's closure was announced, she received numerous messages from previous participants underlining that the effects of even shorter-term projects could be

enduring; on occasion, groups had continued to meet and found ways of financing themselves, and supportive friendships, formed in the context of a group that no longer existed, often survived (Interview 3, Jayne, AFHC, 25/11/15). These reports suggest that the habitual reorientations produced by arts-for-health activity may under some conditions outlive the interventions and organizations that contributed to their formation.

In summary, in a climate of economic crisis, these organizations found themselves in a financially precarious position, and responded with a variety of make-do-and-mend tactics. Their enterprising strategies are described by Soteri-Proctor (2011, p.19) as characteristic of those used by third sector 'community bricoleurs'. Fundraising under these conditions, however, created an extra workload and persistent anxiety and uncertainty concerning organizational stability or survival. These conditions also entailed risk for vulnerable participants, and highlighted the problematic of dependency, although there were differences of opinion concerning whether this should be addressed through careful design of time-delimited interventions, or the development of sustainable models for open-ended groups. Economic conditions are thus forcing urgent changes to models of provision that were established before the economic crisis; the social enterprise model used by Sweet Cavanagh, the low-cost community group model used by the Pendon Crafts Group, and the in-house NHS model represent very different, and partial, solutions to these difficulties.

### **9.3. Articulating the distinctive potentials of crafts for health**

Chapter 2 noted that themes of companionship, comfort, and distraction dominate in interview-based research about the benefits of crafting, and where feelings such as competence and confidence are reported, little is said about their relationship to social, material, or processual factors. Research into facilitator understandings of processes of change is rare, although Raw (2013) found common practitioner understandings of mechanisms of impact in collaborative, event-based community arts interventions. In the present study, similarly, interviews with facilitators

about the distinctive qualities craft as a medium evidence a common philosophy of practice.

Discussions with facilitators about crafts activities demonstrate that their employment was not arbitrary in the sense of being a mere pretext for social connection or occupation; their distinctive potentials were thoughtfully articulated. Crafts activities were seen to draw people in, and perceived as accessible in a way that 'fine art' activities were not: 'there's something about the crafts that's very accessible for people who aren't feeling confident and maybe have no skills in the area of making' (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 30/07/13). Crafts were described as having a domestic familiarity and portability that made them less intimidating than many other art forms, and easier to pursue in a home environment. They were also described as a 'social oil' (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13) that facilitated talk, particularly for participants who might have struggled with conventional chit-chat.

Part of their allure was also described in terms of their aesthetic pull:

The artist who put this together, she started off with the nest base, but encouraged people to add to the nest, and there's something about a nest that people seem to like, and they come and want to stand around it, like standing around a fire or something, but also she'd got these beautiful coloured threads and fabric, and there's something, almost, you found people coming up and just, almost like magpies, wanting to thread things, do things—there's something about the materials. (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14)

Beyond the immediate properties that drew people in, facilitators also noted many aspects of making activities that they saw as connected to their potential benefits. Occasionally the familiar description of the crafts as distracting and soothing emerged, although this was often when facilitators were referring to participant reports rather than their own observations:

so you hear these comments, these echoes, coming through - 'it's the group that's kept me going', or other weeks she's come back and said, 'because I had the craft group to think about it kept my mind...', she said, 'I just thought about the craft, and it took my mind off my problems'. (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13)

Similarly, crafts were seen to have an element of ‘plugging away’ (Interview, Catherine, Double Elephant, 15/07/13) which could be helpfully distracting or absorbing, allowing a state of mindful immersion and a sense of steady progress. The most persistently recurring ideas about the benefits of crafting, however, were those concerning playfulness, failure, decision making and reflection.

### *Playfulness*

Facilitators repeatedly articulated a connection between play and creativity. Making was seen as ‘good for people because they can play’ (Interview, Michelle, CoolTan Arts, 12/07/13); and ‘just about playing and it’s about seeing what happens and practising the technique’ (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13). It allowed ‘people to think that they can just play’, and ‘what was really noticeable in that was, yes, people’s sense of pleasure in the material’ (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14).

Alongside this sensory play, crafting was understood to foster a broadly playful, heuristic attitude, a willingness to take risks and to trust to luck, which relieved anxious participants of the heavy burden of responsibility for what they produced. Printmaking, for instance, because governed by messy processes substantially outside the maker’s control, could have ‘something magical and transformational’ about it that ‘seemed to unlock people’ (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14). Similarly:

I think that when you do a craft thing like printing or pottery, it challenges the learners to free up their thinking and their control of what they’re wanting to create, because the actual process can take over, and surprise them, and they have to learn to go with it, and that’s quite a learning journey for some of them, because sometimes they’re very focused on wanting it to be a certain way, and they have to learn that, no, the process will do something different to it. (Interview, Luky, Mindlift, 02/08/13)

One facilitator used the printmaking plate itself as a metaphor for the protected frame in which a new relation to making could be developed:

So what we’ve always said about printmaking is that in terms of your plate as your matrix, giving you um, almost like a safety . . . like a barrier— so it’s got borders, and that you can then, um, first of all, you can make changes, within a safe place; second of all, you can distance yourself from the outcome, so that you’ve made this,

and then as you print it, and as you reveal the print, that print, it's yours, but also there's a distance, because the press has taken over, and so, I think that's quite helpful. (Interview, Catherine, Double Elephant, 15/07/13)

Activities were often thoughtfully designed to foster a playful approach, as in the following two examples:

So one of the processes Jude uses is clingfilm on wet watercolour wash, and it creates unpredictable, beautiful textures that look like landscapes, and that's really exciting for people—it's very playful, you're using a kitchen product, and it's full of surprises, and when you take the cling film off and everybody looks at everybody else's, there's oohs and ahs and a shared joy of accomplishment and surprise, and that is a very potent mix, it creates a vibrancy within the group, which is lovely. (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13)

If you're painting or inking up some leaves, you know, that's not yours; you don't have to draw either, which is great; you can trace, you don't have to use drawn images, it can be based on texture and colour, there's so many ways of approaching it, which means that anyone who says, oh, I can't draw, or I can't do that, you can get away from that, really, and that's what makes it popular, because it offers later artists a way in to an art form, without feeling that you're failing straight away. (Interview, Catherine, Double Elephant, 15/07/13)

### *Failure and frustration*

Under these relaxed conditions, paradoxically, tolerance for 'failure' and frustration could be enlarged:

Well, we've been making, like, paper bags and paper boxes, recently, and that's been nice because it's three-dimensional, it's not flat, and it's a new thing a lot of them haven't done before, so it's bringing everybody together, like laughing about like things turning out not quite right, and that's been really nice. (Interview, Nessa, Claremont Project, 05/06/13)

Interviewees noted that the ability to deal with setbacks was an important life skill:

[W:] I think failure is really important actually, and I think people must fail at something while they're here—it's just completely unrealistic to never put people in a position where . . . I don't mean set people up to fail, but if that happens, something explodes in the kiln, the dye doesn't stick on the textile and it all washes out, that's only like your cake sinking in the middle, isn't it. [A:] The point is to look at the 'why' and the 'what would I do next time, what could I do in anticipation of that' which is the skill that you'd hope that person could then carry on; to become insightful about it not being a mistake, but an experience (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13)

Even painful failures were seen to have potentially transformative impacts on everyday life:

My reasoning behind this, and I think Julie's and Becca's as well, doesn't matter what we're doing, doesn't matter who or what, it enables people to experience problems! Failures! Really visiting the waste paper basket on a regular basis—a really painful, break-your-knees, tears, everything else, stamp-your-feet day, smoke twenty cigarettes, because the bloody thing won't work; it's finding out about failure . . . And learning that actually you do have the facility within you to *solve* that problem. Not completely, not absolutely, not perfectly, but you can solve it so that things work. And then saying, showing that, and taking it another stage, and then taking it another stage and then taking it another stage. Until the person, the participant comes back to me and says, or to Julie, or to Becca, hey, that made me realize I can do that in the outside world, and you say, yeah! I mean that's such a gift! To give back to us! It makes you cry, it's so lovely. (Interview, Michael, Creative Response, 03/07/13)



*Figure 9.2. Struggling with a creative problem in the Pendon Crafts Group  
(Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

These understandings, the fruit of facilitators' observations over long periods, are consistent with what I noted in Chapter 5 concerning the inevitability and transformative potential in experiences of frustration.

### *Decision making*

At the same time, most of my interviewees pointed to making as a sphere in which it was possible to exercise control through decision making, without the stakes being too high: 'you've got a hell of a lot of skills and decision-making processes, but the decision-making processes are not stressful, because there's no need to achieve' (Interview, Michelle, CoolTan Arts, 12/07/13).

The facilitators I interviewed were familiar with the difficulty many participants experienced with decision making, and felt that the opportunity to experiment with making choices in a safe environment was a major aspect of the therapeutic effectiveness of their groups. Their comments highlight the important role that

design plays in affective dimensions of creative making. As interviewees at Start put it, 'we came to realize that making without design is only half of the autonomy that can be produced by making' (Interview, Wendy, Start, 16/09/13). Facilitators shared a perception that decision making was a ubiquitous aspect of crafts creativity, that confidence about making choices could be enlarged by degrees, that choices needed to feel 'safe' and sometimes needed to be managed or limited, and that decision-making skills were transferable to everyday life:

Decision making is central to the artistic process, and in this way is very helpful to people suffering from depression, who often struggle to cope with the decision making that's part of daily life. Making reintroduces people to decision-making processes in a manageable way. Recovering a sense of self and the capacity to make decisions has a big impact—sometimes in areas such as relationships. People learn to recognize what's good for them, and become more able to say no. This has many repercussions in daily life. (Interview, Lou, Arts Lift, 07/06/13)

So the achievement happens without pressure . . . things that are really simple like shall I paint this green or blue, it's a decision, but it's not a decision where if you paint your living room blue and you then don't like it, you'll feel like you've failed, do you know what I mean, so the fact that you can make these decisions in a safe way, even though it might not quite feel it, it is safe, and people have come back and said my family really like me coming here, cause I've been able to, like, make cups of tea when I go home. (Interview, Michelle, CoolTan Arts, 12/07/13)

Yeah, and there are so many choices—'where do I go?'—but they have a lot of choice, especially this group, because they've been doing it for a while; they can do whatever process, so that's kind of enough choice as it is—photoetching, monoprint, drypoint, linocut, screenprint, they can work across it, and combine them, so it's quite different, that support, whereas with a new group, we would cut that right down and offer them monoprint, collagraph, drypoint. (Interview, Catherine, Double Elephant, 15/07/13)

If somebody asks for [help with drawing] we'll do it, but sometimes if you leave someone for a minute, they might try it, and then they'll see they can do it, and there's more bravery, people are trying it now, they're giving it a go a bit more than they might have a few months ago . . . and maybe it is because we are stepping away for a few minutes and just doing something else before immediately handing it to them drawn. (Interview, Nessa, Claremont Project, 05/06/13)

Facilitators at Start had a very clear vision of how group activities could be designed to support decision-making capacities, and felt strongly that these skills were transferable to other areas of life:

In textiles, the tutors are very interested in opinion forming, which is linked to identity isn't it, so again, many people coming in, having been in mental health services for a long time, come to Start, and it's possible they haven't really articulated an opinion for a long time, so you might even get somebody at the

extreme end who can't decide whether to have tea or coffee and they say 'I'll have whatever you're having'; and that's not uncommon, but there's things you can do about that, and the artistic process is good for that, because every step of the way—you've got to make decisions all the time. But what you can do as a tutor is to frame those decisions, put safe walls around them, so, 'if you chose *that*, this might be the consequence; if you chose *that*, this might be the consequence. Neither one's wrong, but it's about what you prefer'. And then people know they're not going to hazard a guess and it's going to be wrong. But one of the exercises that the textile tutor has done in the past is to get people to discriminate rather than, if they're bad at decision making and opinion forming, then at least she can teach them to discriminate, so the exercise that she devised was to get people to take one of the baskets of colour-coded fabric from the shelf, and to cut little squares off ten of them, and then put them in order of tone. And then, stick them down, they had to do it as a group, and then, go to the photocopier and photocopy them, and that comes out tonal, and then they can see how close they were—and that's all been negotiated decision making. So people who took part in that process can see that, hmm, it's not 'right' or 'wrong' but it's just been something where they had to make a decision so they made one, and they got to the end of the exercise and it was fun, and there wasn't a risk to it, so these things are . . . there are quite imaginative approaches like that that on the face of it seem like art exercises, or they seem like *pure* art exercises, but there's a very serious purpose behind them. And again, that would never be hidden, it would be: this is why we're doing it, now let's reflect on what we got from that— isn't that interesting! Now you can see that next time you're in Tesco's and you can't decide between this and this, maybe you can think about some of the skills you've just used. So it's all about, it's got to be applicable to the rest of your life. (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13)

### *Reflection*

As in the example above, the facilitators I interviewed saw reflection as an important aspect of becoming a confident decision maker. They highlighted relational dimensions of the development of this reflective capacity:

And peer critiquing, and peer reflection; there's . . . a sense that people will look over your shoulder and they will comment on your work, always positively, because it's a positive environment, but yeah, you're there, and you can't hide it away; someone at some point, whether it's the tutor or other people, they will look at that and generally they will say, 'oh, that's really brilliant, that's really great'; so it's really supportive, other people going 'I love that!' or 'I really like this!' or 'I love the colours on this' or 'well, yeah, what do you think—will that work?', or 'I think it might work better if you do it like this', or 'I don't know if it's going to work, but why don't you give it a go and try'. (Interview, Catherine, Double Elephant, 28/07/13)

Unusually, in the case of Manchester Start, reflection was integrated as a formal practice, and seen as crucial to the development of new habits:

I'd say you're really not making the most of a person's creative experiences if you don't teach them how to be reflective and be insightful into what's happening.

Because for most of us, we do need to reflect on what we've learnt, in order to put it into practice later, otherwise you just forget it. You can't remember what the construction of the lesson was, and the lessons you learnt from it—it all evaporates. There's lots of research in the world of work, which says that it's pointless sending people on a training programme if you don't incorporate reflection on and application into practice around that in supervision. So it's known . . . and it's an educational principle as well, isn't it, that students in school, students in college will all reflect . . . so it's not a unique principle, but it seems to be unique in arts for health. It is unusual, and I usually encounter a blank face when I talk about it in the arts-for-health world. And I think one reason is that there's a prejudice about evaluation in the arts-for-health world, as if it somehow sullies the purity of the experience of making, by analysing it. And I completely disagree with that. I think it's the opposite. So that's where we are. So we developed reflective diaries with service users, telling us what they liked about it, so at the end of the session, you fill in a sheet, about what you did, what you've learnt. (Interview, Wendy and Annie, Start, 31/07/13)

This way of introducing reflection was seen as highly effective in a project where participants were very explicitly 'patients' for whom goals had been set. Similarly in the adult education-based Mindlift project, a peer-orchestrated 'collaborative appraisal' was structured in.

In other groups, facilitators actively developed a reflective culture in less directive ways:

I suppose it depends on the person—some people will make a joke about it, and other people will want to know why it's gone wrong, and then you might go through the processes with them again, and that's good because then they might have missed a step, or they might have just done something a little bit awkward and then they can understand why, like, it's not because they're not good at it, it might be because they just missed something on the way. (Interview, Nessa, Claremont Project, 05/06/13)

One facilitator noted the challenges involved in receiving feedback:

Learning how to take feedback without being very hurt, like for example, this design doesn't really work actually, or these colours, I don't think they're great together, without feeling those old feelings coming back, I think it's very good for learning how to be confident enough to hear constructive criticism—which again, helps people when they go back out into the world of employment, because we can often get made to feel, we can be reduced to nothing if we have low self-esteem, and we haven't practised that. (Interview, Florence, Sweet Cavanagh, 19/06/14)

Interviewees also felt that crafted objects had an important significance for their makers, giving them 'a focus on something that's valued, and they can be valued through it, and it gives them confidence because they've done something that they

can relate to other people about, without all the other things that they worry about' (Interview, Luky, Mindlift, 22/07/13).

In summary, questioning about the distinctive qualities of crafts creativity in mental health contexts produced considerable consensus about crafting's potential to support playfulness, toleration of difficulty, decision making and reflection. These observations were largely consistent with my own as participant observer. Facilitators described these capacities as elicited by the making task itself, and also saw them as transferable to everyday life situations. Whilst they felt that crafting naturally developed these strengths, most practitioners deliberately engineered their interventions to maximize such effects, usually without flagging up the intended benefits to participants. Start were unusual in directing participants' attention to what activities were intended to achieve, and in seeing this signposting as an important contribution to the benefits that accrued. This material demonstrates some common philosophies of practice rooted in hands-on experience of making, designing and facilitation, and many shared beliefs, derived from long-term observation, concerning the distinctive impacts of crafts creativity. It also evidences some differences in style of implementation, in particular a more structured reflective approach at Start, which might have been more difficult to institute in a less medicalized setting.

#### **9.4. Challenges for practitioners**

Facilitator interviewees described considerable challenges faced in their work, and similar difficulties are reported in my field notes. Challenges concerned, firstly, the pressures facilitators were under in shielding their groups from the destructive impacts of financial instability; secondly the pragmatic vicissitudes involved in the provision and preparation of materials; thirdly the demanding emotion work involved in caring for participants who were sometimes very vulnerable; and lastly difficulties related to norms of precarious, poorly paid, and voluntary labour in the field. Practitioners were often subject to many of these pressures at once, and support in the form of peer groups and supervision, common in many caring professions, was largely absent.

*Responding to economic pressures*

My field notes record numerous ways in which facilitators attempted to increase the financial robustness or autonomy of their groups. These efforts sometimes came into direct conflict with what was desired by participants themselves. Paradoxically, for instance, ethically motivated attempts to involve groups in decision making and planning were often rejected by participants looking for respite from already-too-onerous responsibilities elsewhere in their lives. The need to raise and to manage money was not just anxiety-provoking in itself, but contaminated by panic, since participants knew that groups—often real lifelines—were under threat of closure if funding couldn't be found. In the Hellan group, whose funding situation was particularly shaky, the facilitator was obliged to take a fairly directive role in encouraging participants to support the group by making goods for sale. This created a number of pressures for participants, including the limits placed on the kind of object that could be made, the obligation to work collectively at least some of the time, the time pressure created by deadlines, and pressure to give work up to be donated or sold. Some resistance was evident, if not always openly expressed. In an extract from field notes, for instance:

Group members seem a bit ambivalent about the prospect of working on group pieces, even though they recognize it would raise their group's profile and make a contribution to the surgery. The idea is endorsed in theory, but as soon as it requires commitment to execute, people seem to feel coerced. It is noticeable during these discussions that making comes to a halt. Gayle jokes with some tension in her voice, 'We're going to need a broom up our backsides if we're going to get all this done'. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 29/10/13)

More confident members sometimes opted out of projects: two or three people confessed that they didn't like the cards they were putting together for sale; one woman who was a pacifist declined to work on a quilt commemorating the first world war; and others were direct about their wish to carry on with a personal project rather than collaborating on a group one. At the same time these group activities created valuable links to the wider community and opportunities for showcasing as well as the development of useful skills. They also produced extra funds for the group, and these were considered, presciently, as a safety net should AFHC at some point be unable to secure funding. The facilitator was thus obliged to walk a thin line between prioritizing the wishes of individuals and the needs of

the group. Most often, resistance was covert. Group members sometimes referred to the items for sale at the surgery as 'your display' to the facilitator (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 29/10/13), and for entirely understandable reasons they were reluctant to be involved in basic housekeeping like tidying, adding to the display, and recording stock and takings, work which then fell to her.

### *Responding to practical pressures*

As already noted, distinctive possibilities arise in using crafts to support wellbeing, as a consequence of the materiality of making. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 noted affective dimensions of working with materials that are salient for psychological change or resilience, and Chapter 8 demonstrated that the creative, social, and economic traffic that ensues in such groups is of a particular kind as a result of the thoroughly material world of crafts creativity.

The 'thinginess' (Ingold, 2010a, p.96) of crafts creativity presented challenges as well as opportunities for facilitators. Getting materials lined up and ready for action was time-consuming. As noted above, the Hellan group's facilitator engaged her group regularly in community ventures that involved producing goods for sale, or group pieces for exhibition in public venues. Whilst notionally these were projects to be undertaken collectively and within group time, in practice it was necessary to spend hours a week in preparation for such ventures, and this was not only time-consuming but at times entailed worry and responsibilities that vulnerable participants were naturally reluctant to share. In setting up the project involving a commemoration quilt for the local heritage centre, for instance, she carried out hours of preparation, cutting out all the quilt blocks, making samples to show to participants so they understood how they would be joined, and producing further samples of quilting and sewing techniques to illustrate what she had in mind. After the first session in which the group worked on this project she shared with me her uncertainty about whether the project was viable:

We also talk about the preparation of the quilt project and how much anxiety this is costing Faye. She feels she's going to have to work hard this term to stay one step ahead of the group, and as time is short, she may have to do many hours of work herself to get the project finished off. (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 03/06/14)

My first-hand experience in the role of facilitator also underlines the amount of preparation time required to run such groups effectively. My field diaries are full of notes about the acquisition and management of tools and commodities, and my observations about the importance of this as part of my role. At the simplest level, materials had to be acquired and transported to the group so that they were there when required. When I mismanaged the provisioning of the group, participants were impeded and I created surplus frustration, although we generally met such challenges by improvising solutions with what was available:

Kate has the pragmatic idea of inking up her block to see how it is going to print in its current state, and I realize I have managed to leave the rollers and ink at home. I encourage Kate to test her block anyway by applying some ink she has brought using a dry brush and she does this very successfully, pleased to see how it's going to print. I make a note to myself that we will need a variety of papers, including some decent printmaking ones, next week. (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 04/11/13)

Buying suitable tools or materials with a small budget could be challenging. On a few occasions, getting cheaper versions of tools, for instance for rug hooking, turned out to be a false economy, since they made tasks harder for participants who were all too ready to blame any difficulties on themselves. During our sessions, I was generally assessing the suitability of materials we had, making mental or actual lists of materials we needed, and designing solutions for their storage, since we were spilling out of the cupboard space available and this made tools and materials hard to organize and to find. My notes reflect a constant internal dialogue about such practicalities, carried on alongside my teaching activities and more personal aspects of the work.

### *Responding to emotional pressures*

Alongside these economic and pragmatic challenges, dealing with participants' emotional needs formed a demanding and sometimes challenging strand of the facilitator's role. A former facilitator of the Hellan crafts group put this as follows:

I don't think people realize how emotionally draining it can be. And there is an absolute need for the facilitator to understand that it is a job, but not to the extent of, it's nine to five and I'm off now and just go... because you know you'll hear the most terrible tales, and it's difficult not to take that all on board and think my God I don't know how this person can cope and what can I do to help them and all that

kind of stuff and that's the sort of normal reaction. (Interview, Leah, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/02/14)

Other facilitators I interviewed concurred, most of them pointing out, however, that a sensitive awareness of individuals' emotional states was crucial: 'often when I'm working in my group, I'm listening to see how that person's feeling inside that day, particularly that day, because they are partly in my care' (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 22/11/13). The importance of this awareness was raised on several occasions by participants; 'you need someone running things who knows about mental health, who'll understand that you have some days where you don't feel so well' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 09/12/13).

Most typically, emotional need was evident in the desire to talk. This was the case partly because some participants were somewhat or extremely socially isolated, and partly because the group and its facilitator, once experienced as safe, became containers for material that was not shared elsewhere. Numerous participants commented spontaneously on the helpfulness of the facilitator's listening ear, and acknowledged the importance, for instance, of 'being able to have a rant' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 07/04/14). Some of my organizational interviewees recalled instances where disclosures of serious and ongoing abuse had been made to facilitators, resulting in complex ethical dilemmas (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14). Often talk was not ostensibly about life difficulties or trauma but these could nonetheless be read between the lines; for instance passing reference by a widowed participant to the greaseproof paper she used to separate pork chops in the freezer, 'because they're always sold in pairs, and I can only eat one' (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/06/13) held matter-of-fact but painful references to mortality, loneliness, and loss. More often participants simply needed someone to witness, with interest and respect, the smaller trials and satisfactions of their daily lives. All facilitators I interviewed found such listening a rewarding part of the work, although some tried, for the sake of other participants, to keep protracted talk about problems out of the room (Interview, Catherine, Double Elephant, 28/07/13; Interview, Michael, Creative Response, 03/07/13). Caring in this context was described as freely given and expressive of an ethical or compassionate stance, rather than in terms of its exchange value as a dutiful,

prescribed or expedient performance; such 'emotion work' needs to be distinguished from the emotional labour common in service industries as well as caring professions, although the two potentially overlap (see Hochschild 1983; Warner, Talbot and Bennison, 2013).

Thoughtfulness was required in relation to issues of dependency and the maintenance of appropriate boundaries. The dangers of emotional entanglement were flagged up by a number of interviewees (Interview, Faye, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/11/13; Interview 1, Jayne, AFHC, 30/07/13; Interview, Michael, Creative Response, 03/07/13). Participants also talked of the emotional ties that formed with facilitators. One for instance told me, 'she's glad that I've warned her that I won't be around after July, as she says "I get very attached to people and it upsets me if they disappear without warning"' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 15/04/14); another expressed her appreciation after the last session, saying, 'it wasn't just the group, it was you' (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 21/07/14). These ties were also evident in the fact that on the rare occasions that groups were led by replacement facilitators, many people stayed away; I witnessed this in both groups and heard other facilitators (e.g. Interview, Leah, Hellan Crafts Group, 11/02/14) describe the same phenomenon. AFHC had considered addressing this issue by having guest facilitators for short engagements, and encouraging participants to be more autonomous in intervening periods. Such dependence, however, as well as being a potential liability, can also reproduce healthy forms of reliance that exist in good-enough early relationships, and provide the 'secure base' that is necessary for development towards independence (Bowlby, 1988). Selves can also be seen as constituted, through and through, by 'relations of dependency' (Butler, 2005, p.20); consequently 'it is not possible to wholly separate instrumental and emotional dimensions of what takes place when people attempt to meet their own and others' needs' (Bondi, 2008, p.259).

Relations of dependency were considered in detail in bringing my involvement with the Pendon Group to a satisfactory close. Happily, the group survived my departure and most members continue to attend, although its future is now more precarious because of AFHC's closure. Participants were consulted about and

prepared for my departure, and towards the end of my involvement, I witnessed an increasing sense of ownership of the group by its members; for instance I became fairly redundant in setting up the hall, getting out materials and packing things away again. These tasks the group members progressively orchestrated between themselves without being asked to do so. I also witnessed them thinking independently about the future of the group. My failure to be there forever and on demand was in this case not only ultimately tolerable, but conducive to further independent development. A great deal of emotion work was involved in managing emotional ties in ways that were ethical and responsible; as Raw (2013, p.197) notes, it is essential 'that arts practitioners have adequate skills to handle the emotional aspects of their practice'. This issue will be further considered in the concluding chapter.

### *Working for crumbs, or for love*

In addition to challenges related to the facilitation task itself, most arts facilitators suffer when it comes to being financially rewarded for their work within what Abbing (2004) characterizes as the exceptional economy of the arts. Many consent to work for love, or crumbs, in exchange for the special status conferred on artists. A European Union report notes that,

despite flourishing culture/creative industry markets, [artists'] activities are generally carried out in far more precarious circumstances than other occupations. Atypical (project-based) and casual employment, irregular and unpredictable income, unremunerated research and development phases, accelerated physical wear and tear and high levels of mobility are among the key features not taken account of in the existing legal, social security and tax structures'. (European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, 2006, p.iii)

Phenomenological or cognitive research on creative practices (e.g. Csentsikmihalyi's 1990 work on flow) tends to focus on the pleasures and to neglect the pressures and frustrations of creative experience, supporting a portrayal of artistic activity as a solipsistic and self-gratifying endeavour that needs no financial reward. Artists themselves continue to rehearse the cultural myths surrounding artistic production, insisting that 'art is a gift', that 'artists are autonomous', and that 'creating authentic work gives one endless private satisfaction' (Abbing, 2004, p.31). As noted in Chapter 2, work within the creative

industries is often precarious and piecemeal, and this is especially the case in the fragile economy of arts for health. In most of the organizations interviewed, arts practitioners (often with relevant degrees, further training and much experience) were sessional and paid for hours of contact time, and some worked unpaid. AFHC's 2014 twenty-five pounds per hour was a typical rate. When preparation and administration time were taken into account (between two and four hours per one hour of facilitation in my own and others' experience) remuneration was much closer to the national minimum wage. In the current market, furthermore, the chances of picking up enough such work to make a living are remote.

My field notes record many conversations between the Hellan group facilitator and myself concerning the hours of preparation a session had required; at the same time we also expressed enormous excitement about the creative projects we had in view, and there was an overlap between what we viewed as our own creative practice, and the one we mediated for our participants (e.g. Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 09/12/13). To this extent we can be said to have been rehearsing social representations of artistic creativity as the expression of an 'internal' need, and creative micro-entrepreneurialism as plucky and exemplary (Gill and Pratt, 2008). The precarity of such work is sadly illustrated by the financial consequences for Faye of AFHC's closure. Such 'fragmented' creative labour (Reimer 2009), often involving multiple poorly remunerated and temporary jobs alongside family responsibilities, is predominantly performed by women, and this is especially the case in a field governed by an ethic of care. As McRobbie (2010) notes, the gendered nature of such creative career pathways is often overlooked when the field is considered solely from a post-Marxist economic perspective in terms of its precarity.

### *Challenges of a volunteer economy*

Under current economic conditions, volunteers make an essential contribution to work in arts for health, and most of the organizations I interviewed were heavily reliant upon volunteer labour. This could take the form of unpaid work done by experienced facilitators, or the replacement of experienced, paid facilitators with inexperienced volunteers. AFHC, for instance, found volunteers rather than paid

facilitators to run the Pendon Group when my involvement came to an end, and this was motivated partly by the need to develop a low-cost, sustainable model for open access, non-time-delimited groups. In this case and some others, volunteers had limited mental health-specific experience or training. Organizational interviewees also noted that the facilitator's first-hand creative experience as 'someone who really knows their stuff' (Interview 2, Jayne, AFHC, 08/07/14) was important, not just in enthusing and teaching participants, but also in helping them to move through moments of creative paralysis and hopelessness, suggesting that there are also potential difficulties with the use of creatively inexperienced volunteers.

Motivations for volunteering may be complex and conflictual (Steffen and Fothergill, 2009). A simple typology (Kelemen and Mangan, 2013) characterizes potential motivations as altruistic (or driven by 'responsible individualism' – see Wilkinson, 2010); instrumental (related to the hope of receiving benefits in kind); or forced (for instance where volunteering is a form of compulsory work experience). This schema maps onto arrangements I observed, where time was offered as a personal contribution, or in the hope of gaining paid work in the future, or as part of an obligatory placement, for instance in a social work training. Research (e.g. Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004) shows that individuals from marginalized groups are under-represented in the volunteering population. In an ethnographic study of volunteers supporting refugees in the USA, Erickson (2010) observes that volunteers were at times motivated by feelings of moral superiority or reforming zeal. In relation to my own experience with one potential volunteer, I found I had to tactfully challenge his stereotypical representations of participants, and the ways that he talked about them in their presence (Field note, Pendon Crafts Group, 04/11/13). These observations suggest that if volunteers are to be involved extensively in such work, there is a need for training to encourage critical reflection on a broad range of issues including wellbeing, mental health, creativity, and arts pedagogy.

In addition to these practical concerns, some cynicism has been expressed about the development of the third sector under current conditions of discursive,

political, and economic neoliberalism. It has been suggested (e.g. Seddon, 2007, p.27) that when voluntary services are purchased by government, voluntary organizations lose their independence, and that both organizations and volunteers enable capitalism through becoming complicit in 'roll-back neoliberal urban politics' (Rosol, 2010, p.239). The continued existence of voluntarism can, however, just as easily be used to refute the thesis that that capitalism is transforming 'every human interaction into a transient market exchange' (Ciscel and Heath 2001, p.401) and that 'markets are subsuming greater portions of everyday life' (Gudeman 2001, p.144); such assumptions are challenged in the work of Williams (2004), Gibson-Graham (2008) and others. My observations also suggest that volunteering was one of many ways in which these creative groups engendered diverse economic practices producing extended social networks and diasporic conceptions of community.

## **9.5. Group crafting on prescription**

The NHS has been described as

uneasily poised between a 20th century system in which health is produced by clinicians working in hierarchical organizations, delivering packets of care to waiting deferential users, and a 21st century system in which health is co-created through partnership and effective sharing of information between clinicians, patients and the wider public. (Drinkwater, 2013, p.400)

General practitioners are envisaged as key actors in this transition, not only through their involvement in local clinical commissioning groups, but because the relationship between doctors and patients, embodied in the consultation, is 'at the heart of our health system' (Fischer and Ereaut, 2012, p.4). There is a move towards reorienting the consultation around 'purposeful, structured conversations that drive towards patient-driven goals of wellbeing' rather than 'diagnosis-driven aims of "cure"', (Hampson, 2013, p.6) and social prescribing is envisaged as an important element in the proposed 'partnership' model of primary care (Langford, 2013a).

Links between medical services and wellbeing-oriented community groups, whilst advocated by think tanks and innovation units, are not yet well established and take a variety of forms (see Thomson, Camic and Chatterjee, 2015, for a recent review of existing community referral schemes). Two of the projects identified in my research (the Hellan Crafts Group and Start), although organized and funded quite differently, had memberships exclusively referred by a medical route. Most of the others had some participants who had been referred from primary or secondary care, although the means by which this happened were often ad hoc. Whilst literature (e.g. Stickley and Hui, 2012) suggests that social prescribing is viewed positively by referrers, three interviewees (the director of AFHC, the GP vice chair of Islington Clinical Commissioning Group, and the GP instrumental in setting up the Hellan crafts group) had personal experience of difficulties involved in implementing a social prescribing model. These difficulties involved general practitioners and patients, as well as the intermediaries involved in signposting patients to appropriate services, and all of them may have been salient in the lack of interest the Pendon GPs showed in our project.

For GPs, there were difficulties concerning both their enthusiasm and their capacity for keeping abreast of relevant community resources. The Islington GP felt it was hard to enlist 'generations of doctors, some of whom were trained in a very different environment, who view the delivery of health care in a very different way' (Interview, Jo, ICCG, 19/07/13). The term 'social prescribing' itself was viewed with some suspicion by the Hellan GP, in spite of his evident support for the concept of referral to community resources; he felt it was 'too politically correct' but also too vague and that it might encourage the prescriptive administration of resources that were better accessed through independent volition (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 10/12/13). More practically, asking GPs to take a signposting role to other services was seen as wholly unrealistic. Already overwhelmed by core tasks, GPs were unable to keep track of information sent to them by external organizations:

What GPs will do is put it in a file, or put it in a drawer, and then they'll think that they'll remember it, so when they are seeing a patient, they'll think, oh gosh, yes I remember, is that appropriate for you, oh no, it's only for over 55. So it's a little bit

haphazard. And the other thing is that when you do remember, and you get it out, and you fill in the form and you send it off, often the funding has gone so the service has stopped, because it's two years later and something has changed. (Interview, Jo, ICCG, 19/07/13)

The Hellan GP concurred: 'every now and then I look through here [points to drawer] and think, oh I remember being given that leaflet a year ago' (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 10/12/13). The local crafts group remained in his awareness because of his role in setting it up, but he felt he didn't have time to maintain a similar connection with other groups. Difficulties were compounded by 'the problem of partners, and locums, and this lost tribe of doctors who come and go' (Interview, Jo, ICCG, 19/07/13). Even where projects or artists were resident within a surgery, this made little difference:

The thing that was really difficult about that whole project [Arts in Primary Care] was that even the practices where you've got GPs who were really keen and enthusiastic and loved it all, they forgot that we were there, even if they've got an artist there who'd be there every week at least once a week, they'd still forget to refer people or . . . it was just really difficult. (Interview 1, Jayne, AFHC, 30/07/13)

As concerns patients, interviewees pointed out that people attending the GP sometimes felt 'fobbed off' (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan Surgery, 10/12/13) if directed to community resources rather than offered a prescription for medication. More problematically, for those most likely to benefit from external groups, there was often great anxiety and hence ambivalence about attendance, and most of the organizations I spoke to devoted considerable effort to accompanying participants to initial sessions, or were highly dependent on social workers, occupational therapists or intermediaries of some other kind to take on this role.

In some contexts these problems had been addressed through the intermediary role of health trainer, wellbeing coach or navigator (see Langford, 2013b). Where this role existed in the organizations interviewed, it was fulfilled by someone working within a surgery, or by an arts-for-health organization. The Hellan surgery had benefitted from funding to have a wellbeing facilitator for a period, 'but it was very hard to show that it had made a difference, and though we all thought it was a nice thing . . . I think it was probably very dependent on who you had, how well they did the job probably made quite a difference' (Interview, Jonathan, Hellan

Surgery, 10/12/13). There was also the issue, particularly relevant to crafts on prescription, of the tastes and experience of the navigators themselves; the director of AFHC pointed to research underway that found that health trainers in this signposting role were unlikely to direct clients to cultural or creative activities since these were often not things they engaged in themselves (Interview 1, Jayne, AFHC, 30/07/13; Froggett and Roy, 2014). This perhaps also reflects the persistence of a cultural trope about the elite or innate nature of artistic creativity.

The experiences of my interviewees thus highlighted considerable challenges in building links between the NHS and community and arts for health initiatives. Difficulties were seen to reside in the slow pace of NHS cultural change, and the inadequacy of structures for the implementation of social prescription. Recent research cited in Chapter 2 (e.g. Kimberlee, et al., 2014) paints a more optimistic picture, since it attempts to specify the conditions necessary for such projects to succeed, and makes a reasonable case for the creation of significant long-term savings. The grey literature on the future development of the NHS also reports on pilot projects in which general practice and wellbeing-oriented resources are integrated within 'wellbeing' or 'healthy living' centres (see Langford, 2013b). How the unregulated but visionary and innovative practices of arts for health are modified when incorporated into these highly regulated frameworks has not yet been the subject of research, although at Start, those involved were able, with some negotiation, to keep their work grounded in a passionate, reflective, and idealistic vision of the potential benefits of the arts for health.

## **9.6. Pockets of constraint – or spaces of freedom?**

As evidenced above, it is possible to see groups like the ones in which I worked, and the economy of arts for health in which they operate, as highly constrained through lack of resources, visibility, and an evidence base. Multiple characteristics of the shoe-string economy of group crafting—including its small scale and the low status of amateurism, the crafts, unpaid work, domesticity, and women's mental health difficulties—leave it ripe to be written off as inconsequential (Soteri Proctor, 2011; Turney, 2004; Harriman 2007). At least some of my field research

could be used to support the pessimistic conclusion that this world of poorly funded amateur crafting, performed mainly by women with difficulties generally understood medically and intrapersonally as ‘mental health problems’, was unable to enact any challenge to dominant representations of women, vernacular making, alternative economies, or human and social nature, nor to attract the resources that would ensure the survival of such work.

Countering this possibility, my fieldwork underlines that creative community groups, part of a submerged economy of exchange, contribution, and mutual support, have strengths resulting from operating below the radar. Such collectives produce opportunities for personal and collaborative action, the impacts of which resonate way beyond the groups themselves. As elaborated in Chapter 8, it is possible to describe participants as at the centre of networks of exchange, contribution, and influence produced by their groups’ activities. Individuals, when described in this way, cannot be positioned as passive recipients of care. Other recent work comes to similar conclusions. A Third Sector Research Centre report (2013, p.38), for example, suggests that the virtues of “little societies” operating below the radar of Big Society policy planners’ have been underestimated. The report draws attention to

the multiple purposes and functions fulfilled by BTR [below the radar] groups, their flexible and informal nature, the potential beneficial impacts of such groups (particularly in terms of acting as a bridge between communities and political systems), their role in sustaining the free exchange of resources (even in the absence of funding), and their potential ability to attract resources to communities or to support existing resources.

Whilst an overtly political or community agenda was rarely a feature of the groups I observed (unlike many of those that were the focus of Raw’s 2013 study), they nonetheless provided opportunities for a variety of forms of quiet activism, whether through the knitting of a blanket for charity, through consolidation of community links and the production of alternative economies, or through challenging a variety of conventional understandings of mental health, inclusion, and creativity. Such work potentially produces a space of creative tension in which normative versions of wellbeing can be disrupted as well as reproduced. It can be argued, with Raw (p.387), that ‘to formalize and control such a practice . . . would

likely destroy some of its key strengths'. There is reason to believe, however, that work using the crafts in health has the potential to retain its distinctive characteristics as an assertively creative, imaginative, and social practice (as distinct from a normatively therapeutic one) when integrated with conventional health services, as witnessed in the work done by Start.

There are also reasons to be hopeful about the longer-term development of more sustainable models of provision for work using the crafts in health. A first reason for hopefulness concerns what might justifiably now be described as an academic and policy assemblage constituting itself around the field of arts for health. This assemblage has undergone substantial consolidation during the life of this CDA. In January 2014, for instance, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellbeing was founded (Howarth, 2015). Legislative changes (to the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and the consequent establishment of PHE and Health and Wellbeing Boards) are conducive to further integration of local authority and health services and the third sector, as well as to greater awareness of mental health as an aspect of health more generally. Potentially, 'austerity intensifies the quest for cost-effective provision, which is a major opportunity for the arts' (Howarth, 2015). PHE, commissioned by the APPG, is currently undertaking a review of the evidence for arts in health; the APPG have also commissioned the development of an evaluation framework for arts and public health, currently underway. In addition, the APPG is setting up a two-year Inquiry, in partnership with King's College London, Guys and St Thomas's Charity, and the Royal Society of Public Health Special Interest Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, with funding from the Wellcome Trust and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The Inquiry aims to 'inform a vision for political leadership in the field of arts, health and wellbeing in order to support practitioners and stimulate progress over the next 5 years' (All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2015).

A second reason for hopefulness concerns the role such work is already expected to play in the restructuring of an NHS that offers 'more than medicine' (Langford, 2013b). Although the framework for such a health service remains to be

developed, more integrated services that cater for psychosocial as well as physical health needs are currently being piloted in the form of health-and-wellbeing polyclinics (for instance in Earl's Court, London, and in Stockport) in which GPs, wellbeing coaches and a variety of arts- and activity-based services operate under the same roof (Thomson, Camic and Chatterjee, 2015). Since independent third sector and community groups continue to be important potential resources for social prescribing, thought is also being given to how such work might be funded more reliably. Suggestions include direct commissioning by local clinical commissioning groups, and personal budgets that individuals can use to pay for services provided by third sector groups (Horne, Khan and Corrigan, 2013; Langford 2013b; National Health Service, 2011).

A further reason for optimism concerns the burgeoning 'cultures of belonging and networked social change' facilitated by the internet and social media, and standing in opposition to cultures of 'networked self-interest' implicated in the economic crises of the last decade (Cardoso and Jacobetty, 2012, p.177). Such cultures are conducive to the democratization of creativity, and a blurring of borders between professional and amateur design activity. Their impacts on contemporary cultures of amateur making are examined by Gauntlett (2011) and Hackney (2013). The proliferation of autonomous, participant-run creative groups of the 'knit and natter' variety supports one form of community arts participation not dependent on external support in the form of grants. Such groups undermine the distinction between making as therapy and making as a routine form of self-care, creative living, and social connection.

## **9.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has used interviews and observational material to describe the patched-together UK economy of crafting for health. Both the maintenance of the field as a whole and the work of individual groups can be seen to depend on enterprising and tenacious bricolage on the part of organizations, facilitators, and sometimes participants. Section 9.2 noted some shared organizational difficulties and Section 9.3 some common conceptions of the merits of the crafts in an arts for

health context, in spite of the lack of a ‘wholecloth’ or unified organizational framework in the field overall. Interviewees concurred that inadequate and unreliable funding imposed substantial limitations on how work was carried out, and the time periods over which projects could be run. On this score, there were differences concerning whether interventions should be relatively short-term and goal-directed, or whether benefits were only achievable in such groups through a longer-term or open-ended approach. Interviewees shared, however, a view of making as a practice that fostered crucial and empowering life skills, and they saw these as transferable. Section 9.4 examined difficulties produced by these imperfect conditions at the level of facilitation, and extended this discussion to the involvement of volunteers. The challenges involved in creating a more stable culture of crafts- and arts-for-health provision through links to the NHS was illustrated with reference to interviewee accounts in Section 9.5.

In Section 9.6, I observed that the small scale, low-status, make-do-and-mend characteristics of such work, often carried out ‘below the radar’, make it vulnerable to neglect and poor resourcing, so that problematic stereotypes are potentially reproduced. Countering this pessimistic view—one that performatively reproduces oppressive conditions (see Gibson-Graham, 2008)—I argued, however, that the work of these nine organizations reveals potentials of this informally organized field that distinguish it from rule-bound, professionalized domains like art therapy. These include possibilities for quiet activism, innovative practice, diverse alternative economic activity, and autonomous group development driven by local agendas. Such work can challenge orthodoxies about creativity, wellbeing, and mental health and can engineer new economic, relational, and creative possibilities for communities as well as individuals. The world of crafts for health is a space of freedom in spite of, and perhaps partly because of, its heuristic and sometimes shaky construction. Sometimes, however, the fabric of such work simply falls apart and cannot be repaired. Given the consequences of economic instability for organizations like AFHC and those with whom they work, new approaches are needed in order to develop and sustain future work in the field. Some grounds for hopefulness about the development of alternative models have been suggested.

## CHAPTER TEN CONCLUSIONS

### 10.1. Introduction



*Figure 10.1. Work at the initial conception stage in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*



*Figure 10.2. Work nearing completion in the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

As participants accurately observed, in any creative project, ‘the final product is the input of so many things’ (Interview, ID, Hellan Crafts Group, 15/04/14). ‘Its appearance changes’ with every new addition (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/03/13), and the raw materials are constantly ‘making suggestions, as it were, about how they could make a completely different picture’ (Field note, Hellan Crafts Group, 18/07/14). This conclusion reflects on the completed thesis as ‘final product’, noting the fortuitous discoveries and unexpected obstacles that occurred en route, the learning that occurred on the journey, and how that knowledge might be used in future work. In Section 10.2, I reflect on how the thesis fulfilled its original aims, whilst inevitably becoming something slightly different from what was originally envisaged. In Section 10.3, I summarize the ways in which this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge. In Section 10.4, I assess the implications of this contribution for good practice in the field, both at the level of facilitation, and at an organizational level. Lastly, in Section 10.5, I extend this discussion to the implications of the current project for further research in this area, and make some suggestions about how impacts on wellbeing might be reconceptualized in crafts- and arts-for-health research, in order to supplement

the predominantly hit-and-run, before-and-after forms of evaluation current in the field.

## **10.2. From preliminary design to completed artefact**

As described in the introductory chapter, this project was conceived as a way of producing new knowledge about the distinctive potentials of crafts practice as a means of supporting psychological wellbeing in the community and in primary care. Initial assessment of the arts-for-health policy and research landscape drew attention to the dominance of a highly instrumental conception of the arts as vehicles for producing benefits in domains such as inclusion, health, and wellbeing. This orientation, combined with the research methodologies commonly in use, has resulted in a lack of research into the characteristics of making itself. This thesis initially responded to calls from a number of commentators (e.g. McCarthy, et al., 2004) for renewed interest in the 'intrinsic' dimensions of creative activities. It aimed to explore, through long-term observation, the distinctive affective and experiential characteristics of amateur group crafting in arts for health and community contexts, and the potential relationship of these intrinsic features to longer-term benefits for the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. In addressing this aim, two sets of research questions were framed: the first set concerned the subjective, phenomenological dimensions of amateur making, and the second set, the potential relationship of these experiences to longer-term benefits. The thesis has provided some original and useful answers to these questions, although my conclusions are framed in terms other than those in which research questions were initially posed.

My initial questions were couched in terms of a number of ordinary distinctions, between, for instance, the intrapersonal and the interpersonal; individual and community; process and results; and cause and effect. A further distinction between makers and materials is implicit, since the role of materials was completely disregarded in my original conception of the research. These binaries are part of everyday language use, and are also the terms in which most of the debates about the impacts of arts for health have been framed. The data I gathered

through long-term participant observation were inadequately captured, however, in terms of these categories. In watching makers in interaction with each other and their materials, the individual/social distinction appeared increasingly empty, both when thinking about 'individual' minds, which were so clearly saturated with and constituted by interpersonal events, and also at the broader level of individual/community distinctions, where complex and reciprocal transactions undermined the distinction at every turn. Linear, before-and-after conceptions of cause and effect, central to evidence-based policy making and dominant in much existing research, also failed to capture the 'something/happening' that was observed; a more performative and less representational mode of description was eventually used to capture the onflow of the making eventscape and its potential for becoming in the present moment as well as the future. Lastly, whereas in my initial conception of the project, makers were to take centre stage, in practice, capturing what transpired forced me to register the significant dynamism of the physical stuff with which participants were working; materials insistently muscled their way into the account.

In all these ways, I was obliged to acknowledge that ideas about the intrinsic or essential nature of anything, whether wellbeing, the crafts, creativity, minds, or communities, were potentially limiting, and one way in which research into the arts in health is trapped by the same 'human/nonhuman, natural/artificial, biology/technology dyads that confound so much contemporary research in the human sciences' (Duff, 2014, p.15). Whilst I inevitably fell again and again into these same traps, I attempted to keep pointing to the way in which language mires researchers in potentially static and essentializing conceptions of agency, creativity and wellbeing. Whilst to problematize the commonsense distinctions mentioned above might be seen to risk returning everything to a slurry from which it is impossible to climb out, and in which no distinctive features or conceptual handles can be found, in the sections that follow I highlight the pragmatic usefulness of the more processual, relational, and distributed account that has resulted.

### 10.3. Original contributions to knowledge

This thesis makes an original contribution to research into crafting for health, and does so both methodologically and conceptually. As has been noted in earlier chapters, a focus on unitary individuals and subjective accounts results, in much health and arts-for-health research, in the attribution of essential characteristics to, for instance, human minds or particular activities. The effects of the complex political, social, and material networks in which experiences of health and illness are situated and constituted are overlooked. As a consequence, health is normatively constructed as something willed and produced by individuals through discriminating consumption of those things deemed to have positive effects on wellbeing (Duff, 2015). How transformative affective experiences come about in specific encounters is rarely specified. In the field of crafting for health, explanations are located too simply in the presumed therapeutic and distracting properties of making, or in the assumed benefits of group belonging. The long-term observational strategy taken here, conversely, has permitted fine-grained examination of how the actions of a recovering, creative or resilient self are solicited, supported, tried out, practised, and consolidated, in the context of group crafting; these developments occur in situated and specific material engagements, personal encounters, and affective atmospheres (Duff, 2015) that call such new acts and identities into being. The conceptual contributions produced by this alternative methodological tack concern situated, relational, processual, and material aspects of crafting for health.

Firstly, this detailed ethnographic approach draws attention to the spatial arrangements characteristic of work in crafts for health, and in particular to features of environments that cannot be located simply in the material or social characteristics of place; one way to think of such 'affective atmospheres', as Bissell (2010, p.273) suggests, is to characterize them as 'a propensity: a pull or a charge that might emerge in a particular space which might (or might not) generate particular events and actions, feelings and emotions'. From this point of view, the maintenance of such affective atmospheres, and the ways in which making and materiality contribute to their distinctive characteristics, are crucial in such

settings. Attention to affective ambience illuminates the ways in which things, as well as human agents, offer invitations to creative action, as well as experiences of belonging to notional communities of expertise, and intimations of possibility; 'the notion of affective atmospheres provides a novel means of tracing more of the social, affective, ethical and material becomings of recovery' (Duff, 2015 p.5).

Secondly, this sustained observational approach forces consideration of the interpersonal dimensions of activity within such groups in their moment-to-moment unfolding. What takes place cannot be adequately glossed in terms of companionship or belonging. The creative group, structured around the acquisition or practice of craft skills in the context of enabling and empathic support, is a facilitating interpersonal environment in which earlier 'failure situations' are potentially unfrozen, and habits of belief about competence and creativity can be performatively reworked. Observations have recorded the distinctive role of the crafted object as an effective locus around which a culture of new learning, mutual support and appreciation can be organized. When social belonging is considered more broadly, detailed description enables a view of such groups as located in rhizomatic networks in which participants inscribe themselves both concretely and through talk, as where a participant speaks of how the blanket she crocheted is giving her grandmother a hug in another country. Again, the role of crafted objects is not negligible. The 'thinginess' of group making is conducive, in very distinctive ways, to enactments of health in the form of 'a body that is active, experimenting, engaged and engaging, with the capacity to form new relations, and the desire to do so' (Fox, 2013c, no page number).

Thirdly, long-term observation allows a consideration of process, almost absent in research into crafting for health, permitting the production, however schematic, of a 'chrono-architecture' of making practices. Sustained fieldwork focused on making processes occurring over weeks or months allows identification of important features of making, such as improvisation, bricolage or reflection, observed again and again. Observation also demonstrates the presence of enchanting, demanding and frustrating dimensions of making that are typically brushed aside in normative accounts of crafts creativity. Sustained fieldwork,

furthermore, allows consideration of processes of gradual change not only in the fabrication of things, but in terms of the development of new habitual orientations. Chronologies are salient, too, in documenting the development over time of such projects, and the difficulties encountered by individuals and organizations in carrying out such work. As noted by Munoz (2010), research and evaluation in the third sector characteristically focus on the 'success story', so that little can be understood about situations in which projects founder or organizations fail.

Fourthly, long-term observation highlights that the materials used in making are not an inert substrate upon which makers impose themselves, but a world of material flows that push forward and act back, requiring of makers competencies such as accommodation, negotiation, partnership, quick thinking, improvisation and collaboration, rather than mastery. To produce an account that gives a voice to 'dumb' materiality is not to naively anthropomorphize the material world, but to acknowledge the transactional and rooted quality of human interactions in a material ground of embodiment and environment. In terms of an alternative metaphor, it is to bear witness to the fact that human agents are inseparable from and carried along by powerful material currents in which they might sink or swim; to swim, in life as in water, is to work with certain givens (the current, the conditions) whilst turning them to best possible advantage. Making provides in the most tangible of ways the opportunity to develop these skills, under circumstances where difficulties can be tolerated and worked through, and new strengths put into practice.

These alternative conceptions of the spatiality, sociality, onflow and materiality of making are of more than theoretical interest. They have implications, firstly, for good practice, and secondly, for further research in the field.

#### **10.4. Implications for practice in the field of crafts for health**

In terms of practice, these findings are suggestive, firstly, for how the distinctive benefits of the crafts can be harnessed; secondly, for how facilitators and volunteers working in the field might best be supported; and thirdly, for the

development of organizational frameworks to support such work. Firstly, my findings confirm that the crafts have distinctive benefits as a mode of arts for health practice, although they suggest that these benefits are more helpfully viewed in terms of the entangled social and material currents that organize themselves around activities of making and the made object in particular settings, than as the presumed intrinsic features of crafts creativity or group membership. Given the multiple transactions that take place in, through and around such groups, the 'properties' attributed to crafts creativity and inclusionary belonging have inadequate explanatory power to account for their potential benefits. This thesis has demonstrated that making, and made objects, are rich in potential, serving as an oil and a pretext for talk, an opportunity for new experiences of learning and agency, and as catalysts in flows of matter and action that embed makers in networks extending well beyond the borders of a single group. Some awareness of these potentials is necessary, however, in order to maximize their effects; good facilitation depends on the capacity to use crafts activities imaginatively in the creation of environments that are safe, empathic, enabling, stimulating, and conducive to a range of connections beyond the group. My findings also suggest that conceptions of amateur crafting that focus on relaxation and distraction are unnecessarily limited. Observation has highlighted that complicated and sometimes troubling affects including enchantment, hopefulness, frustration and ambition are ordinary features of creative making in these settings, and that the opportunity to work with and through challenges is an important aspect of making's transformative potential. From this point of view the value of creative difficulties, and the role of an empathic and enabling creative pedagogy in supporting participants as they work with them, are clear.

Secondly, consideration of the complexities of the facilitation task, highlighted above and throughout the thesis, suggests that such work would benefit from the level of support provided in the professionalized occupational, art, and psychological therapies, where supervision, peer group support, team working, and continuing professional development (CPD) are routine and often compulsory. Regular support of this kind was rare for facilitators with whom I talked as part of this study, with the exception of those at Start, which as an NHS service operated

as a multi-disciplinary team and provided supervision to its facilitators. As Raw (2013) notes, a conflict is entailed here, since the field of arts for health can be visionary, innovative, and sometimes political in ways that are rare in highly regulated professional domains. At the same time these findings suggest that the facilitation role, increasingly fulfilled by volunteers, requires some expertise in creative practice and pedagogy, as well as experience in work with vulnerable participants, and that some training is required where these are lacking. Raw suggests ‘the sector would benefit from developing apprenticeship models for learning the “participatory arts practice assemblage”’ (p.385); this was an arrangement I observed in some of the organizations described in Chapter 9, and it was successfully put into practice in the Pendon group, whose relatively inexperienced facilitator worked with me for a year before taking over the running of the group.

Beyond this, however, it was my finding that experienced facilitators also wished for and found it hard to access peer support and CPD in their work. This issue was first raised when a number of AFHC’s facilitators attended a symposium, *Beyond the Toolkit*, (Falmouth University, 2014) connected to this CDA, and reported that they had welcomed the unusual opportunity to network with their peers and to familiarize themselves with current research into arts for health (Interview 3, Jayne, AFHC, 25/11/15). This symposium provided an important opportunity to disseminate my research to an appropriate community of practitioners and researchers. Further opportunities for dissemination arose through my involvement with the Craftivist Garden project (a collaboration between Falmouth University, Craftivist Collective, Voluntary Arts, and AFHC; see Falmouth University, 2016), which explored the links between crafting and wellbeing. Subsequently, as part of my collaboration with AFHC, I designed and ran a series of five half-day workshops, delivered over a period of six months to a small group of AFHC facilitators. The workshops were designed to fulfill the role of peer group supervision and CPD, and were modeled on my own experience of support, supervision and further training in a professional psychotherapy context. On the basis of my fieldwork and academic reading, I was keen to encourage critical examination of concepts such as wellbeing and mental health, to stimulate

reflection on the emotional and social dimensions of work using the crafts for health, and to make both relevant to facilitators' practice. Each workshop was focused on one or two topics (for example 'wellbeing and mental health', and 'creative making and the social world'; see Appendix 5 for workshop outlines) and structured around activities that encouraged group discussion, both about challenges facilitators had encountered in their work, and about new ideas that had been introduced. The sessions were highly valued and those present decided to continue them in the form of a peer-run group with the support of AFHC, although this will not now be possible unless organized independently. The success of the intervention nonetheless suggests that it was perceived as valuable in providing support and CPD to practitioners who otherwise worked in relative isolation. Peer group supervision also offers one way of maintaining high standards in a largely unregulated field.

My findings also have implications for practice at an organizational level. Observations of making practices suggest that habit is a useful lens through which to view personal change; such groups provide spaces conducive to the performative reworking of emotional habits, and the opportunity for consolidation of new affective repertoires. That the structure of the group itself plays an important role in supporting such change is suggested by the fact that very few of the makers in my study were able to sustain a making practice independently at home. Many benefits were observed to accrue from sustained participation in networks that enabled experiences of creativity, connection, agency and the ongoing consolidation of new habitual dispositions. From this point of view, the benefits of short-term interventions may be limited unless participants can be directed onwards to similar resources, something that is increasingly difficult, as pointed out by interviewees from Start. As reported to me by the Director of AFHC, however, under some circumstances the effects of short-term interventions continue to repercuss in the longer term, sometimes because participants are able to continue their activities independently as a collective or in smaller groups (Interview 3, Jayne, AFHC, 25/11/15); more needs to be understood about the circumstances in which this occurs. At the time of AFHC's closure, the organization was exploring models for low-cost, sustainable, ongoing creative groups like those

in which I worked; as a consequence, the Pendon and Hellan groups may be viable in the longer term without the backing of an arts-for-health organization. In light of the struggles of organizations such as AFHC, the future for work requiring substantial funding might seem bleak. Chapter 9 suggested that there are reasons to be hopeful in the light of the academic and policy-making assemblage developing around the arts in health. My study suggests, however, that these developments need to be informed by situated, relational and material understandings of creativity and wellbeing, rather than generalizations about the therapeutic impacts of making or the arts.

### **10.5. Avenues for future research in the field of crafting and arts for health**

The usefulness of the long-term ethnographic approach used in the current project is suggestive of avenues for further research in three main areas. Firstly, this thesis has captured the specifics of two projects run in similar locations within a single UK county. Whilst interviews with facilitators across the UK suggest considerable consensus about the distinctive features of crafts as a vehicle for support and recovery in a mental health context, there is need for further sustained ethnographic work in a variety of settings. Such research could further articulate the distinctive activity produced by crafts activities at the level of community meeting places, neighbourhoods and local economies, and explore similarities and differences in modes of facilitation. Research traversing a number of sites could also potentially capture common modes or philosophies of practice in work using the crafts in health, as achieved by Raw (2013) in relation to performance- and event-based community arts facilitation. Further studies are required to draw out the distinctive characteristics of a variety of forms of work in arts for health, as has been done, for instance, in research into the benefits of choral singing (Clift, 2015 ref.)

Secondly, further long-term ethnographic research is needed in understanding the broader field of arts for health. The use of evaluation and research for the purposes of advocacy has resulted in a proliferation of 'success stories'. Research

that provides sustained accounts of the strengths and difficulties of a range of approaches is required in order to establish features of effective and sustainable practice. Large-scale surveys that take the form of snapshots (for instance Matarasso, 1997) need to be supplemented with longitudinal cohort studies that gather data over the lifetimes of projects, and which can therefore analyse their challenges and achievements in relation to specific locations and funding arrangements. It is urgent that research captures the impacts on organizations of the rapidly evolving policy context for arts in healthcare. There is scope, also, for more detailed research concerning the extent to which work in arts for health, for instance in a social prescribing context, operates within a conventional neoliberal framework, or whether it sometimes subverts or exerts pressures upon normative conceptions of wellbeing and recovery.

Finally, these findings suggest that the intrapersonal, diachronous conception of impact that dominates in crafts- and arts-for-health research can usefully be supplemented by more distributed, material, spatial and synchronous conceptions of the affective ramifications of making. The limitations of assessing the impacts of such interventions solely at the level of individual and intrapersonal effects have been raised throughout the thesis. A wellbeing questionnaire administered pre- and post-intervention, for example, can say nothing about the spatially and temporally extended effects produced by such groups, and fails to capture the characteristics of an onflow of activities sustained across long periods of time. Interviewing often suffers from the same methodological individualism. The activities of the groups I observed reverberated through extended networks that had their own recursive effects. Work on assemblages of health and affect undertaken from a Deleuzian perspective (see, for example, Duff, 2015, 2014; Fox, 2013b; Thrift, 2008) demonstrates the utility of non-representationalist and post-humanist approaches to researching and theorizing wellbeing. Such approaches need to be applied in detail in the field of arts for health. Atkinson and Scott's study (2015, p.75) of 'dance and movement as catalysts of transition' is illustrative of how this might be done. Theorizing work in arts for health in terms of synchronous and mutual influences active within an extended network would reduce the burden of explanation that falls to diachronic and linear conceptions of

cause and effect in much social impact research. Such an approach, as evidenced by Duff (2014), is also capable of generating alternative ethical accounts of health and wellbeing in terms of creative becomings rather than normative essences.

Considering the crafts- or arts-for-health landscape in these terms requires sustained observation, less to establish processes of change over time, than to arrive at thick descriptions of the ongoing, stable or repeated features of particular circuitries of activities and material flows. This methodological orientation does not have to be set in opposition, however, to quantitative or outcome-oriented qualitative approaches to research in this field. An ethnographic approach produces an unusually rich account of the confluences from which benefits accrue. Such understandings can potentially underpin the testable hypotheses produced by researchers using, for instance, a TBE methodology, usually reliant on insights derived from interviews and focus groups. The various strands of research activity in the crafts- or arts-for-health field do not have to be governed by uniform epistemological assumptions in order to be mutually informative, and where the assumptions that underpin different research methodologies are incommensurable, the friction produced at these interfaces is likely to promote critical rigour and fertile debate. This enrichment of critical dialogue is desirable, since, as Sennett (2008, p.8) suggests, ‘we can achieve a more human material life, if only we better understand the making of things’.

## **10.6. Farewells**

I end with the messages written to me on cards presented to me on the last session I facilitated with the Pendon group. Although mostly framed in terms of gratitude for my input, they convey how much the group meant, and continues to mean, to its members.

Dear Sarah, thanks for your smiles—patience—and well your so smart fantastic self, I was nearly dead 3 years ago—before [I had my organ transplant], its been a big journey for me—your class on Mondays has really helped me—in ways I can’t describe, I thank God for you and your creativity and person centred approach, love Liv

Also thank you for your inspiration and guidance, love Nadine. I will miss you very much!

Wow Sarah, Thank you so so much for creating such a much needed and wonderful group. The free space (i.e. space of freedom) to be creative and supported meant a world of change for me. Your warmth, sensitivity and understanding has inspired much beauty from so many—May xx

To Sarah—Thank you for your inspiration, and for being such a good tutor, I'm sorry you're leaving. Hope you keep in touch! Love Daisy x

Thank you Sarah for coming all that way to inspire and help us, we will all miss you. Come back often. Angie

Thank you for unlocking the door to a new future—Susan

Thanks and Best Wishes from John

Thanks for creating such a welcoming space and for all your help. Best wishes, Rachel x

You've been the most wonderful supportive presence for us all, thank you for your sensitive artistic support—will miss you greatly. Wish you all the very best and please keep in touch Sarah, somehow! Love and creative thoughts! Caroline x

Thank you Sarah for your patience and help. Much appreciated, Eric xxx

To Sarah. Like my butterfly [mosaic] u have entered our lives and hearts and flitting on to pastures new. Your lovely enthusiasm and nature will never be forgotten. Your shiny wings will take you exciting new places. Hope you achieve everything you want. Am sure you will. xxx Cath

Dear Sarah, I don't know what to say. I choke every time I try to write something and have tears in my eyes. My gratitude to you goes far beyond words, words just aren't enough. Taking the craft group with you this year has changed my life! Starting printmaking has opened a door that I did not know was there. Your commitment, kindness, hard work, dedication has been astounding and greatly appreciated by all. I feel I am about to start my career and that I am a printmaker. Not only may I not have discovered this without your help but your support and encouragement has given me the confidence I needed to succeed. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! With all my love and best wishes, Kate xx

## 10.7. Postscript

In the wake of AFHC's demise, and as I worked on the final draft of this thesis, I received the following email from the facilitator of the Pendon group:

Hi Sarah,

Thank you for your upbeat mail. We are planning our funding bids and will do all we can to make them happen.

Arts for Health [Cornwall] has helped with various funding stream thoughts and as you say [the café organizer] has also made some suggestions. We will be trying them all.

I also agree that a contribution to tea/biscuits will be useful and make the group feel more responsible for themselves. So far the reaction has been favourable and I am sure we will be able to keep it all together.

We await a price on the printing press which I hope we will be able to purchase. Once we have a bank account set up in the group's name we will be able to monitor our finances . . . once we know all the rules and regulations, I will put out an email about the group and its aims, with the opportunity to give a donation through an online site. My intent is to put this out to our friends, family and local influential acquaintances. I am sure this will bring in some more weeks worth of rent for the hall. I guess I am trying to ensure a year's buffer.

I will certainly keep in touch and send your love to the group. [The new volunteer] and I feel quite positive that we will keep the group going and look forward to encouraging more people to come along which will help the momentum.

Good luck with the thesis and take care.

Talk soon  
Jill



*Figure 10.3. Finished prints produced by a member of the Pendon Crafts Group (Photo: David Lidstone, 2014)*

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Pendon Crafts Group flyer

Group and place names have been changed.

**Pendon Community Crafts Group**

An invitation to explore the benefits of making by hand for *health* and *happiness*



*People report that creative activities can reduce stress, improve mood and build confidence. They're also a relaxing way of spending time with others. Contact us if you are interested in exploring a variety of crafts as ways of improving wellbeing, especially if you are facing life difficulties that impact on health or happiness.*

Pendon Community Crafts Group, supported by Arts for Health Cornwall, will be running on Monday afternoons from 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013. It will take place in St Thomas Church Hall from 2.15 – 4.15pm (the weekly lunchtime Community Café will be open at the venue until 2pm). Inspired by the community vegetable and herb garden next to the hall, we'll explore a variety of crafts activities, including any that participants would like to bring or share.

**No previous art or crafts experience is necessary.**

*Places are limited, so if you are interested in joining us, have any questions, or just want a chat regarding the group, please contact Sarah:*

Phone: 07757 034764  
E-mail: sarah.desmarais@btinternet.com

Arts for Health  
Cornwall and  
Isles of Scilly  
Improving health  
and well-being  
through creativity

## Appendix 2

### Hellan Crafts Group consent form

The group name has been changed.

<p>HELLAN CRAFTS GROUP RESEARCH CONSENT FORM</p> <p>Name of researcher: Sarah Desmarais</p> <p>Collaborating organizations: Arts For Health Cornwall (contact: Jayne Howard), and Falmouth University (contact: Fiona Hackney)</p> <p><b>INFORMATION</b></p> <p>I'm doing research with Arts For Health Cornwall and Falmouth University into crafts activities and their effects on health and wellbeing. Lots of research shows that creative activities in general are good for quality of life, but there's little research on crafts activities in particular. My research aims to find out more about how groups like this are helpful, particularly when people are facing health and life challenges.</p> <p>As Hellan Crafts is a very well established and active group, I'm seeking your permission to write about it as part of my research (which will also involve setting up and running a similar group myself). <i>I won't use real names or identifying details at any point.</i> It's fine if you decide for any reason later that you don't wish to take part – just let me know.</p> <p><b>CONSENT</b></p> <p>I've been invited to participate in research about the benefits of crafts practice. I've read the information above and had the opportunity to ask further questions. I consent voluntarily to being part of this study, which will not identify me personally and from which I can withdraw at any time.</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Signature _____</p> <p>Date _____</p>
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## Appendix 3

### Pendon Crafts Group information sheet/consent form

Names of the group and location have been changed.

#### PENDON COMMUNITY CRAFTS GROUP INFORMATION SHEET

Pendon Community Crafts Group invites you to explore a variety of crafts as ways of improving wellbeing, especially if you are experiencing life difficulties that impact on health or happiness.

#### *Funding*

Pendon Community Crafts Group will be funded for a year (until September 2014) by Arts For Health Cornwall (AFHC). For this period it will be free of charge. We aim to use this funding to invest in materials and equipment so that after this point, the group can run at low cost to participants (a voluntary contribution of about £2 per session). In this way, the group can be independent of outside funding, which is often short-term or hard to come by!

#### *Facilitation and Organization*

For the first year, the group will be run every week (except for holiday breaks) by artist Sarah Desmarais. Sarah will be involved on a less regular basis beyond this point, but we hope that the group will be supported by AFHC volunteers, and AFHC will be able to help with organizational matters.

#### *Research*

The group is linked to a 'crafts for health' research project at Falmouth University. In connection with this, Sarah would like to write about the experiences of the group, for instance what people enjoyed or found helpful. Your consent is requested for this, and we undertake that nobody will ever be mentioned by name, nor personal details used. You can still come along to the group even if you don't give your consent to being involved in the research aspect.

#### *Photography*

AFHC likes to have a photographic record of the groups they support. We will only use images with your consent – please see the media consent form attached.

#### *Any questions?*

For further information, you can contact:  
 Sarah Desmarais (Facilitator) – 07757 034764 or sarah.desmarais@btinternet.com  
 Jayne Howard (Director, Arts For Health Cornwall) – 01326 377772

*I'd appreciate a signature so I know I've given you this information and asked for your consent:*

*If you'd like to give me a mobile telephone number, it would allow me to contact you regarding dates of holiday breaks, etc:*

Thanks for your participation!  
 Sarah

## Appendix 4 Schedule of interviews

Interview Date(s)	Interviewee	Role	Organization	Project	Location	Organization type	Founded	Funders	Target client group	Time delimited work?
30 <sup>th</sup> July 2013; 8 <sup>th</sup> July 2014; 25 <sup>th</sup> November 2015	Jayne	Director	Arts for Health Cornwall	Various projects including Hellan and Pendon Crafts Groups	Cornwall	Registered charity	2001	Various, including ACE, NHS	Various, depending on project	Some projects
5 <sup>th</sup> June 2013	Nessa	Facilitator	Claremont Project	Crafts group	Islington, London	Registered charity and registered company limited by guarantee	1998 in present constitutional form; history as welfare organization goes back to 1907	Various, including NHS, Islington Giving, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	Older residents of Islington	No
7 <sup>th</sup> June 2013	Lou	Project Manager	Arts Lift	Various groups	Lewisham, London	Part of Adult Learning Lewisham adult education service	1997	Funded through adult education service	Participants with mental health difficulties needing support to attend mainstream adult education courses	Yes
3 <sup>rd</sup> July 2013	Michael	Director	Creative Response	Various creative groups	Farnham, Surrey	Registered Charity	1993	Various, including ACE and Surrey County Council	Participants with mental health or substance misuse difficulties	No

12 <sup>th</sup> July 2013	Michelle	CEO and Founder	CoolTan Arts	Variety of creative groups	Southwark, London	Registered Charity	1991	Various including Big Lottery Fund, Southwark Council, NHS	Participants with mental distress/disabled/with long-term conditions	No
15 <sup>th</sup> July 2013	Catherine	Facilitator	Double Elephant	Print on Prescription	Exeter	Community Interest Company and Social Enterprise	1997	Various including ACE, Awards for All	Participants with mental health difficulties referred by GPs/ Occupational Therapists	No
19 <sup>th</sup> July 2013	Jo	GP and Vice Chair	NHS	Islington Clinical Commissioning Group	Islington, London	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2013	Luky	Curriculum Leader	Mindlift	Various adult education groups	Lewisham, London	Part of Adult Learning Lewisham adult education service	1990s	Skills Funding Agency	Participants with mental health difficulties requiring supported learning services	Yes
31 <sup>st</sup> July 2013	Wendy and Annie	Director and Facilitator	Manchester Start	Various creative groups	Manchester	In-house NHS arts-for-health project	1990s	NHS	Participants referred from Tier 2 mental health services	Yes
11 <sup>th</sup> November 2013	Faye	Facilitator	Arts for Health Cornwall	Hellan Crafts Group	Cornwall	Group supported by AFHC	Group founded 2009	Various sources, through AFHC	Participants with mental health difficulties referred from primary care via local GPs	No

10 <sup>th</sup> December 2013	Jonathan	GP	NHS	Involved in setting up Hellan Crafts Group	Cornwall	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11 <sup>th</sup> February 2014	Leah	Former Facilitator	Arts for Health Cornwall	Hellan Crafts Group	Cornwall	Group supported by AFHC	Group founded 2009	Various sources through AFHC	Participants with mental health difficulties referred from primary care by local GPs	No
19 <sup>th</sup> June 2014	Florence	Director	Sweet Cavanagh	Jewellery workshop	Notting Hill, London	Social Enterprise and Registered Charity	2012	Various sources plus sales	Participants in recovery from addictions/eating disorders	No
30 <sup>th</sup> June 2014	Annie	Committee Member and Programme Organizer	Pendon Church Hall Committee	N/S	Cornwall	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15 <sup>th</sup> April 2014	Faith	Participant	AFHC	Hellan Crafts Group	Cornwall	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20 <sup>th</sup> May 2014	Joni	Participant	AFHC	Hellan Crafts Group	Cornwall	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
27 <sup>th</sup> May 2014	Em	Participant	AFHC	Hellan Crafts Group	Cornwall	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15 <sup>th</sup> July 2014	Gayle	Participant	AFHC	Hellan Crafts Group	Cornwall	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

## Appendix 5

### AFHC workshop programme

#### Workshops overview: MAKE, DO AND MIND

#### A five-workshop conversation about good practice in arts for mental health

#### AIMS

Arts and crafts activities are increasingly valued, in community and primary care settings, as means of supporting mental health and wellbeing. As a consequence, deliverers and practitioners are concerned (a) to pin down what constitutes good practice in the field, and (b) to evidence the effectiveness of this work.

These workshops will be an opportunity to examine related debates in depth, and to make a contribution to them in the form of a handbook to which participants will contribute their knowledge and insights. We intend that the resulting document will differ from existing arts-for-health 'toolkits' by generating *questions* for reflective practice, rather than answers, which tend to underestimate the complexity of the field.

#### PROGRAMME

WORKSHOP 1: Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> October, 9.30am–12.30pm

*Mental health and wellbeing: what are we talking about?*

An opportunity to examine the assumptions embedded in these terms, and to look at how these affect our practice for better and for worse.

WORKSHOP 2: Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December, 9.30am–12.30pm

*Creativity: what is it and how does it happen?*

Are conventional understandings of creativity adequate? Under what circumstances might artistic creativity foster life creativity more generally?

WORKSHOP 3: Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> January, 9.30am–12.30pm

*Creative making and the internal world*

Is it enough to say that creative activities are soothing, relaxing and distracting? Can we build a richer account of their personal benefits?

WORKSHOP 4: Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March, 9.30am–12.30pm

*Creative making and the social world*

Is it enough to describe group creativity as sociable, supportive and inclusive? Can we build a richer description of what's going on at an interpersonal level in group making activities?

WORKSHOP 5: Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May, 9.30am–12.30pm

*How do we make the case for arts for health?*

Attempts to create evidence for the use of arts in health are increasingly critiqued for their lack of rigour; it may be that it's simply not possible to produce hard evidence for their long-term, instrumental benefits. If so, how do we make a case for our work? This workshop will focus on the shorter-term, *observable benefits* of involvement in facilitated arts and crafts groups, and how these can be used to make a case for their effectiveness. It will also ask how the *values* that underpin arts for health practice can be used to argue for it.

The sessions will be led by Sarah Desmarais, who is a designer, arts facilitator and psychotherapist currently carrying out doctoral research with Arts for Health Cornwall and Falmouth University into the individual and community benefits of group crafting.

Tea, cake and sewing will accompany all workshops.