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REPAIR YOUR PRACTICE! Get Out Of Your Tower And Into The World

Reflecting on co-curating *The Department of Repair* (2015), part of my AHRC PhD project, *RepairAbility: Repair-Making as Social and Material Action*, led me to attempt to patch gaps which emerged. TDoR mostly engaged makers, those skilled at repairing particular styles of object (there was very little ad hoc repair), and some involved with repair-making but not necessarily with sustainability. While my practice is rooted in sustainability, I felt it needed further extension into social engagement through action, prompting me to take my practice outside academia to public spaces. This paper discusses the perspective gained from direct action and disobedience through social engagement, and explores use of an autobiographical method to redefine and communicate object-based practice. Linking old and new techniques, and political and personal practices, it [re]examines the transformative nature of repair-making as material action and personal choice.

Taking repairers to community centres and libraries by co-organising Hackney Fixers events and other repair skills sharing workshops helps include in the current repair discourse, those most hit by austerity measures. The togetherness this direct action creates is “social motivation” for my activism (Portwood-Stacer, 2013), through which I am made to reassess my ‘makerly’ privileges: we repair not just beautiful, treasured objects but also essential, everyday things. The outcomes of collaborative and/or participative work - although somewhat recorded in my objects (eg, *Learning Cardigan*, 2014) - is mostly captured in objects that belong to others: meaning that I, as maker, must see my practice here as one that purposefully shares repair skills and the associated discourse.

To contribute to repair practices in a way other than repair-making, I made *MEND MORE Jumper* (2015), as a placard for the 2015 Climate March. My activism is simultaneously disobedient to dominant consumer cultures and “autonomously obedient” to my principles (Fromm, 1981). It also draws on the history of craft being used to highlight injustices; handwork as political stance; and questions hierarchies through subversive stitch-work (Parker, 2010). *MEND MORE Jumper* clearly states my agenda: its non-preciousness enabling portability, its portability facilitating visibility of its slogans, which challenge dominant practices and ‘vocalise’ my activism.

Alongside my practice, I took a year of life-writing classes to help better communicate my practice, develop my ‘voice’ and structure my writing. The relevance of autobiographical methodologies to craft practices becomes clear as the idea of autography - handwriting - corresponds to handmaking. Life-writing, as autoethnographic practice, brings the vulnerable (Behar, 1996), the messy (Hoskins, 1998; Jeffries, 2016; Styhre, N.D.) and the tugs between fictions and truths (Goett, 2016; Porter, 2012) into my writing and speaking, in a way I felt was previously only evident in my making. The procedure of crafting writing using ‘old’ techniques such as writing by hand, reading aloud and scribing events, aids interpretation of ideas and emotions as materially as the crafting of repairs. Episodic building of narrative (eg, McKee, 1999) thus occurs in my writing and making as aspects “shaped by any number of parameters, including time, place, topic or theme”(Miller, 2007), autographically captured.