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PATCHING the PRESENT: Finding fulfilment through sustainable making

This submission proposes a paper that will report on a community collaboration exploring patchwork as a means of bringing generations together and engendering dialogue around the themes of sustainable living, personal fulfilment and bridging intergenerational disparity.

The project will create environments in which individuals from a range of generations, backgrounds and life experiences can exchange views, and explore the way in which working with our hands informs and influences our relationship with the world around us. In contemporary society patchwork articulates the symbolism of repair, restoration and reuse. Furthermore, it will examine ways of confronting contemporary throw-away consumerist culture. Through engagement with pupils from Plymouth School of Creative Arts, clients from Hannah's at Seale Hayne and older members of the local community it will provide an opportunity to interrogate the supposition (posited by the author) that society has moved beyond having that which is 'needed' to live a safe and fulfilling life, to a culture of 'want'. The resulting conversations will be recorded and used to inform the paper.

The essayist Josie Appleton describes contemporary culture as, '... not so much that we have an ethic of consumption, but that – by default – it remains as one of the few meaningful experiences in our lives...'.
(Crawford, 2009, p216)

The proposal draws on several theories that propose a different approach. Including Viktor Frankl, who suggests that fulfilment comes from finding meaning in life (Frankl, 2007); Thomas Declan Walsh who posits that happiness resides in the gap between expectation and reality; the narrower the gap, the greater the sense of wellbeing (Walsh, et al, unknown); Serge Latouche's philosophy of décroissance (Crouch et al, 2015, p14); and Jugaad Innovation the Hindi principle of creating more from less, flexible thinking, and a simple approach (Radjou, et al, 2012).

Patchwork and patching are traditionally sustainable, low or no cost forms of making and mending; using and re-using textiles from household, clothing and dressmaking applications.

Patches hold the threads and fabric of our lives together and contribute to sustainable living and social cohesion. Individual patches retain their identity and meaning, yet through their interaction each is enhanced. The same may be said of people. Sewing and quilting bees were once community activities; groups of women used these opportunities to be productive, creative, pass on skills and discuss the concerns and the issues of the day. Making is an opportunity for interaction, conversation and a means of finding and sharing meaning and understanding. The process of piecing the patches together acts as a physical manifestation and symbol of the meaning and understanding generated through the conversations, which in turn create an aural patchwork, drawing the disparate threads of thought and meaning together.

Bibliography

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