

Narratives of Revival: Examining Exhibitions on Knitting and Crochet in Canada and the United States

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## Abstract

### Narratives of Revival: Examining Exhibitions on Knitting and Crochet in Canada and the United States

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This thesis looks at exhibitions on knitting and crochet of the last twenty years in Canada and the United States in order to reflect on the different ways in which revival can be understood or interpreted through them. The two countries' tight-knit craft alliance throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century is mobilized as a point of departure to examine how practices of knitting and crochet, largely absent from 20<sup>th</sup> century discourse on craft, started being displayed at the turn of the millennium. The case studies consist of four exhibitions staged by museums and galleries alike: *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* (2007) at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* (2009) at the Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto, *À toutes mailles!* (2013) at the Centre MATERIA in Quebec City and Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay in Montreal, and *SUPER STRING* (2006) at the Stride Gallery in Calgary. Considering the recent historical development that are 21<sup>st</sup> century exhibitions on knitting and crochet, the thesis takes the idea of revival as a common denominator and carefully unpacks how they each engage with it, consciously or not. Furthermore, revival being a common topic in craft discourse, the thesis participates by introducing into it the theory of shaped time as elaborated by art historian George Kubler, specifically the ideas of prime objects and formal sequences, to outline each case study's role in indexing (or perhaps reviving) knitting and crochet as artistic practices. In doing so, the thesis argues that the specificities of knitting and crochet, in their materiality and as practices embedded in rich and long-standing social histories, can be conducive to a broader understanding of cyclical patterns, thus inspire a new methodology toward the critical re-examination of persistent patterns in canonical art history.

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## Introduction

The field of craft studies is undoubtedly expanding, attracting academics to reflect on its historical constructions and discursive framing within and beyond art history. Craft is no newcomer to the world of art, although it still manages to make a surprising entrance when exhibited in spaces reserved for so-called fine arts. In the conclusion of the book *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (2010), chief curator at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York Elissa Auther brings forth the idea that the increased visibility of fiber in contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century art could be partly due to a revival of fiber-making practices, a result of social and discursive forces.<sup>1</sup> Taking the relay of Auther's open-ended inquiry regarding the revival of fiber-art practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this thesis aims to generate a better understanding of how narratives of revival have had a sustained presence in fiber exhibitions. The thesis will focus on knitted and crocheted art displayed in Canadian and American exhibition spaces within the last twenty years. The case studies include, on the one hand, two exhibitions held at museums: one American exhibition at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York titled *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* (2007), as well as one held at the Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto titled *She Will Always be Younger Than Us* (2009). On the other hand, two case studies are taken from gallery spaces: *À toutes mailles!* (2013) hosted in both the Centre MATERIA in Quebec City and Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay in Montreal and *SUPER STRING* (2006), presented at the Stride Gallery in Calgary. The reasoning behind the selection of the American case study is to take into consideration the greater impact of the institution where the exhibition was held, particularly in terms of indexing and representing craft discourses pertaining to knitting

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<sup>1</sup> Elissa Auther, "Conclusion," in *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2010), 172.

and crochet. Among the many craft institutions in the United States, the New York Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) stands out as a leading institution in the display of craft and has played a key role in the shaping of narratives in curatorial practice.<sup>2</sup> In Canada, there is no comparable institution for crafts shaping the emerging field but instead museums dedicated to specific mediums and practices, as is the case with the Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto for example. Two gallery samples will account for more localized exhibitions of knitting and crochet and how the idea of revival within the context of immediacy is afforded by these smaller scale endeavours. Through the idea of revival, the thesis aims to simultaneously unfold the cyclical patterns within the concept of revival while also pointing to the necessity of examining the greater scheme of cycles that underpin the shape of time in art history and craft studies. By doing so, this selection of case studies will lead the thesis to: deconstruct the weight of value and its abstractions within the narrative presented by *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*; analyze strategies for feminist solidarity as displayed in *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us*; consider the power of familiarity in *À toutes mailles!*; and finally, untangle the potential of socially engaged art within *SUPER STRING*.

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<sup>2</sup> The Museum of Arts and Design was founded in 1956 by American philanthropist Aileen Osborne Webb, also the founder of the American Craftsmen's Council in 1942 "to recognize and promote contemporary crafts in an age of machine manufacturing". Initially named the Museum of Contemporary Crafts and eventually becoming the American Craft Museum in 1986, the broad scope of the museum's collection included anything from architecture, fashion, interior design, performing arts, and technology. In 2002, the institution went through a third name-change in 2002 to "[reflect] this wider spectrum of interest, as well as the increasingly interdisciplinary nature" of their collection. See: "Museum History," *Museum of Arts and Design*, last updated May 19, 2022, <https://madmuseum.org/about/museum-history> ; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Museum of Arts & Design," *Britannica*, last modified August 26, 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Museum-of-Arts-and-Design>.

## Revival's Transnational Subtext: Building a Narrative for the Identity of Craft for Canada and the United States

The transnational dynamics at play across the case studies allows for a more informed understanding of how narratives of revival are shared locally and across nations. The peculiar case of American craft's influence on the formation of Canadian craft identity and the complex dynamic arising out of the two nations' craft alliance should be kept in mind in the case studies. The late Canadian craft scholar Dr. Sandra Alföldy's book *Crafting Identity* (2005) offers an exceptional, in-depth view of these transnational exchanges implied in the development of a craft field *and* identity, mainly through a sociological portrait of the web of connections that have linked the agents of the American and Canadian professional craft fields since their inceptions. Alföldy's account of these various interactions and relations untangles the narrative implicit to the trajectory of craft in Canada, which was very much preoccupied with crafting a national identity through professional craft, on par with, but in contrast to, American craft. Similar tensions can also be felt internally, for instance, across anglophone and francophone cultures within Canada. Alföldy relates the ease with which professional craft managed to take root in Quebec, in an attempt to deliberately distance itself from the so-called amateurish values promoted by the Canadian Guild of Crafts in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> The 1974 exhibition *In Praise of Hands* encapsulates the challenges to forging a craft identity in Canada, across nations, cultures, but craft disciplines as well. Hosted in the city of Ottawa, the exhibition may be remembered as a Canadian endeavour although its organizing body was, in fact, the World Crafts Council, largely overseen by members of the American Crafts Guild and its founder Aileen Osborn Webb. For the occasion, the committee appointed Joan Chalmers, a representative of the Canadian Craft Guild, as the curator

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<sup>3</sup> Sandra Alföldy, "Introduction," in *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 8.

for this exhibition. This became a point of contention due to other craft organizations, most notably the Canadian Craftsmen Association, disapproving of the Guild's tight-knit association with the American Crafts Council and the values it promoted. Nevertheless, the exhibition *In Praise of Hands* did result in the formation of the Canadian Crafts Council in 1974, a name which only served to reinforce its alliance with the American Craft Council. Furthermore, Chalmers and Webb appeared to be on the same wavelength in their pursuit of modernizing the purpose of craft, both sensing an evolution past craft fairs, and seeking to forge a path for craft into fine arts institutions.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, people like Webb and Chalmers believed in the development of a refined taste through exposure to beautiful craft, meaning that some craft practices did not align with such a goal. This quote by Chalmers is telling in that regard:

If you go to any craft fair, especially the church basement ones, you just know how awful it's going to be... What's worst of all are the *crocheted fancy dress ladies* that become socks that go over the extra roll of toilet paper... if people don't have a developed taste it's their problem. All you can do is try to educate people by exposure to beautiful crafts.<sup>5</sup>

The statement is one of many examples of crochet being used by curators and writers alike to illustrate widely held prejudices toward amateur craft, and using it to justify their ambition to elevate craft and promote its revival as worthy of intellectual consideration and as more than this lowly view of craft as “your grandma’s crocheted doilies.”<sup>6</sup> In the context of a 1970s exhibition on craft, it comes as no surprise that crochet and knitting practices were left out of the equation,

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<sup>4</sup> The 1974 *In Praise of Hands* was an opportunity for the American Craft Council, and Canada as a whole, to forge a craft identity of their own on the international stage. In order to secure federal support for the exhibition, Webb had James Plaut, executive secretary of the Worlds Craft Council, fly out to Ottawa in 1971 where he, alongside craft advisor for the Province Ontario, Mary Eileen Hogg, successfully nurtured “a pleasant sense of comradeship between the two countries”. (Alfoldy, 162) Sandra Alfoldy further adds that Plaut, a Harvard graduate, director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (1939-1956) and director of the Arts Looting Investigations Unit in Washington, “embodied the cultural capital” which, at the time, the field of Canadian craft lacked. (Alfoldy, 162)

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Sandra Alfoldy, “The Dis/Unity of Craft,” in *Ibid*, 169 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>6</sup> The association of crocheted doilies to grandmothers is also referenced by various academics as well : Glenn Adamson, “Section 1: HOW TO: Section Introduction,” in *The Craft Reader* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 10 ; Sandra Alfoldy, “The Dis/Unity of Craft: *In Praise of Hands*, Toronto, 1974,” in *Ibid*, 175 ; Susan Luckman, *Craft and the Creative Economy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 13, 23, 32.

although *In Praise of Hands* did feature textiles in the form of lace-making and wall-hangings.<sup>7</sup> The latter attracted controversy as the hosting Science Center made the decision to allow visitors to interact with the object giving them permission to touch the textiles to enhance the audience's tactile experience. Regarding this decision, an exhibition reviewer did not mince words when expressing their disapproval of the interactive display, saying: "I shudder to think what that feather carpet by Spain's Esperanza Rodriguez will look like if many more dumb women ruffle it."<sup>8</sup> This gendered accusation reflects a conflation of women as not intellectual thus a public not versed in contemplative activity and refined taste. It was eventually agreed that the textile pieces had to be taken down to prevent further damage. The case of *In Praise of Hands* is rife with exclusionary discourse on craft based on a hierarchy of value, one that is undoubtedly informed by the influence of American craft.<sup>9</sup>

More of those discrepancies in discourse across the field of craft appear when considering how, for instance, studio pottery of the 1950s and the fiber art soft sculptures or wall-hangings of the 1960s and 1970s benefitted from sharing formal affinities with modernist abstraction while knitting and crochet had yet to be compatible with the formalist format.<sup>10</sup> Major exhibitions focused on knitting and crochet are practically non-existent in art institutions prior to the 1990s, reinforcing their niche position within the field of craft in comparison to other crafts. These

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<sup>7</sup> The exhibition did feature a presentation of lacemaking by non-Canadian craft artists which could arguably stand-in as a representative of needlework in general.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Sandra Alföldy, *Ibid*, 185.

<sup>9</sup> Sandra Alföldy, *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>10</sup> The 1971 exhibition "Abstract Design in American Quilts" at the Whitney Museum in New York displayed quilts made by Gee's Bend, a group of African American women from the South of the United States. The quilts had been collected by Jonathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoof who saw potential in what they interpreted as abstract modernist designs. Over the years, the exhibition has been criticized for having capitalized off of the artists and their context in favour of minimalist abstract aesthetics, and feminist critics have argued that the domestic art of quilt-making was only being valued because of its resemblance to male modernist art. For further reading, see: Hugo Letiche, "Doubling: There's an Escape from Commodification ...?," *Society and Business Review* 4, no. 1 (2009): 8-25. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/17465680910932432>.

specificities have even generated a sentiment that knitting and crochet are a category of their own, as expressed by English visual artist Freddie Robins who views her knitted art as entirely distinct from craft. In short, knitted and crocheted art truly started gaining traction in art institutions around the mid to late 1990s and into the 2000s when exhibited in the form of installations or performances as postmodernist works were propelled to the fore by the advent of the politics and discourse developed around, among other things, so-called Third Wave feminism from the late 1980s and throughout 1990s. In these case studies focused on displays of knitting and crochet practices, this thesis explores the cycles implied in the notion of revival as it is mobilised in these exhibitions. The narrative of revival presented in each case points to the vitality of knitting and crochet within an art world context. It also further supports Alfoldy's claim for a complex, often collaborative, impact of the American craft milieu on Canadian craft.

There are two key concepts that inform this thesis: the first is that of revival as noted above and the second is that of narrative. Narrative is understood here as “a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, undertaking the task of detecting such narratives requires considering modes of presentation, a situation within a historically informed sequence of events, as well as the values being promoted (or subverted). The knitting and crochet exhibitions that are the focus of this thesis reveal how narratives may take on the cyclical shape of craft revival. Narratives of revival are nothing new to the field of craft studies, as made evident by a 1888 text titled *The Revival of Handicraft* by the leading figure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Arts and Crafts movement in England, William Morris.<sup>12</sup> In this text, Morris reflected on what he perceived to be the increasing

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<sup>11</sup> *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “narrative, noun”, last modified June 30<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/narrative>.

<sup>12</sup> William Morris, “The Revival of Handicraft,” The William Morris Internet Archive : Works, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1888/handcraft.htm>.

absence of handiwork in the landscape of capitalist industrialization, expressing a nostalgia for this absence.<sup>13</sup> Although nostalgic, Morris also makes sure to warn against a reactionary return to handicrafts, looking instead to contemporary socialist literature to inform his conception of a socially beneficial craft revival.<sup>14</sup> Morris's handicraft revival would be inspired by gothic architecture of the Middle Ages mobilizing its aesthetics and mode of production as a metaphor for liberated unalienated labour, pre-division of labour. Morris's investment into decorative arts sought to breathe new life into handmaking and articulate progressive ideals through craft. In turn, later generations have looked back to Morris's narrative of progress in *The Revival of Handicraft*, and those of the broader Arts and Crafts Movement in general, as building blocks for their own narratives of revival, creating an intergenerational loop in discourse – a cycle. In the context of the contemporary exhibitions on knitting and crochet examined in this thesis, the questions I wish to answer include: what historical reflections and discourse are conducive to a narrative of revival? What might an analysis of revival informed by the theory of shaped time reveal about these narratives?

Cycles are illustrative of the inherently recurring events that are revival. How narratives adhere to a cyclical shape of time admittedly requires careful study into the constituents of a chain of events in order to rationalize their supposed return (or revival) which forms a cycle. In *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962), American art historian George Kubler remarks

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<sup>13</sup> Craft scholar Glenn Adamson makes a concise analysis of the duality of narratives which shape craft discourse. On the one hand is a narrative of loss engrained in this recurring idea of craft forever disappearing and clamouring for the preservation of “past” craft knowledge, namely through its revival. On the other hand, a narrative of crisis tells a different story, one in which craft is shaped as a “driver of progressive change” into the future. Adamson sides with a view of craft as modern invention. For further reading, see: Glenn Adamson, “Memory,” in *The Invention of Craft* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 181-239.,

<sup>14</sup> William Morris was greatly influenced by Karl Marx's analysis in *Capital*, structured around different epochs of production, which Morris then used to present what he considered as the three great epochs of production starting in the Middle Ages, before a division of labour came to define the innerworkings of industrialised society.

upon the insurmountable task that is drawing up an accurate portrayal of a shape of time: “The shapes of time are the prey we want to capture.”<sup>15</sup> At a time when the discipline of art history was dominated by historical classifications of style, biography, or monographs, Kubler’s analysis focuses on *things* and their relation to time through the variables of series, sequence, change, time, as well as duration. Kubler argues that artifacts, tools and artworks alike, that manage to persevere through time embody a “purposeful solution” to a rational problem.<sup>16</sup> Said objects are dubbed “prime objects” and designated as such by their potential to trigger a formal sequence, which, in the case of the artwork, is the subsequent influx of reproductions and copies modeled after the so-called prime object.<sup>17</sup> Such formal sequences are open and can never close definitively as they may unexpectedly serve a purpose again generations later. Of interest to the present thesis is the idea that revivals operate upon this basis of an open formal sequence, revisiting mutated aesthetics

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<sup>15</sup> George Kubler, “The Classing of Things,” in *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 29. *The Shape of Time*, originally published in 1962, was reprinted in 2008 as “a freshly designed edition” (backcover). While the work itself was not updated in 2008, Kubler authored an article for the Yale architectural journal *Perspecta* in 1982, two decades after the first edition of his book, titled “The Shape of Time Reconsidered”. The article was an opportunity for Kubler to acknowledge a number of critiques and explain the book’s method of compiling anthropological data and mathematical methodology in order to advance the theory of shaped time (Focillon 1933 ; Kubler 1962 ; Krakauer 1966). As the article makes it clear towards the later half, *The Shape of Time* sought to introduce the intersection of social sciences (anthropological data of objects – things by manufactured/made by people) to the humanistic discipline of art history. Kubler concludes that without the consideration of these objects “the history of art becomes each decade more and more restricted to the interests of art collectors and museums”. (Kubler 1982, 121) Kubler’s shape of time using “man-made objects” was a point of departure for craft specialist and art history academic Ezra Shale’s 2017 book *The Shape of Craft*. As noted in one of the book’s reviews, Shale’s book on the different disciplines of craft and their application in modern examples of skilled labor came at a time of revival for material culture (new materialism) by reinstating a practice of applied analysis in art (Sorkin 2018). For further reading, see: Ezra Shales, *The Shape of Craft* (London: Reaktion book, 2017); Jenni Sorkin, “The Shape of Craft”, in *CAA.Reviews* (October 15, 2018). doi: <https://doi.org/10.3202/caa.reviews.2018.216>.

<sup>16</sup> George Kubler, “The History of Things,” *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> George Kubler’s rationalization of prime objects points to particular objects through history having “prime traits”, which he defines as possessing the capacity to effect change. This inventive power possessed by prime objects, in the grand scheme of history, indexes the event of mutation. Mutation, in Kubler’s theory, is a central pattern in the shape of time as it maps out instances where prime objects (inventions) generate their own copies and variants. Kubler makes sure to emphasize that prime objects, as he conceptualizes them, are not necessarily readily identifiable. Prime objects can range from the anonymous invention to signed and dated canonical works of art. This range illustrates the difficulty of reproducing a reliable and all-encompassing shape of time, comparing the retracing of prime objects to the impossibly tedious task of determining the first identifiable trace of a biological species. For further reading, see: George Kubler, “The Classing of Things,” *Ibid*, 39.

from the past and making them once again relevant in the context of a present revival. Among other things, Kubler mentions the renewed purpose of the prime object through technical revival, specifically, the revival of past knowledge or techniques.<sup>18</sup> However, in the case of a revival of knitting and crochet whose technical formal sequence has been continuously accessible throughout the centuries as an amateur hobby, the revival at stake here may instead be interpreted as an ideological revival. In the context of this thesis working through some of the frameworks established by a Eurocentric approach to art, knitting and crochet being used within the realm of the fine arts constitutes a mutation from its trajectory in European history. The idea that knitting and crochet can be vehicles of ideology is itself a *mutation* from this historical classification as deskilled domestic labour and inherent femininity.<sup>19</sup> The knitting and crochet exhibitions or activist initiatives in the case studies of this thesis reproduce this mutant gene shifting the view from the domestic to the public, echoing the popular feminist adage of “the personal is political”.<sup>20</sup> On the idea of mutation, Kubler is outspoken on his disdain for biological metaphors such as “flowering”, “growth” and “death” being used to explain prime objects and events in art history.<sup>21</sup> That said, he admits that the analogy of the mutant gene is representative of the slight behavioral changes which could explain the *raison d’être* of prime objects.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> George Kubler, *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Roszika Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch* provides a deeper look into the practice of embroidery as a signifier of feminine “docility, obedience, love of home and life without work”. It is important to note that Parker’s observations emerge out of a deep understanding specifically of the European context, most notably through the ages of the Renaissance, the Victorian period and Second-Wave feminism (the latter being most relevant to Parker at the time of writing the first edition of the book in 1984). In the context of this thesis working through some of the frameworks established by a Eurocentric approach, knitting and crochet being used within the realm of the fine arts constitutes a mutation from its trajectory in European history. For further reading, see: Roszika Parker, “The Creation of Femininity,” in *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, 1-16. (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> The famous slogan was coined by American civil rights worker and feminist activist Carol Hanisch in 1968, see: Theresa Man Ling Lee, “Rethinking the Personal and the Political: Feminist Activism and Civic Engagement,” in *Hypatia* 22, no. 4, (Autumn 2007): 163.

<sup>21</sup> Bence Nanay, “George Kubler and the Biological Metaphor of Art,” in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 58, no. 4, (October 2018): 424.

<sup>22</sup> George Kubler, *Ibid*, 36.

Where would these contemporary exhibitions on knitting and crochet, in Canada and the United States, fall within the framework of a formal sequence? What is implied in the narrative of revival they all carry in some form or another, regardless of intent? The exhibitions examined as part of this thesis, the narrative of revival, can be linked back to a history of American exhibitions which featured fiber art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s decades, various exhibitions showcased fiber art which generated much discourse and gatekeeping at a time when craft was supposedly undergoing a revival.<sup>23</sup> This gatekeeping fed into the dichotomy distinguishing craft from popular art, the latter being commonly referred to as folk art at the time. Through the lens of folk art, the work of fiber artists was compared to macramé, a popular and highly marketed domestic craft practice through the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, the question (or struggle) for fiber artists became whether to actively participate in this revival lest their art be saddled with these (often perceived as negative) associations to folk art.<sup>24</sup> In New York City alone, exhibitions such as *Eccentric Abstraction* (1966), *Wall Hangings* (1969), or *String and Rope* (1970) reconciled the conceptual idea of modern art with the medium of fiber, further insisting on establishing a distinction between high art and lowly craft, playing off a Greenbergian perspective based around formalist qualities and cerebral contemplation. Reviving mediums associated with craft also came with a narrative of folk politics which came to prominence in the formative years of globalization, at the onset of the 1970 New International Division of Labour (NIDL).<sup>25</sup> In *Inventing the Future:*

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<sup>23</sup> Elissa Auther, “Fiber Art and the Struggle,” *Ibid*, 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> From a feminist perspective, the ramifications of the NIDL on global feminism is addressed by Italian activist and feminist author Silvia Federici in her 2012 collection of essays titled “Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle”. In these essays, she examines how neoliberal politics have contributed to the restructuring of domestic politics allowing for the continuing exploitation of women’s labour and their reproductive rights under capitalism. In one essay titled “Reproduction and Feminist Struggle in the New International Division of Labor (1999)”, Federici offers the following definition and contextualization for the NIDL: “The NIDL is usually identified with the international restructuring of commodity production that has taken place since the mid ‘70s when, in response to intensifying labor conflict, the multinational corporations began to relocate their industrial outfits, especially in labor-intensive sectors like textile and electronics, in the “developing countries.” The NIDL is thus

*Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (2015) co-written by political theorists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, the authors explain the appeal of folk politics at the prospect of an increasingly globalized world, where production is alienated through its exportation:

Folk politics presents itself as another possible response to the problems of overwhelming complexity. If we do not understand how the world operates, the folk-political injunction is to reduce complexity down to a human scale. Indeed, folk-political writing is saturated with calls for a return to authenticity, to immediacy, to a world that is ‘transparent’, ‘human-scaled’, ‘tangible’, ‘slow’, ‘harmonious’, ‘simple’, and ‘everyday’.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, folk art of the 1960s and 1970s came to prominence as a purposeful, immediate solution in the face of globalization. As artworks made of craft materials came to be categorized under folk art, the mediums carried connotations of authenticity through their association with the handmade. Paradoxically, despite the opposing forces that were conceptual art and folk art in the 1960s and 1970s, crafted materials were simultaneously adopted by conceptual artist as a means of reinventing the newest form of abstraction.<sup>27</sup>

Fiber as a material was being adopted for conceptualist aesthetics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with little consideration into the process of making itself.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, exhibitions taking an interest in the practices of knitting and crochet are historically recent, having only gained traction at the turn of the millennium. The historical situation of these exhibitions makes them contingent not only on the increased popularity of performance and multidisciplinary art in a postmodernist era, but also

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identified with the formation of the Free Trade Zones—industrial sites exempt from any labor regulation producing for export—and with the organization of “global assembly lines” by transnational corporations.” The creation of the NIDL is a key event in the formation of a globalized world, an event that Federici goes back to in an effort to dispel the myth of “interconnectedness” associated with it. She further argues that this restructuring fractured any possibility for international feminist solidarity by increasing divisions among women worldwide with the inequalities it generated in terms of living standards. For further reading, see: Silvia Federici, “Reproduction and Feminist Struggle in the New International Division of Labor (1999),” in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn: PM Press, 2012), 66-67.

<sup>26</sup> Nick Srnicek, and Alex Williams, “Our Political Common Sense,” in *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (London, New York: Verso, 2015), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Elissa Auther, “Postminimalism,” *Ibid*, 50-51.

<sup>28</sup> This point is reinforced by the title of Elissa Auther’s study on 20<sup>th</sup> century fiber art which emphasizes the materials of “string, felt, thread”.

feminist discourse of the so-called Third Wave. The thesis will delineate the development of a narrative around revival based upon knitting and crochet practices in Canadian and American exhibition spaces, starting with one of its largest displays in *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*.

## *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* (2007): Reconsidering and Deconstructing the Notion of Value

Knitted and crocheted art exhibited in contemporary spaces will tend to promote these practices by reinvigorating the discourse surrounding them while pulling from their enduring legacy over centuries. Each case study chosen for this thesis casts the mediums/practices of knitting and crochet in new, or at least different, ways and, in doing so, a narrative of revival starts to form around it. Each is designed to incite audiences to reconsider the value of craft in the art world. The most prominent example of such an endeavour into shifting the value systems of the artworld through needlework is the 2007 exhibition *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* encouraged a push toward the intellectualization of craft as a way of subverting expectations set on craft according to the values that currently govern the artworld. The section of the thesis will examine the reactionary and not-so-radical-or-subversive nature when revival is predicated on a narrative of shifts in value systems. Indeed, this idea will be critically examined via a reconsideration and deconstruction of the notion of value.

The introduction of the thesis has already touched upon the museum's name change in 2002 going from the American Craft Museum to the "sexier" Museum of Arts and Design.<sup>29</sup> The allure of the museum's new name echoed the museum's history up to this point which was marked by

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<sup>29</sup> Martha Schwendener, "Flair and Flash, Not Frumpiness: An Exhibition Documents the Growing Influence of Knitting and Lace on Art," in *New York Times* (January 27, 2007), <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/27/arts/design/27lace.html>.

plans of expansion, leading to its subsequent relocation in 2008 in order to better accommodate its rapidly growing collection of interdisciplinary craft.<sup>30</sup> This coincided with the early 2000s's noticeable increase of knitting and crochet practices being exhibited in institutions of the artworld as noted in the previous section. The historical convergence combined with the museum's trajectory through the years of legitimizing knitting and crochet in the art world, especially when exhibited within the walls of one of the leading craft institutions in North America. When considering these elements together, this creates a recipe for the legitimization of practices like knitting and crochet which had yet to have been exhibited at such a scale and in such a renowned artistic institution, further made true by the record attendance set by *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* for the museum.<sup>31</sup> However, the title of the exhibition suggests an understanding of these practices as not only worthy of artistic appraisal, but as "radical" and "subversive". Radical and subversive are both adjectives meaning to affect the structures of a system, an institution, or other authoritative bodies.<sup>32</sup> How are radical and subversive practices being framed in *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*? To answer this question, it is necessary to understand how revival and the notion of value (the building block of capitalist society) are presented within the exhibition.

In the introduction to the *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* catalogue, chief curator David Revere McFadden speaks of a "renaissance of interest and activity in knitting and laces structures [which] has been nourished by larger changes in the ways that art is made and perceived."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Museum History," Museum of Art and Design, <https://madmuseum.org/about/museum-history>.

<sup>31</sup> Jacqueline Ruyak, "Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting," in *Surface Design Journal* 32, no. 1, (Fall 2007): 89.

<sup>32</sup> The two words are used quite interchangeably at times. However, one website differentiating the two states the following: "As adjectives the difference between radical and subversive is that radical is favoring fundamental change or change at the root cause of a matter while subversive is intending to subvert, overturn or undermine a government or authority." (<https://wikidiff.com/radical/subversive>)

<sup>33</sup> David Revere McFadden, "Knitting and Lace: Radical and Subversive?," in *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*, ed. David Revere McFadden, Jennifer Scanlan, and Jennifer Steifle Edwards (New York: Museum of Arts & Design, 2007), 8.

Renaissance as revival is understood here as being guided by a larger social mobility and ongoing shifts in what is socially perceived as valuable, resulting in a re-valuation of these practices.<sup>34</sup> The question of value in the context of the exhibition is made more evident further into the exhibition text:

The mission of the Museum of Arts & Design is to understand and reveal this intentionality and to celebrate the unique intersection of intelligence, visual acuity, and skill that artists bring to the behavior of making things of *aesthetic value*.<sup>35</sup>

The curator's statement brings forth the idea of revival through conceptual, intellectual but most importantly, aesthetic value judgement. This passage strategically frames the limits of the scope of artists that ended up being included, in other words, artists who qualify as having established themselves as producers of objects of aesthetic value, a narrative which has permeated the field of Western art since the age of Enlightenment.<sup>36</sup> In Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of fields of cultural production, the French sociologist argued that the recognition and belief in value are the conditions which allow for the work of art to penetrate discourses of legitimacy. Conversely, recognition and belief in the work of art's value rely upon the social conditions of production within the field of agents, in other words, the social authority of institutions like museums or galleries who defend the interest of the art world's value system.<sup>37</sup> Insofar as value informs and maintains the

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<sup>34</sup> This recalls Elissa Auther's conclusion cited earlier in the thesis introduction wherein she believes that the renewed interest toward fiber art during the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be a result of wider societal shifts.

<sup>35</sup> David Revere McFadden, *Ibid*, 9 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>36</sup> This passage refers to canonical Western art historiography which can be traced back to the period of Enlightenment. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) is often argued as being among the firsts to attempt to elaborate a tangible method to critique and identify the beautiful, thereby establishing a taxonomy of values to determine what qualifies as beautiful, by proxy as art. Kantian aesthetics have (in)famously influenced modern art criticism articulated by Clement Greenberg in his 1960 book *Modernist Painting*, an influence which can still be felt in the exhibition spaces of the "White Cube" promoting an immersive contemplative visual experience by emphasizing the work's formal qualities against a "neutral" white background. Important to note here is that the MAD was also a "White Cube". For further reading regarding craft's relation to the paradigm of the white cube, see: Lisa Vinebaum, "Outside the White Cube," in *Exhibiting Craft and Design: Transgressing the White Cube Paradigm, 1930-Present*, edited by Alla Myzelev, 160-80 (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, Or the Economic World Reversed" in *The Field of Cultural Production*, 36-37 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

hierarchical structure of a field of production, this would indicate that value should theoretically be the main *target* of “radical” or “subversive” interventions, rather than its *goal*. Is the exhibition faithful to its title?

The questions pertaining to the value of craft have been deeply ingrained in the cultural imagination as well as art’s history and historiography, and especially for the so-called domestic and feminine practices of knitting and crochet. They are presented as historically devalued, currently undervalued, but with the potential of becoming valuable. However, it is often argued that, for needlework to be perceived as valuable, systems of value need to be re-configured. In a 2013 article on new amateur feminine craft, design historian Fiona Hackney promotes quiet activism, notably exemplified by knitting circles or individual knitting, as a credible methodology for studying craft processes and for generating “alternative forms of value and social capital”.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the article, these amateur hobbies are framed as a driving force for creating alternative economies, generating alternative value forms through a “shared love of making.”<sup>39</sup> Here, the value-form is elaborated in relation to the hobby of knitting which Hackney frames as countercultural, thereby qualifying as radical or subversive.<sup>40</sup> Whether knitting or crochet are countercultural or *radical* remains a point of contention and specialist of activist visual arts Kirsty Robertson demonstrates that, through knitting’s activist history, its credibility as a political tool is constantly being scrutinized one way or another.<sup>41</sup> With that said, narratives embedded in systems of value (renewed, shifted, or alternative) contain knitting and crochet practices within the binaries of capitalist trends: what’s “in” (mainstream) and what’s “out” (marginalized). Returning to

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<sup>38</sup> Fiona Hackney, “Quiet Activism and the New Amateur: The Power of Home and Hobby Crafts,” in *Design and Culture* 5, no 5 (July 2013): 175.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 187

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 172

<sup>41</sup> Kirsty Robertson, “Rebellious Doilies and Subversive Stitches: Writing a Craftivist History,” in Maria Elena Buszek, *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Conctemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) 184-203.

*Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*, it is evident that the curator David Revere McFadden treads carefully when he explains that the exhibition aimed not to shed light on devalued feminine art forms nor men's participation in needlework, but rather to salute the "new prominence" of fiber as a legitimate medium in art.<sup>42</sup> As an authority in terms of craft display, the Museum of Arts and Design "saluting the new prominence" of knitting and crochet signals its value as credible art mediums. Here, Revere McFadden may not explicitly aim to shift or transform the value of so-called devalued feminine art, but nevertheless displays it in such a way that can be appealing to the artworld and its ever-shifting hierarchy of values, an aspect that will further be developed toward the end of this section.

In *Against Value in Arts and Education* (2016), editors Sam Ladkin, lecturer in creative and critical writing, Robert McKay, lecturer in English literature and Emilie Bojesen, lecturer in education, re-evaluate the autonomy (the locus of radical potential) of the arts when buttressed against the "audit culture" cultivated by the dogma of value. The collection of essays touch upon value in the domains of critique, arts and education. In the introduction, the editors propose that when rushing to defend or form a critique of the arts and education using the metric of value, more pressing questions should first be considered:

Do the arts and education constitute a critique of value rather than act as expressions of value, or can they? Rather than intrinsically constituting or generating exchange value, should the arts and education struggle against the unthinkingness of value, value as that unthought region we take for granted? We have to ask ourselves what harm we carry on those who make art, or who educate, by insisting on a metric of value.<sup>43</sup>

The autonomous hierarchy of the artworld, that which determines the exchange value of an artwork, necessarily rests upon abstract expressions of value which, as the passage states, often

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<sup>42</sup> David Revere McFadden, *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Emile Bojesen, Robert McKay, and Sam Ladkin, "Introduction," in *Against Value in the Arts and Education* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 5.

serve to reinforce the natural appearance of value, its unthinkingness.<sup>44</sup> When value is taken for granted, so are the fundamental structures which rest upon the unthinkingness of the value system. To critique value is to address tautological, self-regulatory discourse that circulate within the logics of the field and help maintain its hierarchies. Radical or subversive approaches to value would therefore not only seek to shift value systems but deconstruct them entirely. Having established this, what does it mean when a large-scale exhibition, deeply entrenched into the internal logics of the art world, display so-called radical and subversive practices? The editors of *Against Value* provide the useful alternative of “significance” instead of the word “value”. Significance highlights the subjective experience and compensates for the contextual meaning lacking in value. Unlike the sociability, transferability, and power of conversion of value, in other words its exchange value, significance informs the non-fungible and subjective contexts of an event or encounter. What is significant to one person may not be for another.

*Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* was a highly publicized exhibition, even getting its own segment during a morning news show which opened with the line “gone are the days of your grandma’s doilies”, quickly followed by the reporter flaunting her vest knitted by her mother.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, the exhibition presents very few works that could be considered “wearable”. It does, however, feature a range of artists that have a background in fashion, among them are artists Liz

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<sup>44</sup> Karl Marx famously helped define the expression of the so-called “value-form” in the first volume of *Capital* which, in capitalist society, is generally understood as the commodity. Marxist scholar Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s theory of real abstraction later stipulated that value is formed at the site of exchange, reifying the abstraction of the object’s original use-value in order to level an equivalent exchange of goods. In the field of economics, value constitutes the core of the agreed-upon language for capitalist transactions driven by abstract potentiality, predictability, and innovation into the future. For a more in-depth and recent analysis of Sohn-Rethel’s idea of the formation of value through reified processes of commodity abstraction, see: Alberto Toscano, “The Open Secret of Real Abstraction,” in *Rethinking Marxism* 20, no. 2, (2008): 273-87.

<sup>45</sup> Sabrinagsch, “cw11 morning news: CW-11 morning news covers the Museum of Arts and Design's 2007 exhibition "Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting." Featuring Sabrina Gschwandtner, KnitKnit founder and artist,” Youtube, August 4, 2019. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9qMbPasAgA&list=FLP1maVxgcVyyJ5IUecBYJ\\_w&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9qMbPasAgA&list=FLP1maVxgcVyyJ5IUecBYJ_w&index=4)

Collins and Freddie Robins. American artist Liz Collins experiments with knitting such as with the technique of “knit grafting”. This technique, allowing for the fusion of knits on top of varying fabric, is mobilized in the artwork titled *Illuminated Veins* (2006) (Figs 1 and 2) where the blue and red knits create the effect of lines connecting with and laying over one another in the way of veins. These knitted veins rest atop the silk body of a classic 1950’s silhouette and extend out in a way meant to resonate with the surrounding architecture of the museum.<sup>46</sup> The textured knits of blue and red colours contrast strongly with the soft silk of a more muted tone, suggesting the abjection of a body turned inside-out. That said, the abject nature of its construction is downplayed by the elegant silhouette of the dress. In addition to the colours, the contrasts in texture, that of knits and purls overlaying the soft silk, reinforce this inversion of bodily integrity with the structural elements of knit grafting exploding outwards into the surrounding architecture.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, the exhibition’s teacher resource packet had some questions laid out to ask in relation to some of the works displayed and, about Liz Collin’s installation it asks: “How does this garment [Liz Collins’s *Illuminated Veins*] fit into the definition of knitting and/or lace?”<sup>48</sup> The question indirectly hints to the audience that Collins’s garment could be interpreted as subverting preconceived ideas about what a knitted structure is or should look like. While Collins’s subversion may stem from how she toys with contrasts, between chiffon, beige, blues and reds or the silhouette against a spiderweb of knits, the artist also makes use of her own historical fashion knowledge in the process of creating these objects. Liz Collin’s dress installation aims for subversion by recalling

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<sup>46</sup> “Liz Collins,” in *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*, ed. David Revere McFadden, Jennifer Scanlan, and Jennifer Steifle Edwards (New York: Museum of Arts & Design, 2007), 22.

<sup>47</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>48</sup> The Crafted Classroom, *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting: Teacher Resource Packet*, 16 (New York: Museum of Arts & Design), <https://madmuseum.org/sites/default/files/static/ed/Create%20TRP/Radical%20Lace%20TRP-arial.pdf>.

past metaphors, the recognizable silhouette of a 1950s dress, as an attempt to redefine knitted structures.

By contrast, English artist Freddie Robins's art installation/sculpture titled "Craft Kills" (2002) (Fig. 3) is a machine-knitted grey wool in the shape of a body envelope joined at the hands, ribbed at the neck, and pierced by needles throughout its body. On the body's stomach area are the words "CRAFT KILLS" knitted in blue. The sculpture floats ominously above the ground, and knitting needles are scattered on the floor. The image of the body, said to be a self-portrait, appears to correspond to Robins's intention of representing knitting as visceral and violent, rather than a passive activity, reinforced by the actual ban of needles aboard flights post-9/11.<sup>49</sup> Her knitted body is not being comforted or made warm by the knit, but rather suffocated, restricted, and pierced by its instruments. Although the artist calls it a Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows, it also recalls the voodoo doll afflicted by the curse of craft, and one can only speculate that the ones on the receiving end of that curse could be knitters such as Robins. Such an interpretation is reinforced by this statement on the artist's website: "Freddie is an artist who challenges the common perception of knitting as craft."<sup>50</sup> Robins views knitting as inherently subversive and fashionable, her conceptual work consisting of non-functional objects, which would help distinguish it from the values inherited from William Morris's view of craft as both decorative and functional.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps unintentionally, Robins's sculpture takes aim at the field of modern craft and its core values, presenting knitting as a martyr figure, an outsider when contained within the values

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<sup>49</sup>"Freddie Robins," in *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*, ed. David Revere McFadden, Jennifer Scanlan, and Jennifer Steifle Edwards (New York: Museum of Arts & Design, 2007), 26.

<sup>50</sup>"Freddie Robins," Royal College of Art, Last modified November 14, 2014, <https://www.rca.ac.uk/more/staff/freddie-robins/>.

<sup>51</sup>"Freddie Robins," Last modified June 15, 2020, <https://www.textilecurator.com/home-default/home-2-2/freddie-robins/>.

promoted by the field of craft as understood by Robins as the legacy of 19<sup>th</sup> century Arts and Crafts Movement.

On a different note, the exhibition also presents a more “on the nose” interpretation of radicalism and subversion with its politically engaged section titled “Interconnections”. Among them is interdisciplinary artist Sabrina Gschwandtner’s *Wartime Knitting Circle* (2007) (Fig. 4), an interactive performance installation which invited the audience to knit and engage in dialogues about the (at the time) current war crises in Iraq and Afghanistan. The models provided to the participants to knit were based on textile artists Lisa Ann Auerbach’s *Body Count Mittens* (2005) (Fig. 5) and Cat Mazza’s *Stitch for Senate* project (2007-2009) (Fig. 6). The two models aimed to advocate for the safe return of the troops home, with the former pointing to the death toll which increased in the amount of time between making the two separate mittens, and the latter consisting in knitting the names of senators as a political call to action. The other activist project, the *Nike Petition Blanket* by Cat Mazza (2007) (Fig. 7), brings attention to the exportation and exploitation of labour in foreign countries, exemplified (but not limited to) *Nike* factories which produce goods of high value for a significantly low-cost, paying its factory workers extremely low wages well below living standards. Mazza’s petition is a collage of crocheted squares used as replacement for the typically written signature, thereby emphasizing the amount of labour that goes into creating a single square, a single signature.

Reviews of the show have said that, based on the overwhelming amount of works on display, the show lost its focus. Indeed, while in some parts of the exhibition the visitors are encouraged to actively participate in activist causes through *Wartime Knitting Circle* and *Nike Petition Blanket*, in the same exhibition, they are greeted upon their entry by *Expanding Club* (2007) (Fig. 8), made by Canadian artist Janet Echelman, which is a large floating mushroom cloud shaped knotted net

sporting the colours of countries having participated in nuclear warfare. Critic and textile writer Jessica Hemmings finds that the encounter with some of the artworks felt limited both in terms of space but also considering the abundance of other works to see within a certain amount of time.<sup>52</sup> The imposing display of knitting and crocheted art may have aimed to resolve a question the likes of “Why have knitting and crochet not been recognized for their intellectual value?”. In other words, the exhibition seemed to bet on quantity to effectively secure the “entrance” of these practices in the institutional realm of the fine arts. Admittedly, this fails to dig deeper into the sociological history attached to these practices, why these practices have struggled to fit in with a male-dominant intellectual modernist narrative to begin with.<sup>53</sup> This could explain why the exhibition was criticized for its lack of focus. It should be noted that the exhibition catalogue nevertheless turned out as a useful index for knitting, lace, and crochet artists, although still limited considering they mostly came from North America or Europe.

The exhibition catalogue provides ample biographical details about most of its artists. In the case of Liz Collins, we learn that she made her New York fashion debut in the fall of 2002 and, following her runway premiere, eventually grew more interested in experimenting with ways of sculpting fabric. Her transition from the professional field of fashion into the field of fine arts is driven forward by her conceptual experiments with material constructions, developing a kinship between fabric and architecture. Like Collins, Freddie Robins also had her beginnings in the world

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<sup>52</sup> Jessica Hemmings, “Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting,” Exhibition Reviews, Published January 1, 2007, <https://www.jessicahemmings.com/radical-lace-subversive-knitting-mad-new-york/>.

<sup>53</sup> The question “Why have knitting and crochet not been recognized for their intellectual value?” is an obvious nod to the late art historian Linda Nochlin’s famous inquiry and text titled *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* Nochlin dodges the trap of responses in the form of an overcompensation which would fail to consider the deeply rooted sociological factors to blame for the lack of women artists known to the art historical canon: “The existence of a tiny band of successful, if not great, women artists throughout history does nothing to gainsay this fact, any more than does the existence of a few superstars or token achievers among the members of any minority groups.” See: Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” in *Art and Sexual Politics: Women’s Liberation, Women Artists, and Art History*, ed. Thomas B. Hess, and Elizabeth C. Baker (New York: MacMillan, 1973), 37.

of fashion and made her transition into the fine arts through conceptual knitted art. The fields of fashion and art are two distinct fields which operate their own hierarchy of values and according to their own rules. Nevertheless, the two fields share enough affinities for an artist like Liz Collins to easily translate her work in the field of fashion into the vernacular of the artworld. Referring back to the theory of fields of cultural production, Pierre Bourdieu argues that the state of a field is defined by its autonomy from other fields, and from there it can then introduce its own set of rules and hierarchies.<sup>54</sup> The smooth transition from professional craft in the world of fashion and Collins's subsequent entry into the artworld was also aided by the fashion garment being easily accommodated into the medium of installation art in addition to her approach to garment construction which she could articulate using ideas of architecture already valuable to the lexicon of the field of art.<sup>55</sup> The detailed biography of artists in the *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* catalogue is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provides insights into not only the artist's practice but their provenance, how they navigated their way into the field of craft, specifically needlework art. This could also explain how Françoise Dupré's art came to be categorized under the section on "intersections" meant to address the sense of community in knitting adjacent practices, not stemming from the nature of the work displayed in *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*, but more so based on the artist's her previous community-based projects. On the other hand, the biographical approach feeds into a narrative of individualist agency, which fails to acknowledge unequal opportunities across artists where individuals pursuing the route of the arts have to meet high expectations or risk greater debt. The lack of artists of colour and artists from

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<sup>54</sup> Bourdieu argues that recognition, as a part of the mechanisms of a field of production further complicates the notion of "true" autonomy. In the literary and artistic fields where recognition determines the dynamic of the field of positions (and vice-versa), there is a constant struggle with autonomy where hierarchy persists: "the more autonomous [the field] is, i.e. the more completely it fulfills its own logic as a field, the more it tends to suspend or reverse the dominant principle of hierarchization (...) whatever its degree of independence, it continues to be affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it." (Bourdieu 1993, 39)

<sup>55</sup> "Liz Collins", *Ibid.*

non-Western countries in an international exhibition is indicative of the role played by socioeconomics at the intersection of race, class, and gender in determining one's favorable entrance within the field or position within a formal sequence.<sup>56</sup>

The situation of knitting and crochet within craft, as well as craft within art history, when examined through the lens of value, has the perverse effect of generating a greater crisis in the discourse being proliferated. Crisis, as defined by the authors of *Against Value*, is informed by philosopher Hannah Arendt's theory of crisis as both immanent danger and an opportunity for exploitation. The authors argue that the role of value is not one of a response, but rather an expression of the crisis. Therefore, shifts in value systems, at most, point to a problem that exist within the system, without necessarily addressing the hierarchy that subsumes it.<sup>57</sup> The limitations of value discourse amount to neoliberal politics of contained progress within the reach of the capitalist status quo.

Radicalism, subversion as well as transgression have undoubtedly served to shape philosophical definitions on the ontology of art. Duchampian modernism has triumphed (or perhaps made a parody of) a narrative of a value system of art based on navigating through a subversion of expectations and radical undertakings through various mediums of art, both aspects that continue to influence conceptual thinking in contemporary art. If a purpose is to be assigned to the *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* exhibition, it would be that it sought to showcase knitting and crochet

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<sup>56</sup> George Kubler's section on the "limitations of biography" were critical of biography, specifically in the sense that it would rely on biological fallacies such as the idea of the "genius". Indeed, Kubler argues against this by reinstating the biological fact that genius is not genetically inherited, therefore, disposition is simply "incidence under nurture" See: George Kubler, "The History of Things," *Ibid*, 6. This is certainly comparable to Bourdieu's theory of position-takings and favorable entry in the fields of cultural productions.

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Ibid*, 72

as works not only worthy of their own museum presence, but also worthy of conceptual evaluation through their so-called “subversive and radical” nature.

While revivals can be shaped by economic, social, institutional, ethical or structural factors, it is important to understand the slippery slope that is revival founded upon so-called shifts in value systems. *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* framed knitting and crochet as intellectual endeavours, positioning these practices within this hierarchy, which displaces one set of values in favour of another, without disrupting the structure of the field itself, as the descriptors “radical” and “subversive” would otherwise suggest. That is not to say that artworks exhibited as part of *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* couldn’t be interpreted as radical or subversive in some respects. However, as writer on textiles Jessica Hemmings points out in her review of the show, this over accumulation of artworks comes at the cost of “[diluting] exploration of the currency knitting is currently enjoying.”<sup>58</sup>

Value, the myth of objectivity which sustains capitalist society, is rather arbitrary. While allocating more capital to knitting and crochet practices in the form of recognition and value can provoke renewed critical attention to the artistic practices, the weight of value perpetuates hierarchical struggles within cultural production which have historically kept the craft and fine arts at odds. Instead of holding knit and crocheted artworks as valuable, could they be understood from the perspective of prime objects and formal sequence, per George Kubler’s definition? Does the significance of knitting and crochet being exhibited within such institutions like the Museum of Arts and Design at the turn of the millennium necessarily indicate the new formal sequence, centered around the (hypothetical) prime object: knit and crocheted conceptual art? Nevertheless,

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<sup>58</sup> Jessica Hemmings, *Ibid.*

it remains that *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* was undoubtedly meaning to offer a solution to the dichotomy of art and craft and its methods share a kind of affinity with Kubler's idea of serial appreciation:

As the linked solutions accumulate, the contours of a quest by several persons are disclosed, a quest in search of forms enlarging the domain of aesthetic discourse. That domain concerns affective states of being, and its true boundaries are rarely if ever disclosed by objects or pictures or buildings taken in isolation. The continuum of connected effort makes the single work more pleasurable and intelligible than in isolation.<sup>59</sup>

The following case study will depart from the "continuum" of serial appreciation and take a deeper look at the implications of a cyclical shape of time.

### *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* (2009): Reclaiming Through Feminist Metaphors of the Past and for Intergenerational Solidarity

*In order for struggles to form a cycle there must be a spatial proximity of laboring bodies and an existential temporal continuity. Without this proximity and this continuity, we lack the conditions for cellularized bodies to become community.*<sup>60</sup>

Presented at the Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto, the 2009 exhibition *She Will Always Be Younger* accompanied a larger one titled *When Women Rule the World: Judy Chicago in Thread*, a survey of American feminist artist Judy Chicago focusing on her collaborative needlework art. *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* assembled works by five textile artists, including knits and crochets by Canadian artist Wednesday Lupypciw and American artist Cat Mazza. In the introductory statement, guest curator and artist Allyson Mitchell (whose work is included in the third case study, 2006's *SUPER STRING*) underscores the importance of honouring past feminist ideas and feminism's inherent cycles when forming those intergenerational bonds.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> George Kubler, "The Classing of Things," *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>60</sup> Franco Bifo Berardi, "The Zero Zero Decade," in *After The Future: Franco Berardi ("Bifo")*, edited by Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn, 72 (Stirling : AK Press, 2011), <https://libcom.org/files/AfterFuture.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Allyson Mitchell, "She Will Always Be Younger Than Us," in *When Women Rule the World: Judy Chicago in Thread*, ed. Allyson Mitchell, and Sarah Quinton (Toronto: Textile Museum of Canada), 85.

Here, revival is not understood in terms of the material craft, or even needlework, but rather in terms of feminist discourse. The section will focus on the meaning of knitting and crochet as resurgent practices in addition to their significance as vectors of feminist discourse inherited from so-called Second and Third Wave feminisms.

When imagining a cycle, one imagines a straightforward circle going one direction to reach back to its starting point just to repeat this same trajectory. Using George Kubler's terminology, the starting point of the circle constitutes the prime object, and the remaining interval is made up of the series of objects reproducing the prime object's traits. Finally, the moment of revival completes the cyclical loop back to the starting point where a) a prime object with mutant intentions is born; or b) a technical revival is underway. In this circular diagram of a cycle, revival should be imagined at the interstice of repetition and fundamental change.<sup>62</sup> For instance, knitting and crochet have never faced the threat of their technique being forgotten through the ages. Therefore, when thinking of revival in relation to these practices, what is implied is a renewed historical purpose propelling them into the limelight of relevancy.<sup>63</sup> As a sister exhibition to *When Women Rule the World: Judy Chicago in Thread*, the knitted and crocheted art displayed as part of *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* are to be considered as a complement or, perhaps, a continuation to Judy Chicago's thread works. Together, these feminine coded practices appear as the site of a short-lived formal sequence seeking to find a solution to revive past feminist "cycles",

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<sup>62</sup> Kubler adds the variable of duration to his analysis of periods which reveal the purpose behind these historical events or cycles. He explains how, for instance, art history arbitrarily ascribed the Greco-Roman era the span of a millennium, a duration unmatched by any other periods in the canonical Western classification of history. See: George Kubler, "Some Kind of Duration," *Ibid*, 91-92.

<sup>63</sup> This ideological revival for knitting and crochet shares some parallels to the ideology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde wherein a new philosophy for autonomous art relied on exploring/exploiting the dichotomy of art and life. Craft writer Louise Mazanti argues that, while the avant-garde theory as articulated by art historian Peter Bürger still serves as a point of reference for contemporary conceptual craft, the identity of craft, mainly through its aesthetic position, renders it incompatible to the avant-garde's quest for aesthetic autonomy. The craft objects should thus form a different category and Mazanti propositions "super-objects". For further reading, see: Louise Mazanti, "Super-Objects: Craft as an Aesthetic Position," in Maria Elena Buszek, *Ibid*, 59-82.

a link that had been fragmented by moral differences between the so-called Second and Third Waves. The circularity of cycles reconciles three key conditions for historical change: structural and temporal integrity (the fully formed cycle), purpose (the way forward) and dialectics (the reality of contradictions coexisting within a cycle or across formal sequences).

This proposed understanding of an ontology of cycles suggests continuity through the accomplishment of a sequence, followed by its repetition. However, by returning to the same sequence, pointing back to the previous solutions or struggles, the problem appears to take on a different form: History repeats itself, but differently. Similarly, knitting and crochet involve repetition, a circular or back-and-forth cadence that, while repetitive, makes the overall shape of the object grow, materially generating something “new”.

Another metaphor for cycles is that of a “wave”. Waves in nature form out of a vibration in the ocean, increasingly growing above the surface of the water to eventually crash onto the shore. Wave as accumulation is also present in the wave as an emotional feeling that slowly takes over the nervous system and reaches its peak before eventually fading away. Waves combine temporal continuity (water in the ocean in perpetual motion) and structural continuity (waves carrying water forward and ultimately bringing it back into the ocean). In light of this, the historicization of feminism as first, second and third waves is attractive at first glance, as a metaphor of unity and solidarity, the wave carrying the feminist movement forward into the future.<sup>64</sup> However, waves

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<sup>64</sup> The metaphor of the oceanic wave for feminism, despite its ubiquity, has been criticized by feminist scholars for “[flattening] out the past and [creating] historical amnesia about the long and complicated trajectory of women’s rights and feminist activism.” In the last decade, feminist discourse across disciplines has been re-thinking/questioning the utility of the wave metaphor (Laughlin, A., Castledine, L., 2011 ; Rome S., O’Donohoe, Dunnett 2019, 252-72 ; Davidson, Joe P.L. 2021). In contrast, Nancy A. Hewitt, expert on gender history and feminism, keeps the notion of wave however, rather than mobilizing the oceanic metaphor, uses the metaphor of waves transmitted by satellite or radio. As opposed to oceanic waves, transmitters carry and extend waves in the form of short or long frequencies, engineered and used with the purpose of communicating and listening to a message. The fundamental difference between the oceanic wave and the satellite waves is the element of communication which, among other things, can be cultivated through forging intergenerational bonds. See: Nancy

also evoke the tangible and disruptive danger of sublime nature, be it drowning, suffocation or, perhaps more threatening, disappearance. The struggle pervading contemporary feminism may lie precisely in how to emerge out of the wave and step into a virtual and safe future, one that will not face a fourth incoming wave, as argued by feminist art historian Griselda Pollock.<sup>65</sup> Knitting and crochet, through the structural continuity it embodies, could be used as model for rekindling the intergenerational bond severed by the progressivist narrative used to historicize and categorize feminism(s).<sup>66</sup> The 2009 exhibition *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* provides a glimpse into such a narrative.

To fully flesh out the intergenerational narrative and the formal sequence which underpins this exhibition, a brief survey of the Judy Chicago exhibition is in order. Working throughout the 1970s, Judy Chicago's most well-known piece is undoubtedly the 1979 monumental installation *The Dinner Party*, a triangular shaped table adorned with fine cutlery, ceramics plates and embroidered table runners (Fig.9). This hypothetical dinner party invited women figures from Western history and mythology, reunited and represented using an iconography of the so-called "core", in other words, imagery resembling the shapes of female sexual organs. This iconography

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A. Hewitt, "Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor," in *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3, (Fall 2012): 658-80.

<sup>65</sup> Griselda Pollock's 2016 article *Is Feminism a Trauma, a Bad Memory, or a Virtual Future?* inquires on the state of this contemporary feminist movement, arguing in favour of stronger intergenerational understanding from one feminist wave to another, which brings the author to question the analogy of wave used to frame feminist movements. Her concerns arise from the historical categorization of feminism as over and done with in the 1990s after the work of Third Wave pioneers. In response to this, she states: "I decided to argue the inverse. I suggested that, far from being ready for the dustbin of history, feminism had not yet arrived [...] I declared feminism to be virtual. [...] This freed me from the burden of defending a past that was, of course, itself already being carved up and periodized, treated like a bone to be fought over by contentious generations, or drowned in waves of erasing novelty". See: Griselda Pollock, "Is Feminism a Trauma, a Bad Memory, or a Virtual Future?," in *Differences* 27, no. 2, (2016): 30.

<sup>66</sup> The feminist paradox of nostalgia and progress has rendered the project of feminist historiography all the more difficult to build in a cohesive and constructive manner. While both nostalgia and progress are aspects often argued among feminist scholars, both are undoubtedly a part of how the Western feminist project of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to mark the collective psyche. For a good example of a nuanced historical analysis of feminist's past, one that engages in good faith with this paradox, see Victoria Hesford's 2013 analysis of the rhetoric used to establish the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s: Victoria Hesford, *Feeling Women's Liberation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

is signified here in the flower-shaped ceramics plates (the vulva) and the shape of the inverted triangle (the pubis). This piece has attracted much controversy and received valid criticism, but it nevertheless remains a staple in the artist's production, particularly for its collaborative aspect. Indeed, the installation required the labour of over 400 workers.<sup>67</sup> Chicago's arsenal of craftspeople (sometimes including, other times excluding herself) had been a staple in her production throughout the decade. In the catalogue for the 2009 exhibition, Canadian artist and curator Dr. Allyson Mitchell elaborates on the central role of collaboration with other women in Chicago's art, specifically in relation to her *Birth Project* (1980-1985) (Fig. 10) which were needlework depictions of biological processes the artist associated with womanhood, such as birth, in an effort to establish the foundations for a feminist visual language, in this case leaning on the universalist spiralling aesthetics of the female center. The connotations of needlework as feminine labour only served to add on to the idea of solidarity in femininity. However, this solidarity came with the reality that Chicago, lacking in needlework skills, resorted to delegating this labour onto amateur needleworkers who, according to the catalogue, demonstrated technical mastery, as well as added personal knowledge and experience to the piece.<sup>68</sup> In the context of the 1970s, Judy Chicago's essentialist iconography, although much criticized by the oncoming generation of Third Wave feminists, undoubtedly contributed toward imprinting the feminist slogan "The Personal is Political" into the collective imaginary, bringing women's lived experiences to the forefront of political battles. Mitchell's essay makes careful note of Judy Chicago's open attitude towards the criticism, highlighting the artist's acknowledgement of the problematic use of female genitalia

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<sup>67</sup> Roszika Parker, "A Naturally Revolutionary Art?," *Ibid* (London: IB Tauris, 2010), 209 ; Allyson Mitchell, "A Call to Arms," in *When Women Rule the World: Judy Chicago in Thread*, ed. Allyson Mitchell, and Sarah Quinton (Toronto: Textile Museum of Canada, 2009), 18-19. There were multiple catalogues for the Dinner Party, see: Judy Chicago, and Susan Hill, *Embroidering Our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework* (New York: Anchor Books, 1980) ; Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party : A Symbol of Our Heritage* (Green City: Anchor Press/DoubleDay, 1979).

<sup>68</sup> Allyson Mitchell, "A Call to Arms," *Ibid*, 19.

imagery as a universal signifier of womanhood. Mitchell states: “the criticism [aimed at Judy Chicago] had the effect of disarticulating Chicago’s work from ‘feminism’ (or an appropriate feminism), resulting in a breakdown of intergenerational and interpolitical dialogue.”<sup>69</sup> Reactions to Chicago’s work thus initially set off a dialogical and dialectical exchange insofar as it triggered an opportunity for a more sophisticated discourse on feminism and its iconography to take place. That said, strong reactions throughout the years seemed to overpower any form of intergenerational collaboration, an aspect that Chicago claimed defined her practice, instead making her the figurehead of values past, out of tune with feminism’s ongoing waves. This intergenerational divide leads into considering the cyclical nature of discourse driven by fiber art, an idea made clear in the exhibition text:

One of the few benefits of the cyclical, generational nature of feminist politics is that it guarantees youthfulness, even if occasionally naïve. While feminism may be as old as the suffragists, it is also as young as its newest enthusiasts. As young feminists look to the past to appropriate, negotiate and refashion ideas and strategies that came before, the possibilities of intergenerational dialogue are moving into exciting new territory.<sup>70</sup>

This excerpt, taken from the first paragraph of the *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* exhibition catalogue, emphasizes feminism as fundamentally cyclical in nature.<sup>71</sup> Conveniently, the opposite page illustrates this idea of cycles through intergenerational dialogue with a photograph by Donald Woodman of a young woman alongside an older woman, showing both of their hands busy fiddling

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Allyson Mitchell, "She Will Always Be Younger Than Us," *Ibid*, 85.

<sup>71</sup> Where the idea of the cycle appeals to calls of intergenerational solidarity, it also suffers from the persistent lack of perspective outside of the narrative established by White feminism. Critical race theory scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw’s ground-breaking theory of intersectionality in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991), continues to inform more recent scholarship and mainstream ways of thinking feminist methodologies. However, in the field of craft, a narrative of “tradition” or “authenticity” has and continues to obfuscate the way in which handmade craft by people of colour is being conceptualized, consumed, and even marketed (Black, Burisch 2020, 13-32; Parker 2010, xi-xxi). Thus, feminism being “fundamentally cyclical” can be interpreted as repeating the same exclusionary pattern of White feminism considering how the intersectional perspective was missing from the past cycles. For further updated readings on the topic of intersectionality, see: Elizabeth Evans, Éléonore Lépinard, *Intersectionality in Feminist and Queer Movements: Confronting Privileges* (London: Routledge, 2019). For readings that address intersectionality and craft, see: Suzanne C. Schmidt “Precarious Craft: a feminist commodity chain analysis,” in *Migration and Development* 9, no 1 (2020): 74-91.

with thread, their heads tilted down looking attentively at their work (Fig. 11). Having established that the narrative driving this exhibition explicitly works through the notion of cycles, other questions arise: How are the practices of knitting and crochet conducive to revival from a feminist perspective? In relation to Kubler's theoretical framework, how are knitted and crocheted artworks implicated in this narrative of revival?

Going back to Judy Chicago, a form of problem-solving can be detected in the iconography of the needlework. Indeed, when addressing criticism aimed at her regarding the rehashing of old patriarchal patterns, she responds:

I had no iconography to build on except male iconography [...] it wasn't really until modernism and the development of abstraction when you could actually create forms to stand for your meaning that we even had a chance.<sup>72</sup>

Solving what she perceived as a missing iconography of femininity was not only a matter of looking into the repertoire of pre-existing past metaphors, but it was also helped by time, contingent on the unfolding of canonical art history. Chicago started off with the phallus, transforming it into something abstract, to then make it a symbol of womanhood all of which was a way of establishing iconographic foundations where there was none, at least in the Western art historical canon. This retracing of time suggests feminist iconography built out of the destructive rubble of patriarchy and the subsequent reclaiming of patriarchal figuration by abstracting its masculinity to "give birth" to new possibilities for feminine aesthetics. A key word here is "new", that implies the idea of innovation and, as Kubler would question, whether innovation is even possible in modern or contemporary art history.<sup>73</sup> To answer this, art historian Roszika Parker's

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<sup>72</sup> Judy Chicago, quoted in Allyson Mitchell, "A Call to Arms," *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Although distinct from Kubler's emphasis on revival and time, Walter Benjamin's analysis of reproductions that are perceived as lesser versions than the "authentic" work of art in his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* is worth noting here. He explains how the idea of authenticity fortifies the authority of an object over its reproductions while the existence itself of the reproductions reinforces the "authentic quality of [the work of art's] presence, i.e. its *aura* (Benjamin 1969, 4). However, the very notion of authenticity, often tied back to the

book *The Subversive Stitch* (1984) provides an in-depth portrait of the socio-historical construction of embroidery as feminine labour inherited from the creation of a specialization and division of labour during the Renaissance. Parker's analysis looks more intently into embroidery as a case study; however, it is safe to include knitting and crochet as activities that have also, within the parameters of a division and hierarchization of society, been relegated to the feminine and domestic spheres. *The Subversive Stitch* is widely regarded as a turning point in terms of writing on craft history for its deeply informative insights into the history behind embroidery as feminine labour, which, although published the decade following Judy Chicago's needlework projects, helps rationalize how Chicago might have resorted to past metaphors. More precisely, needlework as reflective metaphor for the socially constructed image of femininity. In the case of Second Wave feminism, specifically Judy Chicago's essentialist iconography, it was based off pre-existing social divisions predicated on the biological binary. The iconography has arguably proved fruitful considering the feminist discourse that was brewing in the years leading up to the crystallization of a postmodernist ideology, making way for Chicago's feminist aesthetics to be considered as fine art and make their way into major institutions.

The timeliness of feminist iconography can also be looked at using Kubler's theory of formal sequence. According to the art historian, a formal sequence generated by a prime object (the work of art) is never truly closed off because prime objects may later use past metaphors to resolve future problems. Essentialist depictions of femininity came to be questioned in Third-Wave

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originality or original intentions of the artist, ties back to the "fictitious unity" of the genius artist's brain (Krauss 1986, 30-31). Also worth considering is Peter Bürger's keystone book *The Theory of the Avant-garde* and in particular the section on the "New" avant-gardist work of art. Referencing to Theodor Adorno's aesthetic theory in which the categorization of art is based on the bourgeois-capitalist penchant for anti-traditionalist art, Bürger clarifies that this category transcends modernism. Not even the concept of the commodification of art itself is a "new" idea, and "newness" has, in fact, been a factor in producing a "calculated effect" on the spectator long before the "invention" of capitalism or the "birth" of modernism (Bürger 1984, 60). The perspectives of Benjamin, Kubler, Adorno, Bürger and Krauss cited above are all concerned with invention, originality and newness in modern art.

feminism, which appeared to temporarily close off its formal sequence. In 2009, *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* exhibition revived the formal sequence, paying homage to Judy Chicago's influence in the development of feminist aesthetics.

Among the works presented in *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* is the performance video titled *K2tog: video knitting coven* (2006) (Figs. 12 and 13) by multidisciplinary artist Wednesday Lupypcwiw. The performance stages two versions of Wednesday in which they play the role of two twins working at a knitting factory. Scenes of them working on the machine are interrupted by sleep and dream sequences, as well as a scene where one of the two Wednesdays appears to be plotting against the other. In the end, the evil twin (right) stabs the other (left) Wednesday who bleeds out black yarn out of their mouth and stomach before collapsing. Ultimately, no product is generated out of this tenuous and conflict-ridden process, the knitting machine synonym with painstaking work provides does not reward its user(s). At one point, the machine is shown from up close, and its loud mechanical rumble conveys an image of an evil threatening entity with no face. The unfolding of events presents a narrative of struggle and repetitive labour through constant back-and-forth motions. However, the repetitive rhythm of labour is sometimes offset by an atmosphere of disruption amplified by the soundtrack of the video starting with this innocuous techno sound which later transforms into a techno soundtrack whose distinctly disarticulate quality escapes structural unity and disrupts the illusion of flow associated with the labour. Tragically, the only real fiber being generated throughout the performance is the black yarn used as a signifier for blood when left Wednesday is stabbed by right Wednesday, suggesting that the material and process had come to consume Wednesday inside and out. Lupypcwiw's performance disrupts the passive view associated with "feminine" ways of making by emphasizing the physicality of the piece. It is noted in the exhibition catalogue that the artist subscribes to the resurgent DIY

movement and its potential as a radical craft practice. Radical craft methodology echoes a text also from 2009 co-written by fellow Albertan artists and collaborators Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch on imagining radical spaces and strategies for displaying craftivist art. Coming from the same *milieu*, Black, Burisch and Lupypcwiw explore radical potential through dialogical experience, in the case of *K2tog*, one of inner dialogue by doubling the self in order to reflect on these internal conflicts in relation to labour, productivity and emotional investment poured into craft making. The dark atmosphere reinforced by a colourless palette of hues of browns and blacks in *K2tog* contrast deeply with the installation also by Lupypciw titled *Seasons* (2006) which, during *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us*, surrounded the small pink television set on which the video performance was displayed (Fig. 14). *Seasons* consists of handmade knotted ropes of pink chemical dye hung up on the corner wall and piling up on the floor of the exhibition space. The ropes have knots to them and appear thick or flimsy adding on to the disorderly allure of the installation. The knots are said to physically index a finite moment in time, the passing of days, weeks, and *seasons*. This Incan method called *quipu* was used for measuring quantities, commercial exchange, census-taking, agricultural production and even dating status.<sup>74</sup> Lupypciw's title, "seasons", is intriguing as the concept itself is interpreted as cyclical in nature, while the disorderly display of the ropes denote anything but a regular flow of cycles in the artist's life. Disrupting the perceived regularity of cycles while pointing directly at them joins into the video loop of *k2tog* as the twins' lives seemed to be consumed by their work on a knitting machine, however they never generated a product. In fact, work turned into this obsession which led the

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<sup>74</sup> Orly Cogan, Wednesday Lupypcwiw, Cat Mazza, Gillian Strong, and Ginger Brooks Takahashi, "She Will Always Be Younger Than Us," in *When Women Rule the World: Judy Chicago in Thread* (Toronto: Textile Museum of Canada, 2009), 88.

Wednesday on the right to stab the Wednesday on the left, concluding with the latter pursuing the mundane work on their own.

The event of revival(s) may be imagined as the knots in Lupycwiw's pink rope. They tangle up and disrupt the linearity of a shape of time, making it bend backward and forward before continuing this thread which remains connected to the fabric of history. On the individual level, cycles are rationalized as *routines* which are often structured around a rigid division of the day between work and so-called "free time". Free time may also be structured to allow for an individual to enjoy this time off work enjoying their hobbies, knitting and crochet being examples of this. George Kubler even argues that larger structures of society are made up of layers upon layers of routine behaviours which bind and protect civilization.<sup>75</sup> In a passage on the "anatomy of routine", Kubler evokes repetitive behaviour, in other words routine, how it extends through ritualistic gesture, and how mutations borne out of repetition, in a considerable durational stretch of time, results in these moments of revival, citing fashion and the Renaissance era as examples.<sup>76</sup> Thinking of it through the metaphor of the knotted rope, one might imagine this infinite ever-expanding loop in which moments of revival are detected and subsequently knotted by historians as markers of deviation, or a *mutation* in societal *routine*.

Metaphorically, if knots embody a dialectical bond, stitches embody the dialogical. The former emphasizes temporal continuity, encapsulating intergenerational bonding, whereas the latter encapsulates structural integrity, the fabric of solidarity which supports the virtual future of feminism. To solidify and pursue the formal sequence toward stronger feminist solidarity across women artists, the curator and the artists of *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* acknowledge

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<sup>75</sup> George Kubler, "The Propagation of Things," *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 67

the resonating influence of Chicago, particularly her past work with threads. Delineating this narrative of revival has contributed toward highlighting the ideological and historical purposes behind re-visiting and re-experimenting with past feminist strategies.

### *À toutes mailles!* (2013): The Convergence of Familiarity and Revival

Next in this series of exhibitions is *À toutes mailles!* shown in both Montreal and Quebec City in April 2013. The exhibition was part of the “Projet 20/40”, 20 and 40 being the two major highways connecting the cities of Montreal and Quebec City. In Montreal, the exhibition took place at the Maison Marie-Uguay, a cultural centre for emerging artists.<sup>77</sup> As the last installment in this series of exhibitions revealing different facets of a narrative of craft revival through knitting and crochet, *À toutes mailles!* ascribes a mix of familiarity and innovation to the concept of revival. An article from the newspaper *Le Soleil* is titled “À toutes mailles: Le tricot entre en galerie” (*À toutes mailles : Knitting Makes its Entry in the Gallery*), suggesting the long-awaited moment when needlework practices like knitting and crochet would finally make their way into museum or gallery spaces thanks to *À toutes mailles!* Yet, as the previous exhibitions analyzed in this research demonstrate, it is safe to say that knitting and crochet have been managing to capture the attention of the artworld, specifically as postmodernist subversive or radical means of artistic expression (see the *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*, six years prior). Nevertheless, the same article continues by paraphrasing curator and artist Carole Baillargeon’s views:

Aujourd'hui, le tricot a dépassé le stade de l'artisanat. Ici et là, dans les villes, il s'affiche sous forme de graffiti, quand il recouvre des branches d'arbre, par exemple. Avec le temps, grâce au caractère familier du tricot, les artistes ont trouvé de nouvelles manières

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<sup>77</sup> Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay, last modified August 16, 2021, <https://montreal.ca/en/places/maison-de-la-culture-marie-uguay>.

d'impliquer émotivement le spectateur. Il était temps qu'il entre en galerie, estime Carole Baillargeon.<sup>78</sup>

In the very first sentence, Baillargeon reiterates an idea which was previously brought up in relation to artist Freddie Robins's knitting practice and its distinction from craft. Additionally, Baillargeon suggests here that knitting has untangled itself from the "shackles" of craft to pursue more "noble" pursuits by pointing at its entry into the world of fine arts. However, she then cites an example outside of the institutional, fine arts realm and rooted in craftivism – yarn bombing, the practice of guerilla knitting. While yarn bombing is closely tied to craftivism (which will become more relevant in the next and last case study), recent scholarship has emerged criticizing the now widely accepted practice (and movement) noting how guerilla knitting benefits from its exceptional aesthetics playing off an inoffensive allure unlike the racialized and criminalized artistic expression of paint graffiti.<sup>79</sup> Baillargeon also brings up the familiar character of knitting, an aspect which, according to her, contributes to the emotional response of the viewer. Knitting and crochet as vehicles for emotional immersion is particularly apparent in the Québec City installation of this exhibition.

Presented in the white backdrop of the Centre Matéria, artworks by Cécile Dachary, Doug Guilford and Janet Morton explore ascending, immersive, net-like sculptures through the mediums of knitting and crochet. French fiber artist Cécile Dachary's crocheted wall-hanging titled *Le ciel est rose* (Fig. 15) takes the form of five enlarged doilies, their centers extending all the way to the

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<sup>78</sup> Translation: "Today, knitting has overcome the status of craft. Here and there, in various cities, it presents itself in the form of graffiti when it covers tree branches, for instance. Over time, thanks to the familiar character of knitting, artists have found new ways of involving the audience emotionally. It was about time that it would make its way into the gallery, reckons Carole Baillargeon." See: "Centre MATERIA – À toutes mailles!: le tricot entre en galerie," *Le Soleil*, November 3, 2013, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2013/11/02/centre-materia-a-toutes-mailles-le-tricot-entre-en-galerie-c23739d6881fcb4596a48d79550c6907>.

<sup>79</sup> Leslie A. Hahner, and Scott J. Varda, "Yarn Bombing and the Aesthetics of Exceptionalism," in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11, no. 4, (2014): 301-321. doi: 10.1080/14791420.2014.959453.

floor where they form small pools of yarn.<sup>80</sup> The artist forgoes the last step of weaving in the ends, letting them hang loosely all throughout the piece in a bleeding effect. The repeated flower motif, common for crocheted doilies, wavers between easily recognizable to resembling abstract geometrical constructions of infinite spirals. The familiarity of the doily pattern is further offset by the large scale of the piece which offers a different view of filet crochet, the technique used to make doilies consisting in creating holes to allow for the typical crocheted mat to be see-through. Its familiar aspect stems from its association with the domestic as it was used to dress and protect surfaces around the home, most notably the dinner table. In the West, the rituals built around the space of the dinner table have produced ideas and routines of etiquette and manners, teaching ways of behaving and conforming which would allow one to navigate with distinguished ease within elite circles. The white crocheted doilies are a part of this décor reminiscent of proper table setting indicative of a well-mannered, European elite upbringing. Cécile Dachary's untidy doilies of different shades of pink alter this sense of familiarity associated with crochet and its utilitarian but particularly societal function. Simultaneously, in addition to the domestic connotations of the doily, the use of the colour pink appears as elaborate strategy to evoke and unequivocally emphasize the feminine character of the work. This is reinforced by Dachary's own description of her practice:

Héritière d'un savoir-faire féminin, familial et professionnel, j'ai gardé la mémoire des gestes réservés à l'intimité du foyer et tente d'en élargir les champs. Ce qui était alors une forme d'œuvre « domestique » devient un mode d'expression artistique marqué par sa féminité intrinsèque.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> It is worth noting that the artist's website shows a photograph of *Le ciel est rose* exhibited hanging from the ceiling. From that angle, the threads of crochet suddenly resemble strings of pink chewing gum being pulled apart. See: Cécile Dachary, "Crochet," Cécile Dachary, last modified January 18, 2015. <https://www.ceciledachary.com/texte.html>.

<sup>81</sup> "Heiress of a feminine, family and professional know-how, I have kept the memory of gestures reserved for the intimacy of the home and try to widen the fields. What was then a form of "domestic" work becomes a mode of artistic expression marked by its intrinsic femininity." See: Cécile Dachary, "Texte," *Ibid*.

Formally speaking, the droopiness and pinks of Cécile Dachary’s crocheted circles can also be found in Nova Scotian crochet artist Doug Guilford’s sculpture, conveniently titled *Doilies* (2003) (Figs. 16 and 17). The difference being that, rather than wall-hangings, Guilford’s crocheted pieces are ceiling-hanging artwork elegantly pooling upon white pedestals almost in the manner of an evening gown. Two of the three crocheted nets are shorter, with a longer thread hanging them up from the ceiling, while another crocheted piece stands much taller and creates a more uneven surplus of material at the base, overflowing over the pedestal. From afar, the sculptures, although droopy, give off a sense of lightness through their netted construction. Despite the similarity shared by the three pieces, each of them is unique their singular appearance made possible by the artist’s self-proclaimed obsessive experimentations with ways of sculpting with crochet, which inevitably results in crocheted pieces of unique appearance. Unlike Dachary’s enlarged doilies, Guilford’s nets share little formal affinities to typical doilies despite the title. This reinforces Guilford’s art practice which seeks to explore organic constructions through “obsessive sculptural crochet projects”.<sup>82</sup> These hanging sculptures are a stark contrast from Guilford’s other exhibited work consisting of printed collographs of wire structures crocheted by the artist (Fig. 18). These prints are dark in colour and resemble molecular or bubble-like formations found in nature, again exploring themes of the organic through experiments with crocheted sculpture. In terms of familiarity, the artist’s exhibited pieces turn the familiarity of the crocheted form on its head, however rather than exploring abstract avenues, they instead reflect upon organisms found in nature. On the artist’s website, Guildford states: “I believe in the essential value, and in the ultimate

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<sup>82</sup> Doug Guilford, DOUG GUILFORD, last modified March 27, 2022, <https://www.dougguildford.com/>.

futility, of work.”<sup>83</sup> Looking at the artist’s portfolio, this so-called “essential value” is likely to be located in nature, central to the artist’s methodology and representations.

Last in the Québec City exhibition are three works by Toronto-based knitting artist Janet Morton. *Chains of Fools* (2003) *Senses Spin* (2003) and *The Manse* (2008) touch upon a sense of familiarity through what they represent. That said, *Chains of Fools* (Fig. 19) and *Senses Spin* (Fig. 20), both created in the same year, depart from Morton’s usual recourse to yarn, interpreting instead the element of thread through the unconventional material of cassette tapes giving off a metallic sheen. The provenance of the material is made more obvious in *Chains of Fools*, an installation in the shape of a lopsided lozenge assembling various shapes such as a mask, heart, or uterus. Biological references to the female anatomy in the vein of Second Wave feminist essentialist iconography is not a recurring theme of Morton’s work. A staple of Morton’s practice is her sense of humor and the female reproductive organ hanging off an outdated, obsolete 1990s metallic cassette tape drives home the twisted irony between object and objectification.<sup>84</sup> *Senses of Spin* has a similar umbilical linkage, however, the large shape which tornadoes up to the ceiling and punctuated by decorative butterflies emerges out of a turntable, another music-related household item. The last artwork by Morton, *The Manse* (Fig. 21), is a threefold installation this time made of white yarn, which she uses to knit small public monuments resting atop tightly rounded balls of yarn of the same colour. Morton has explored time and time again knitted architectural representations, inside and out, and at various scales, specifically of buildings that

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<sup>83</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>84</sup> *Chains of Fools* was also featured as part of the 2006 exhibition *Material Obsessions: Janet Morton and Evelyn Roth* at the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery in Vancouver, whose description highlights the humorous tone of Morton’s work. See: Julie Bevan, “Material Obsessions: Janet Morton and Evelyn Roth,” Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, <https://belkin.ubc.ca/exhibitions/material-obsessions-janet-morton-and-evelyn-roth/>.

were familiar to her life.<sup>85</sup> *The Manse* is on the smaller scale, although the time spent knitting these was compared by Morton to the speed at which farmlands in her town of Guelph, Ontario have been replaced by developments.<sup>86</sup> Again, the ball of yarn indexes the provenance of materials, an aspect which articulates the artist's concerns for overconsumption and resources. The familiarity found in the literal representations of the home and various items related to the home are accompanied by a reminder of everyday materials triggering the audience to reckon with their relationships to materialism and not take it for granted.

In contrast to the starkness of the Québec City exhibition space, the Montreal iteration of this exhibition was held at the Marie-Uguay cultural centre, with its walls completely painted black. The black surroundings had the effect of creating luminous auras around the artworks. More than the Québec exhibition, this iteration also extrapolated beyond the theme of the stitch ("maille" in French). The inclusion of artist Mexican artist Helga Schlitter, who primarily works with the medium of ceramic, is pertinent here with her installation titled *Quetzalcoatl* (2013-2014) (Fig. 22) which consists of white rounded ceramic sculptures fixed to the wall and enveloped by yarn, steel wool as well as thread made from cassette or even DVDs. The colourful sculptures stretch across the black wall of the exhibition. For Schlitter, a native of Mexico, the title and the colours of the work are direct reference to Aztec art. The Quetzalcoatl is a Mesoamerican deity described as a feather serpent, and here signified through the snake-like shape of the sculptures. The artist

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<sup>85</sup> The 1999 *Cozy* consisted in 800 knit sweaters stitched together which then covered the exterior of an entire house. The 2004 installation *Femmebomb* followed in the same vein, but this time covering the 4-storey School of Human Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with quilts and crocheted panels. In 2000, Morton also covered home furniture with knits as part of her installation *Untitled (Domestic Interior)*. For more examples of Janet Morton's large-scale architectural knits spanning from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, see: "Artist's Profile: Janet Morton," The Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art (CCA), [http://cca.concordia.ca/artists/artist\\_info.html?languagePref=en&link\\_id=5793&artist=Janet+Morton](http://cca.concordia.ca/artists/artist_info.html?languagePref=en&link_id=5793&artist=Janet+Morton).

<sup>86</sup> "Rome Wasn't Built in a Day," Paul Petro Contemporary Art, <http://www.paulpetro.com/exhibitions/81-Rome-Wasn%27t-Built-In-A-Day>.

references her heritage through the metaphor of the snake, further reinforcing the link between familiarity and revival by bringing back to the surface one's cultural lineage.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, Schlitter's sculptures fuse different means of craft-making, ceramics and knitting, creating a space of encounter for these different craft practices. The exhibition also displayed soft sculptures with Jacques Samson's *Sculptures Toutous* (2013) (Figs. 23 and 24). Samson's stuffed crochets are on a high table, placed in a seemingly haphazard fashion. The unceremonious display of what could be described as dolls is a deliberate invitation from the artist to the audience to interact with the sculpture through touch. This invitation transgresses rigid museum or gallery etiquette regarding the tactile accessibility of the art object, a constraint put in place to ensure the preservation of the piece (see, for example, the wall hangings at the *In Praise of Hands* exhibition), in turn, granting the visitor a growing sense of familiarity with the piece encountering it with the same proximity as the maker of the object.<sup>88</sup> Last in the list of sculptures which occupied the exhibition space is the collective Colifichet's life size knitted sculpture in the iconic likeness of Régis Labeaume, mayor of Québec City at the time (2012) (Fig. 25). Displayed in Montreal, this particular piece establishes a clear link to the other city of Projet 20/40. In 2014, a year after the exhibition had taken place, Régis Labeaume "met" his yarn *doppelgänger* and made this interesting remark: "Je ne suis pas capable de me qualifier moi-même, alors comment voulez-vous que je qualifie mon

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<sup>87</sup> Helga Schlitter works predominantly with ceramics and glass, thus very little is archived on the incorporation of fibre, specifically yarn in this case. With that said, the Mexican native's heritage is central to her artistic practice. See: Helga Schlitter, "Démarche artistique: Helga Schlitter," Helga Schlitter, last modified October 6, 2016, <https://www.helgaschlitter.com/>.

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Samson's 2010 Masters thesis for the department of visual arts at Université Laval titled "SCULPTURES TOUTOUS: Le rapport affectif entre l'oeuvre, son créateur et le spectateur" (translation: SCULPTURES TOUTOUS : The affective rapport between the work of art, its creator and the viewer) addresses the sense of familiarity that arises from assembling his soft sculptures on a table, a presentation that recalls the social ritual of "setting the table" for family dinners of special occasions (Samson 2010, 27-28). For further reading, see: Jacques Samson, "SCULPTURES TOUTOUS: Le rapport affectif entre l'oeuvre, son créateur et le spectateur," (Masters thesis, Université Laval, 2010).

sosie?”<sup>89</sup> Although this remark came a year later, there is much to ponder in what was most probably an off-hand comment by the “real life” mayor. Indeed, such an innocuous meeting with a lookalike, in this case one made of yarn, triggers this tension between the familiar and the strange, a tension conceptually mediated as the theory of the “uncanny”. This psychoanalytical theory of the uncanny defines the underlying psychological tension when an individual is met with an object that projects a strangely familiar image.<sup>90</sup> Seen through this lens, Colifichet’s sculpture aims to capture the likeness of the mayor through obvious signifiers (namely the glasses, the height, the droopy ears, as well as the attire), however, the medium of knitting further obfuscates the process of translating his likeness into yarn. Familiarity therefore has to rely on these caricatural elements which immediately render the signified recognizable. In exhibition pictures provided by the curator, the sculpture appeared to be greeting the audience, and its iconic appearance allowed for a sense of familiarity to settle into the audience’s subconscious who, using the above-mentioned signifiers, could readily identify their mayor.

The mediums of knitting and crochet, due to their longstanding history as ways of handmaking, are anchored in the past, a narrative reiterated by curator Carole Baillargeon’s declaration on knitting and crochet cited earlier, in other words, clamoring for their recognition in the art world, establishing what she imagines as a new trajectory for the practices. The way in which Baillargeon sets up the narrative of revival can be best captured by craft theorist Glenn Adamson’s paraphrasing of anthropologist Alfred Gell’s theory of enchantment: “The lesson [Gell] draws (...) is that a crafted object is enchanting because we understand it in *relative terms*—relative, that is,

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<sup>89</sup> Translation: “I am unable to qualify myself, therefore how can you expect me to qualify my lookalike?” See: Régis Labeaume, quoted in Valérie Gaudreau, “Régis Labeaume rencontre son sosie... de laine,” in *Le Soleil*, February 11, 2014, <https://www.lesoleil.com/2014/02/12/regis-labeaume-rencontre-son-sosie-de-laine-f7587d18d8cc9a33c70e2d55662e2ee7>.

<sup>90</sup> Gregorio Kohon, “Considering “the uncanny”,” in *Reflections on the aesthetic experience: Psychoanalysis and the uncanny* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

to what we could achieve with our own hands.”<sup>91</sup> Indeed, knitting and crochet are handmade practices that are complex enough to require a certain amount of skill but not complex enough to be assumed as the products of automation. As seen in this case study, the artworks all bear a sense of relatability and familiarity which is what ultimately compels or *enchants* the viewer. Familiarity suggests a pre-existing formal sequence, complete with its prime object and the series of replicas which has transformed the object of the crocheted doily into this cliché of dated decoration that once was a staple in millions of family foyers.<sup>92</sup>

### *SUPER STRING (2006)* and the Craftivist Lens: Stringing Together Socially Engaged Art

The last case study to be examined is the 2006 exhibition *SUPER STRING* at the Stride Gallery in Calgary curated by Canadian artist and writer Anthea Black. The exhibition explores the possibilities of craftivism, and the idea of (inter)connectivity is exemplified by the evocative metaphor of the string. Where *À toutes mailles* ignited a sense of familiarity to generate a space of encounter between visitors and objects, the *SUPER STRING* exhibition engages with revival through the idea of reactivating activist projects. This section highlights how the metaphor of the knitted or crocheted string traces and delineates a narrative of revival through socially engaged art. Moving from the world of large institutions to that of galleries and artist-run centres, revival reverberates through the theme of interconnectedness as praxis and as a theory in the smaller scale gallery that is the focus of this section.

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<sup>91</sup> Glenn Adamson, “Mystery,” in *The Invention of Craft* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 100.

<sup>92</sup> George Kubler explains it this way : "Prime objects and replications denote principal inventions, and the entire system of replicas (...) The replica-mass resembles certain habits, as when a phrase spoken upon the stage or in a film, and repeated in millions of utterances, becomes a part of the language of a generation and finally a dated cliché." See: George Kubler, “The Classing of Things,” *Ibid*, 35.

In the last few decades, many craft practitioners, especially those in needlework, have adapted their art making practices into a powerful vehicle for political engagement in society. For instance, historian Anne MacDonald shows in her social history of knitting how much the practice has been associated with a need to stay out of a state of idleness, crystallizing into activism during the Second World War when “knitting [was] no longer a pleasant hobby”.<sup>93</sup> The “stitch by stitch” praxis where revolution starts at the individual, one stitch at a time, has been promoted by American craft practitioner and writer Betsy Greer in her book *Knitting for Good!: A Guide for Creating Personal, Social, and Political Stitch by Stitch* (2008). Extending Anne MacDonald’s 1988 social history of knitting Greer spoke in 2008 of a resurging generation of needlework artists looking to mobilize their craft toward political and altruistic causes. The introduction of Greer’s book is reflective of these earlier activist (and interventionist) undertones especially when she recounts her own introduction to activist knitting:

When I started learning about the economic conditions in Afghanistan several years ago, I realized I couldn’t not do something for the children there. After hearing about the war-torn history of the country, how few resources many of the people had, and how many Afghans had never experienced life without violent conflict, I felt especially inspired to help. (...) When I learned about the societal conditions and the harsh winters in Afghanistan, I went through my yarn stash and quickly whipped up a few children’s hats. It took little more than a couple of hours, and I made sure to use bright colors in the hope that they might bring a little bit of light to those who had endured a lifetime of strife.<sup>94</sup>

Greer thereby concretized her humanitarian efforts by knitting afghans “stitch by stitch” which would bring warmth to children in war-torn Afghanistan. Greer acknowledges the difficulty of imagining a life consumed by the violence of wars, and her collaboration with the established initiative *Afghans for Afghans* therefore extends into an expression of her empathy. She further remarks: “Some people donate money to causes. Some help raise awareness for them via

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<sup>93</sup> Anne L. Macdonald, “The Forties: Knitting in War and Peace,” in *No Idle Hands: The Social History of American Knitting* (New York: Ballantine Books), 290.

<sup>94</sup> Betsy Greer, “Introduction”, in *Knitting for Good!: A Guide to Creating Personal, Social & Political Change Stitch by Stitch*.

campaigning. I choose to knit. I know that what I create with my own hands will directly help someone in need by providing warmth.”<sup>95</sup> Knitting, in contrast to donating money, feels much more directly involved in providing, for instance, elements of warmth and comfort to an Afghan child. The motto “stitch by stitch” thus refers to the repetitive but very concrete act of knitting, a product of an accumulation of various combinations of knits and purls. Through craftivist initiatives, artists could mobilize their craft practices to express ideas that tackle modern ills such as consumerism, materialism, pollution, as well as a lack of self expression in society.<sup>96</sup> The daunting task of taking on such large issues reinforced by the deeply rooted abstract mechanisms of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy leads craftivists like Greer to argue in favour of the immediate and, most importantly, the connective stitch by stitch approach for craftivism.

The early to mid-2000s craftivism described by Greer fits neatly into the period of the *SUPER STRING* exhibition. Indeed, the exhibition captures the *zeitgeist* of the early 2000s guerilla knitting movements through the analogy of the string. Among the projects that were on display, *SUPER STRING* featured the Calgary-based group *Revolutionary Knitting Circle* founded in 2000 by activist Grant Neufeld, whose aim was to forge interactions through the sharing of knowledge about the craft but also by generating constructive discussions.<sup>97</sup> Their non-violent approach to promoting and brainstorming activist strategies is reflected in their *Peace Knit* (2004) banners which were displayed during *SUPER STRING* (Fig. 26). These banners had originally been created in the context of the 2002 G8 which took place at the summit of the mountain resort in Kananaskis, also in Calgary, Alberta and were guarded by a police force. The G8 (now G7) is a yearly inter-governmental forum where the richest industrialized nations of Canada, France, Germany, Italy,

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<sup>95</sup> Betsy Greer, *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Betsy Greer, Chapter 9, *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Anthea Black, and Nicole Burisch, “Craft Hard, Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies for Craftivism in Unruly Contexts,” in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (London: Bloomsbury Press), 611.

Japan, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom meet to discuss issues pertaining to globalized economics, particularly free trade.<sup>98</sup> The congregation is practically guaranteed to be met with dissent, but dissenters are quickly shut down with brutal force as they are either pepper sprayed or teargassed. The Revolutionary Knitting Circle's *Peace Knit* banners thereby offered a more subdued means of protest, but most importantly, they acted as "rallying points for action, discussion, and awareness".<sup>99</sup> Despite this, it is fair to question the agency of such artifacts of activism as they arguably transform into static art objects. In an article published a decade after this exhibition, Canadian craft writer, artist and curator Nicole Burisch examines performance art in relation to craft thereby considering the political underpinnings of the dematerialization of the craft object.<sup>100</sup> The *Peace Knit* banners, albeit not performance art, trigger similar concerns regarding the re/depoliticization of the object when exhibited in the gallery as a finished product instead of the knitting circle. This discursive transition when going from the knitting circle to the gallery space begs the question whether the object retains its craftivist function in the latter, or whether it is becoming a *trace*, an archive of activism. Conversely, over the last decade or so, the discourse around curatorial strategies have grown to challenge the neutralization of the art object

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<sup>98</sup> In 2014, Russia was forced out of the group following its invasion of Crimea, thereby changing its name to what it is known today as Group of Seven (G7). Early into the Obama administration, the G20 (an alternative consisting of a larger array of countries such as China, Brazil and India) was reported to be the up-and-coming world summit that would replace the smaller congregation. (See: Steve Brusk, and Ed Henry, "Officials: G-20 to supplant G-8 as international economic council," in *CNN (US)*, September 24, 2009.

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/09/24/us.g.twenty.summit/index.html>.) However, the G7 perseveres today as the principal conference for Western leaders as it is set to take place in June of 2022 in the Bavarian Alps, in Germany. As mentioned in the text, these summits are accompanied by waves of protest revindicating the spectre of imperialism and colonialism emanating from the free trade policy. Somewhat related to the free trade policy is the international Fair Trade movement which has also been examined in light of craft practice/practitioners by historians of various horizons who have articulated their own critiques of the project's structural flaws. See: Kathy M'Closkey, "Novica, Navajo Knock-Offs, and the 'Net: A Critique of Fair Trade Marketing Practices," in Sarah Lyon, and Mark Moberg, *Fair Trade and Social Justice: Global Ethnographies*, 258-277 (New York City: NYU Press, 2010).

<sup>99</sup> Anthea Black, and Nicole Burisch, *Ibid*.

<sup>100</sup> Nicole Burisch, "From Objects to Actions and Back Again: The Politics of Dematerialized Craft and Performance Documentation," in *TEXTILE* 14, no. 1, (2016): 54-73. Nicole Burisch moderated a panel discussion during *SUPER STRING*. In the pamphlet, Anthea Black thanks Burisch for her role in the concretization of the exhibition: "SUPER STRING would not have been possible without discussion and encouragement from Nicole Burisch and Amy Gogarty, two dedicated craft addicts. Heartfelt thanks!" (Black 2006)

in the so-called White Cube, finding alternative modes of display that would incite the participation of the public, thus the activation of craft and crafting.<sup>101</sup>

Going back to the “stitch by stitch” approach, the ephemeral process implied in the motto itself is inevitably lost in its display. In the same article, Burisch situates the context of her analysis on the dematerialization of craft performance within a “(re) positioning [of] craft as a political practice”.<sup>102</sup> Whatever the interpretation of these banners’ political agency may be when displayed in this fashion, the potential for guerilla knitting projects to be reactivated suggests the possibility of revival through socially engaged art. George Kubler does not include politically engaged much less gendered art in his analysis, but his theory of formal sequence is designed around the general idea that certain inventions (objects) or interventions (events) throughout history happen to solve aesthetic, utilitarian, or philosophical problems. In a very short spurt of a passage, Kubler establishes two poles for the purpose of things: the trivial (for example, the trivial history of the button) and the factual (the recording of precise historical data such as names and dates).<sup>103</sup> Kubler’s formal sequence is said to fill the space in between, where prime objects are born and problem-solving occurs. While craft revival allows for the factual study of trivialized practices or objects such as knitting and crochet, *SUPER STRING* underscores a distinct formal sequence, concerned with how to develop curatorial strategies that can avoid the neutralization of political art and promote its message.<sup>104</sup> Hence, *SUPER STRING* turns to the previously mentioned idea of activation. An example of activation would be the Revolutionary Knitting Circle hosting knitting

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<sup>101</sup> For further reading on the curatorial strategies being experimented with for the activation of the craft object in exhibition spaces, see: Kirsty Robertson, and Lisa Vinebaum, “Crafting Community,” in *TEXTILE* 14, no 1 (2016): 2-13; Lisa Vinebaum, “Outside the White Cube,” in *Exhibiting Craft and Design: Transgressing the White Cube Paradigm, 1930-Present*, edited by Alla Myzelev, 160-80 (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>102</sup> Nicole Burisch, *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>103</sup> George Kubler, *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>104</sup> Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, *Ibid*, 615.

circle workshops as part of the exhibition (Fig. 27), allowing for an appreciation of the medium beyond its materiality but, more importantly, highlighting the political engagement and social interaction involved throughout the process of making. As political art, the pieces produced as part of this workshop inherently signal a moment of revival triggered by the sense of urgency, the need to (re)act and create rather than simply contemplate in the face of adversity and inequality.

The title of the exhibition, *SUPER STRING* reflects on the idea of string as a very powerful or even extreme bonding agent, mapping out intersubjectivity, especially evident during these Revolutionary Knitting Circle's workshops. Visually, the form of the string recalls the two-dimensional graphic line. The use of lines as baseline methodology has famously been used by anthropologist Tim Ingold arguing against a "building blocks" composition of all life forms. Indeed, he articulates the so-called "life of lines" through the act of knotting, which encapsulates linearity, friction and stability: "Nothing can hold on unless it puts out a line, and unless that line can tangle with others."<sup>105</sup> This quote emphasizes the sociability of lines, and their complex entanglement is imagined through the craftsmanship of knotting, consisting in the tying of a string to form knots. In the 2015 book *The Life of Lines*, Ingold carefully differentiates a methodology that relies on the in-betweenness of lines, in other words their perceived interactions, from the *correspondence* process in the life of lines which helps to portray the lines as *persons*, choosing to favour the latter in his approach.<sup>106</sup> The methodology of lines as processes has been a central part of Ingold's thinking throughout the years, as reflected in an earlier article from 2010 titled *The Textility of Making* in which he argues for a model where the flow of the production process weaves itself and is integral to the formation of the object, as opposed to the hylomorphic model

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<sup>105</sup> Tim Ingold, "Part I: Knotting: Line and Blob," in *The Life of Lines* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

<sup>106</sup> Tim Ingold, "Part III: Humaning: The correspondence of lines," *Ibid*, 154.

wherein the idea determines the final form of the object, as is the case with design for instance.<sup>107</sup> Ingold is clear with his intention to locate primacy in the process and uses the form of the line as illustration of this fluid process of bending and straightening materials as the maker forges their own path toward an evolving purpose.<sup>108</sup> The notion of a flow of production has been criticized, namely by craft historian Stephen Knott for how it elevates exceptional politics of uninterrupted time and how, in capitalist society, this reinforces competitive productivity by punishing disruptive “non-flow-like states” of struggle and repetition.<sup>109</sup> Another 2020 article titled *Unraveling Knitting: Form Creation, Relativity, and the Temporality of Materials*, by anthropologist Lydia Maria Arantes, responds more directly to Ingold’s emphasis on fluid processes, using the practice of knitting in which the very properties of the material and the technique dispel any notion of a flow of production being inherent to all forms of making. Not only does knitting index intentionality, rigorous pre-planning, and design, but its material properties *accommodate* disruption by allowing its maker to put down the project and go for long periods of time without evolving the shape of the object. Thus, knitting and crochet challenge the linearity and predictability of string.

The linearity of the string ties into the description of the exhibition which states that: “Crafters share a lineage that wraps up together: when we craft, we’re never alone”.<sup>110</sup> A lineage, or line of descent, typically functions as a genealogical framework used to retrace a family’s biological provenance. The line used to guide lineage is straightforward, just as George Kubler argued that biology is predictable while history is unpredictable.<sup>111</sup> Crafters assembled during *SUPER*

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<sup>107</sup> Tim Ingold, “The Textility of Making,” in *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, no. 34, (2010): 91.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 92

<sup>109</sup> Stephen Knott, “Time,” in *Amateur Craft: History and Theory* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Press), 95.

<sup>110</sup> Anthea Black, *SUPER STRING*, Stride Gallery, 2006, [http://www.stride.ab.ca/arc/archive\\_2006/super\\_string\\_main/super\\_string\\_sml.pdf](http://www.stride.ab.ca/arc/archive_2006/super_string_main/super_string_sml.pdf).

<sup>111</sup> George Kubler, “The History of Things,” *Ibid*, 11.

*STRING* do not share this linear biological bond, but they instead share a multidimensional lineage from a multiplicity of background, hence it “wrapping up together”.<sup>112</sup> Unlike the line, the three-dimensional form of the string evokes physicality and the ability for one’s hand to grasp and manipulate it in various combinations far beyond the constraints of a two-dimensional line drawn on a flat surface. String is the conversion from two-dimension into multi-dimensions. It is no wonder then that it has been a serious contender in the field of quantum physics as the basis for the eponymous theory of “super string”.<sup>113</sup> String can be understood as a universally connective agent reaching, entangling, wrapping up, creating knots, or stitches, across dimensions. The string theory models map out the trajectories and movements of particles in the form of strings vibrating off of each other, as would the strings of a violin.<sup>114</sup> The connectivity present in mathematical formulas conjures up deep conceptual thinking in the context of an exhibition highlighting the act of needlework-adjacent practices as effecting change through the vibrating “sound of thousands of knitting needles clicking in unison”.<sup>115</sup> The holistic ambition of string theory is reflected in Cindy Baker’s contribution to the exhibition, *All Things to All Men (And Women)* (2006) (Figs. 28-29). In it, Baker proposes underwear as a theory for everything that is attractive to the man’s (or woman’s) gaze: “*All Things to All Men (and Women)* is a tongue-in-cheek look at underwear as a

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<sup>112</sup> Anthea Black, *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Initially dubbed the string theory, the theory sought to emulate Albert Einstein’s law of general relativity used to observe the behaviours of large-scale structures in the universe and apply it to the scale of atomic forces in the universe. The first forays into string theory came about in the late 1960s and its first iteration in quantum physics focused on the behaviours of the bosonic particle. This first theory, however, came to be challenged being restricted to bosonic particles which obey different principles of distribution than particles like fermions that were left unaccounted for. In the decades thereafter, string theory generated an influx of research, namely in the 1980s when it was re-examined in light of the recent theory of supersymmetry, wherein force and matter were imagined as equals in quantum mechanics as a way to tie in loose strings. This made for five distinct so-called super string theories to emerge, subsequently leading physicist Edward Witten to combine all five into one M theory, under the principle of dualities. See: Edward Witten, “Duality, Spacetime and Quantum Mechanics,” in *Physics Today* 50, no. 5, (May 1997) & Edward Witten, “Oral History Interviews: Edward Witten,” interview by David Zierler, American Institute of Physics, May 15, 2021, transcript, <https://www.aip.org/history-programs/niels-bohr-library/oral-histories/46968>

<sup>114</sup> “Edward Witten Explains String Theory (2000),” Youtube, July 22, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE\\_8596AYsk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE_8596AYsk).

<sup>115</sup> Anthea Black, *Ibid.*

metaphor for all possible objects of fantasy – all possible wearers – to highlight the broad spectrum of desire.”<sup>116</sup>

Underwear is a metaphor which is used to come face to face with the elusive nature of desirability through a myriad of possible shapes, sizes and textures of panties imagined and crafted by the artist. Baker makes it clear that the art installation is meant to project the artist’s own desires, rather than those of society. By attempting to create an exhaustive set of physical representations of her own desires, she continuously fails to encapsulate all shapes and sizes. The success of the work lies in its failure to accurately relate body shapes for *all possible wearers*. The work of a single artist mobilizing string in an effort to conceptualize an exhaustive spectrum of shapes and sizes thus requires the active participation and attention of visitors. The intersubjective approach to this work (re)activates its purpose as a craft object, triggering the viewer to fill in the gaps using their own perception of desirability, inciting them to imagine what is missing from this selection of lingerie. The universalist approach, whether in Baker’s installation or in string theory, invites others (peers, strangers, viewers, and so on) to fill in the gaps.<sup>117</sup>

Another work that engages with the dialectics of the string is Kris Linsdkoog’s *I want to do something nice for the planet* (2006) (Fig. 30) consisting in a 200-foot-long knotted friendship bracelet displayed in a disorderly pile. Despite the knots holding the strings together, the pile evokes disruption rather than flow. The feeling of disruption is further reinforced as protests are

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<sup>116</sup> Cindy Baker, “All Things to All Men (and Women),” Cindy Baker, last modified February 6, 2009, <https://www.populust.ca/cinde/wp/2009/02/all-things-to-all-men-and-women/>.

<sup>117</sup> These gaps are usefully discussed in an article titled “Testing Orthodoxy: Collecting, the Gaze, Knitting the Impossible” by Clio Padovani and Paul Whittaker, where knitting is viewed as the site for challenging ideological fixity. Knitting being essentially the collection of stitches to produce a tangible structure, it is marked by loops, or holes, which conceptually serve to challenge orthodoxy, or ideological fixity. The authors base their analysis on the lacanian theory of psychoanalytical gaze, wherein “the knots speak of nothing but the holes which are there”. (Padovani & Whittaker, 174) See: Clio Padovani, and Paul Whittaker, “Testing Orthodoxy: Collecting, the Gaze, Knitting the Impossible,” in *The Textile Reader*, ed. Jessica Hemmings, 171-77 (London: Berg Publishers, 2012).

the artist's inspiration for this piece.<sup>118</sup> The shape of the string is problematic because while it may elicit a sense of connectivity, it also runs the risk of being entangled thus causing disorder. Here, the string acts as a reminder that disruption of flow can occur in the most connective of structures. In Lindskoog's installation, the colourful friendship bracelets represented here by the artist are tied together and form a bond through these knots. Although this artwork is not a work of knitting or crochet per se, it showcases the initial stages of the strings when the knot has yet to be transformed (or to transform itself) into a stitch. Furthermore, it calls to mind a *frogged* crochet or knitting project.<sup>119</sup> This interpretation ties in with previous works by the artist wherein he mobilized the uncanny aesthetics of the everyday in a disorderly fashion emphasizing the repetitive and tedious process of production, essentially reinforcing the idea that the making process is anything but fluid.<sup>120</sup>

String does not inherently denote a fluid process as it can just as easily morph into narratives of struggle and disruption which are fit for socially engaged art. Knitting and crochet can rely on its history as a socially mobilizing activity as grounds for establishing new projects meant to raise consciousness.<sup>121</sup> Following the 2006 *SUPER STRING* show, its curators Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch published an article in 2009 titled *Craft Hard Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies for Craftivism in Unruly Contexts* in which they ask this simple, yet stimulating rhetorical question:

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<sup>118</sup> Anthea Black, *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> "Frogging", an expression used in both knitting and crochet communities, consists in the pulling of yarn off the needle, undoing stitches which can happen when discovering that a mistake has been made a few rows back, for instance. Having been already stitched, the yarn takes on this curly shape which looks disorderly once unraveled.

<sup>120</sup> "Here Not Is Certainly Somewhere – Kris Lindskoog," Stride Gallery, <http://www.stride.ab.ca/here-not-there-is-certainly-somewhere-kris-lindskoog/>.

<sup>121</sup> Many examples are deserving of mention here: the Stitch 'n Bitch movement, World War propaganda urging women to knit. Again, refer to: Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

“So much for precedents; what about the future?”<sup>122</sup> How does the analogy of string move forward?

Just as string theory attempts to answer the question of how atomic particles interact with each other, craftivism’s stitch by stitch approach explores the strengths of craft by connecting one individual to another in order to generate real tangible effects on society. Not unlike Edward Witten’s clever recycling and connecting of various past theories, in which he almost single-handedly revives string theory in the form of the M theory, craftivist exhibitions like *SUPER STRING* engage with a narrative of craft revival by mobilizing the historically established pattern of translating needlework into protests and adapting them for modern political causes. A narrative of connectivity serves as the underpinnings for an exhibition which portrays needlework as conducive to craft revival. The aim was not limited to taking knitting and crochet out of their trivialized status and index a major cultural shift for the history books. Most importantly, the exhibition considers possible avenues of problem-solving the sanitization of art, the typical faith of political art going through the mechanism of the art world. Doing so with a medium typically associated with feminine labour further complexifies the task, filling a gap that was left unfulfilled and completely untouched by the theoretical model of Kubler’s entire *Shape of Time*.

## Conclusion

What drives this analysis attentive to the shape of time and potential narratives is the idea of revival as part of a broader project toward reckoning with art historical methodology. This becomes even more pertinent when looking specifically into the mediums of knitting and crochet, historically categorized under the umbrella of craft. Admittedly, knitting and crochet as artistic

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<sup>122</sup> Anthea Black, and Nicole Burisch, *Ibid*, 609.

mediums have also been left to the margins of craft discourse from the inception of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Arts and Crafts movement to various 20<sup>th</sup> century ventures for the professionalization and legitimization of craft in Canada and the United States. Elissa Auther's *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Craft in American Art* shows evidence of fiber art being positively reinforced in artistic institutions not through its process of making, but through its adherence to modernist codes of display in the form of wall-hangings or minimalist installations. Therefore, when tracing the development of the visibility afforded to knitting and crochet in artistic institutions, the tentative historicization of their revival at the start of the 2000s is deserving of scrutiny as it indexes a moment when the mediums were offered as a means for solving "the problem with craft" and other larger issues in the landscape of art history.<sup>123</sup> Looking back at this particular selection of exhibitions, the very notion of revival at the root of the "invention of craft" fragments itself into these various narratives singular to each exhibition. In this thesis, the narrative embedded in the display of socially engaged art was brought back to the locus of revival, inciting further reflection upon an ontology of cycles as informed by a theory of shaped time.<sup>124</sup> George Kubler's analysis efficiently put forward an argument toward re-imagining historical fixity which, back then, pertained particularly to seeking an alternative to the idea of artistic biographies, styles and periods. The term "craft" is sparsely used in *The Shape of Time*, but when it happens to be brought up, it is worth noting that craft indexes repetition, a cycle of making or thinking. Indeed, craft is

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<sup>123</sup> T'ai Smith, "The Problem with Craft," in *Art Journal* 75 (2016): 80-84.

<sup>124</sup> George Kubler has stated that his own work on the so-called shape of time is part of a larger theory of shaped time in which he includes his mentor Henri Focillon, art critic Paul Valéry, sociologist Siegfried Kracauer, and Kubler himself. In the article *The Shape of Time Reconsidered* (1982), Kubler provides an overview of these authors' writings and how they contribute toward a theory of shaped time up to that point. This short historiography starts with Paul Valéry's 1906 remarks on studying specialized histories in the form of "comprehensible series" (Valéry cited in Kubler 1982, 120), to Henri Focillon's 1933 *La Vie des Formes* and the relationships between art forms as well as the problem of artistic styles, ending with Siegfried Kracauer's book *History, the Last Things before the Last* (published in 1966, four years after Kubler's 1962 *Shape of Time*), which, finally, explicitly spoke of a "concept of shaped time". (Kracauer cited in Kubler 1982, 120) See: George Kubler, "The Shape of Time: Reconsidered," *Perspecta* 19 (1982): 112-21.

for Kubler the repetition of a practice rooted in “tradition”, but he also uses craft as a metaphor for “the craft of art history”, in other words, the resurgence of discourse and events.<sup>125</sup>

Moreover, Kubler’s call for the appreciation of objects beyond the limited scope of artworks established by Western connoisseurship is reprised 55 years later in Ezra Shales’s 2017 *The Shape of Craft*. This methodology for developing a shape of time (now reformulated as the shape of *craft*) is thought-provoking insofar as it urges contemporary scholarship on craft to develop a more critical stance toward craft’s practice of “virtuous reclamation” in the name of sustainability, or the artworld seeking to display craft as conceptual art thus divorcing the object from its context of production.<sup>126</sup> Although the present thesis was concerned with objects displayed in the artistic context of exhibitions affiliated in some way or another to the conceptual *zeitgeist* of the post-modernist contemporary art world, Shales’s *Shape of Craft* insists on asking that the social history of these craft objects be considered, in the same way Kubler suggested considering the expansive unpredictability of a formal sequence linking prime object and *things* (tools, objects, artworks) together.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> George Kubler, “The History of Things,” *Ibid.*, 10

<sup>126</sup> Shales, *Ibid.*, 18. Shales also states: “We need to disabuse ourselves of the notion of avant-garde in order to cultivate craft.” (Shales, 23) This statement regarding craft’s incompatibility with the hierarchy of the artworld cemented by the values of the avant-garde (autonomy, originality, newness) shares some affinities with Louise Mazanti’s previously cited text, but the latter argues for the creation of an entirely new category of craft as “super objects” (Mazanti 2012). Refer to footnotes 63 and 73.

<sup>127</sup> Ezra Shales cites Phillips and Steiner’s edited collection “Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds” as part of his first chapter’s analysis of the social lives of crafted objects and their makers. The theory of the social lives of objects had previously been articulated by cultural anthropologist Igor Kopytoff in his “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process”. All of these published decades after George Kubler’s work, however, Shales’s references and aim demonstrates how compatible the two theories are, especially for how a formal sequence can be applied to the process of commodification, for the manufactured as much as the bespoke craft object. For further reading, see: Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 64-91 ; Ruth B. Phillips, and Christopher Steiner (ed.), *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

The idea of revival, how or when it manifests itself, and what it represents in the field of craft is genuinely deserving of further inquiry, which is what this thesis was meant to precipitate using the variant of knitting and crochet exhibitions understood through Kubler's contribution to the theory of shaped time. In the case of *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting*, the exhibition captured the attention of both the fields of craft and fine art, a method that allowed for the thesis to consider the abstract variable of value that contribute to the hierarchical systems in place. *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* directly engaged with the idea of the continuum, the precarious cycle of feminist waves that requires mending in order to revive itself, but most importantly to survive and thrive. In *À toutes mailles!*, revival was examined from the perspective of familiarity as the basis for the ongoing revival of knitting and crochet practices. For *SUPER STRING*, the notion of cycle was twofold: first came the consideration of the lifecycle of activist art in its modes of display; second was the analysis of universalist and tangled up narratives behind cycles as informed by the philosophy of interconnectedness underlying string theory. Each case study was critically analyzed and, while certain ideas were challenged, all the exhibitions shared the goal of, on the one hand, establishing a dialogue with the past and, on the other, questioning the current state of the art world and its limitations.

This thesis is one attempt to fill in the gaps in scholarship regarding knitting and crochet as art historical objects, and their historical situation as art exhibitions. Acknowledging the historical specificities of these mediums does not equate to revitalizing or even promoting discourses of legitimacy around these practices. Rather, the result should be further consideration into the scope of objects, be it artworks, exhibitions or even writings, being considered in the ever-expanding horizon of art history. Although the thesis aimed for a narrowly focussed exploration of exhibitions set against the transnational backdrop of canado-american relations, it would be worth expanding

the scope of such research questions into the global scene, a project that is far beyond the constraints of the present thesis. By doing so, a clearer constellation of prime objects, sequences, seriations and durations could be delineated and project a more accurate “bigger picture” of how cycles are being interpreted at all levels of artistic production, in all their specificities, and in all their displays.

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## FIGURES



Figs. 1 and 2 Liz Collins, *Illuminated Veins (After EV)*, 2006, silk organza and silk yarn. (left: *Veins/New Life* exhibition, 2009. <http://aesthetic.gregcookland.com/2009/05/liz-collins.html> ; right: *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* exhibition, 2007. <http://greenjeansbrooklyn.blogspot.com/2007/01/greenjeans-review-radical-lace.html>)



Fig. 3 Freddie Robins, *Craft Kills*, 2002, machine-knitted wool, knitting needles, 6 ft. 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. x 15 in. (2m x 68 cm ; 38 cm). Collection of the artist. <https://www.freddierobins.com/blog/craft-kills>



Fig. 4 Sabrina Gschwandtner, *Wartime Knitting Circle*, 2007, Acrylic, cotton, wood, various knitting notions, dimensions variable, *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* exhibition, Manhattan, New York, United States. Photography: Museum of Art and Design <https://www.sabrinag.com/wartime-knitting-circle>



Fig. 5 Lisa Ann Auerbach, *Body Count Mittens*, 2005, Brown Sheep Lamb's Pride worsted yarn. <https://www.ravelry.com/patterns/library/body-count-mittens>



Fig. 6 Cat Mazza, *Stitch for Senate*, 2007-2009, Hand and machine knit baclavas, 10 x 12 x 10 in. (each). <https://www.post-craft.net/art.htm>



Fig. 7 Cat Mazza, *Nike Blanket Petition*, 2007, crocheted wool, 56 in. x 11 ft. 8 in. (142.2cm x 3.6m), *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* exhibition, Manhattan, New York, United States. Collection of the artist. [https://kayteterry.typepad.com/kayte\\_terry/2007/03/microrevolt.html](https://kayteterry.typepad.com/kayte_terry/2007/03/microrevolt.html)



Fig. 8 Janet Echelman, *Expanding Club*, 2007, High-tenacity polyester fiber and lighting, 25ft (height) x 20ft (diameter) Museum of Art and Design, New York. <https://www.echelman.com/project/expanding-club>



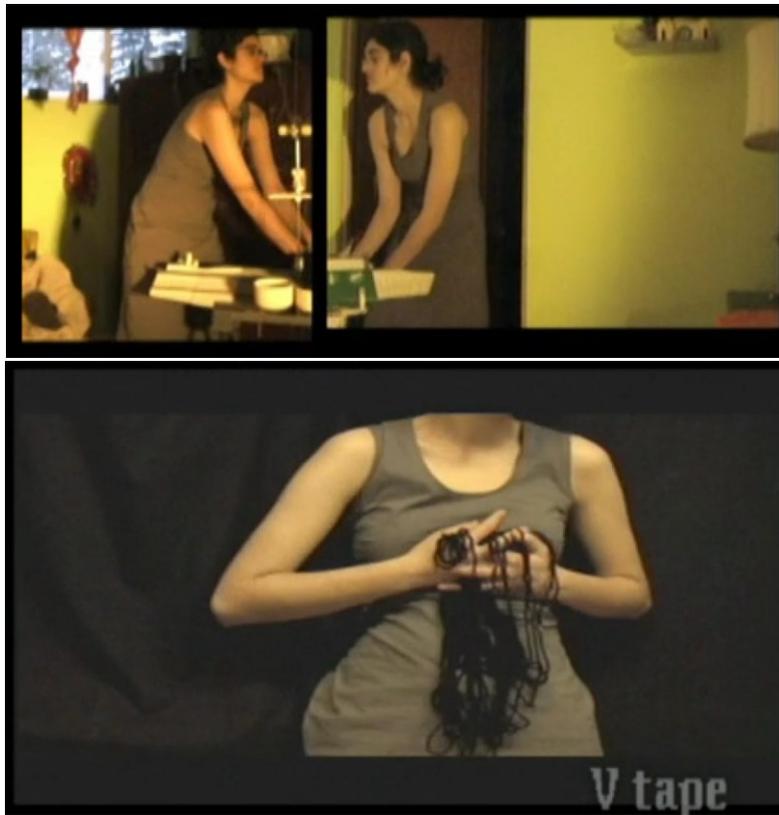
Fig. 9 Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79, ceramic, porcelain, textile, 576 x 576 in. (1463 x 1463 cm). (Detail) Installation view at the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York, United States. Gift of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation. Photography: Stan Honda/AFP/Getty, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/an-overdue-celebration-for-an-unruly-landmark-of-feminist-art>



Fig. 10 Judy Chicago, *Birth Tear E2*, 1982, embroidery (needleworker: Jane Gaddie Thompson), 14.5 x 22in. Courtesy: Through the Flower ©Judy Chicago. <http://gallery.stkate.edu/exhibitions/judy-chicagos-birth-project-born-again>



Fig. 11 *She Will Always Be Younger Than Us* exhibition. Photography: Donald Woodman. Source: Allyson Mitchell, and Sarah Quinton, "She Will Always Be Younger Than Us," in *When Women Rule the World* (Toronto: Textile Museum of Canada, 2009), 84.



Figs. 12-13 Wednesday Lupyciw, *K2tog: video knitting coven*, 2006, (screen captures) video, *She Will Always be Younger Than Us* exhibition at The Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto, Canada. Courtesy of Vtape.



Fig. 14 Wednesday Lupyciw, installation view of *K2tog: video knitting coven*, 2006, video; and *Seasons*, 2006, hand-knotted rope, cotton fibres in *She Will Always be Younger Than Us* exhibition at The Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto.  
<https://textilemuseum.ca/event/she-will-always-be-younger-than-us/>



Fig. 15 Cécile Dachary, *Le ciel est rose*, year unknown, acrylic yarn, 300cm x 200cm, *À toutes mailles!* exhibition, Centre MATÉRIA, Québec City, Canada.  
[http://www.ceciledachary.com/page\\_1.html](http://www.ceciledachary.com/page_1.html)



Fig. 16 Doug Guildford, *Doily*, 2003, crocheted nylon-coated copper wire, 33 in. (diameter), *À toutes mailles!* exhibition, Centre MATÉRIA, Québec City, Canada.  
<https://voir.ca/nouvelles/2013/10/24/%C2%ABa-toutes-mailles%C2%BB-le-tricot-au-dela-de-la-pantoufle-en-phentex/>



Fig. 17 Doug Guildford, *Doily*, 2003, crocheted nylon-coated copper wire, 33 in. (diameter)., 9 views, Florida.  
[http://cca.concordia.ca/artists/image\\_timeline.html?languagePref=en&link\\_id=5689&artist=Doug+Guildford](http://cca.concordia.ca/artists/image_timeline.html?languagePref=en&link_id=5689&artist=Doug+Guildford)

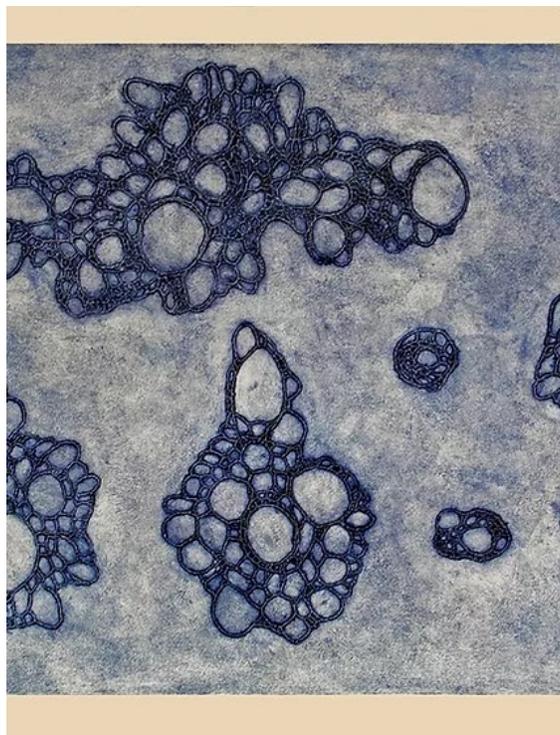


Fig. 18 Doug Guildford, *BLUE TIDE: Off-Shore Evidence #1 – 8*, 2008, collograph printed on washi from crocheted copper wire “doilies” laminated to pulp boards, 28 in. x 36 in. Collection of the artist. <https://www.dougguildford.com/blue-tide-cov2>



Fig. 19 Janet Morton, *Chains of Fools*, 2003, 50 knitted cassettes, 5 x 8 in. each, *À toutes mailles!* exhibition, Centre MATÉRIA, Québec City, Canada.  
<https://voir.ca/nouvelles/2013/10/24/%C2%ABa-toutes-mailles%C2%BB-le-tricot-au-dela-de-la-pantoufle-en-phentex/>



Fig. 20 Janet Morton, *Senses Spin*, 2003, tornado knit from audio tape, portable turntable, monarch butterflies, 4 x 12ft., *À toutes mailles!* exhibition.  
<https://voir.ca/nouvelles/2013/10/24/%C2%ABa-toutes-mailles%C2%BB-le-tricot-au-dela-de-la-pantoufle-en-phentex/>



Fig. 21 Janet Morton, *The Manse*, 2008, acrylic yarn, height: 28 in., *À toutes mailles!* exhibition, Centre MATÉRIA, Québec City, Canada.  
<https://voir.ca/nouvelles/2013/10/24/%C2%ABa-toutes-mailles%C2%BB-le-tricot-au-dela-de-la-pantoufle-en-phentex/>



Fig. 22 Helga Schlitter, *Quetzalcoatl*, 2013-2014, metal brooch, yarn, steel wool, cassette tape, 14.8 ft x 6 in. x 6 in., *À toutes mailles!* exhibition. Courtesy of the curator and the artist.



Figs. 23-24 Jacques Samson, *Sculptures toutou*, 2013, stuffed crocheted cotton fiber, dimensions variables, *À toutes mailles!* exhibition, Centre MATÉRIA, Québec City, Canada. <https://www.jacques-samson.com/>



Fig. 25 Colifichet, *Le sosie*, 2012, knitted sculpture, height: 5 ft 2in., <https://www.lesoleil.com/2014/02/12/regis-labeaume-rencontre-son-sosie-de-laine-f7587d18d8cc9a33c70e2d55662e2ee7>



Fig. 26

Revolutionary Knitting Circle, *Peace Knits*, 2004, *SUPER STRING* exhibition, Stride Gallery, Calgary, Canada.

[http://www.stride.ab.ca/arc/archive\\_2006/super\\_string\\_main/super\\_string\\_images.htm](http://www.stride.ab.ca/arc/archive_2006/super_string_main/super_string_images.htm)



Fig. 27

*SUPER STRING* workshop hosted by the Revolutionary Knitting Circle at Stride Gallery, 2006. <https://antheablack.com/2011/04/11/super-string/>



Figs. 28-29 Cindy Baker, *All Things to All Men (and Women)*, 2006, *SUPER STRING* exhibition, Stride Gallery, Calgary, Canada. <https://www.cindy-baker.ca/work-2013/allthings>



Fig. 30

Kris Lindskoog, *I want to do something nice for the planet*, 2006, *SUPER STRING* exhibition, Stride Gallery, Calgary, Canada.

[http://www.stride.ab.ca/arc/archive\\_2006/super\\_string\\_main/super\\_string\\_images.htm](http://www.stride.ab.ca/arc/archive_2006/super_string_main/super_string_images.htm)