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## **Crafting Stories in the Domestic Archive**

**Rowan Bailey**

### **Biography**

**Rowan Bailey** is MA Programme Coordinator in Art and Design and Senior Lecturer Historical and Theoretical Studies at the University of Huddersfield. Her research interests extend to histories and theories of aesthetic philosophy inscribed and embedded within art and design practices, including those modes of productive activity not yet accounted for in existing models of research. She is currently exploring practitioner approaches to archives and existing collections, which also includes teaching and learning projects in alternative pedagogical spaces.

### **Abstract**

The Knitting and Crochet Guild archive, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire hosts a vast array of hand-made items, including clothing, artefacts, yarns and samples, as well as tools, pattern leaflets, booklets and magazines. This article explores how the collection was used as a starting point for engaging students in new experiential encounters with the archive, as both a concept and as a container for material histories of the past. Two theoretical frameworks of investigation provide an intertwining methodology for reading the project: the first operates as a feminist narrative of intervention in the history of textile craft making, and the second considers how the 'thought-images' of Walter Benjamin provide a tool for thinking through student responses. It is argued that as a repository of the home-crafts, Lee Mills provides historical materialism with the experiential investigation it needs for a critical pedagogy of the present.

### **Keywords**

Archival engagements, craft pedagogies, 'thought-images', philosophy, feminism.

## Introduction

The Knitting and Crochet Guild archive is housed at Lee Mills, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire in the North of England. As a repository of the “home-crafts” it contains examples of the unofficial traditions of women’s production. First established in 1978, it holds a collection of knitted and crocheted items, including hand-made garments, artefacts, yarns and samples, tools, pattern leaflets, booklets and magazines (over 50,000), as well as other ephemera, some bordering on the eccentric. As domestic pieces, some date to as far back as 1900, although the majority of the collection is post-1945. (Figure 1) Serving as a rich material resource for textile craft practitioners and theorists, the collection provides new opportunities for archival engagement. Barbara Smith, the Publications Curator and Angharad Thomas, Textiles Archivist, are responsible for sorting the items. The archive is under construction, with many of the boxes’ contents still needing to be catalogued. (Figure 2) In this respect, it is a continuous work in progress. Tucked away within an industrial estate on the outskirts of Holmfirth, it is a hidden treasure trove on the edge of a small town in the Holme Valley, near Huddersfield.

In 2012-2013, the University of Huddersfield sought to collaborate with the Guild, for the purposes of engaging textile craft students in the practices of archiving and to expand their knowledge and understanding of the domestic histories of knit and crochet making.<sup>1</sup> Keen for assistance in the mammoth and methodical task of cataloguing many of the still yet to be archived items, Smith and Thomas welcomed volunteer involvement at Lee Mills, and agreed to guide and assist students in archival methods, as well as imparting their own knowledge and expertise of the archive’s contents, including the material and technical histories embedded within the items themselves. The collaboration was to be part of a second year undergraduate professional practice module entitled “Crafting the Community”, where students participate in a variety of different volunteering activities pertinent to contemporary crafts practice.

By actively enabling textiles to be situated within the social landscape, the teaching team on the textile crafts programme are proactive in fostering projects in local contexts, often alongside communities who are economically, socially and/or culturally isolated and under-represented. As module leader, Claire Barber, has overseen the creation of over 200 individual student volunteer posts, working across more than 30 projects for over 18 community partners. Recent projects have included: workshops with “Young Carers” in Bradford, “Live at Home” (for the over 50’s) in Bradford, “The Sleeping Bag Project”; an initiative to reclaim sleeping bags for people without homes, “Craft and the Penistone Line” in collaboration with the Penistone Line Partnership and Honley High School; a project to place craft on trains and at train stations on the Penistone Line Railway. There is also participation in the global collaborative project “The Dream Rocket Project”, directed by Jennifer Marsh (USA).<sup>2</sup> These new ways of experiencing teaching and learning in alternative spaces, whether at art festivals, through community learning programmes and outreach initiatives, charity groups and/or open access initiatives, emphasises a pedagogical praxis that brings learning processes into littoral spaces of engagement.<sup>3</sup> As projects which are informed by public strategies and methodologies of craft engagement in the world, they highlight the experimental ways in which the craft professional (whether artist, designer, maker and/or theorist) may produce alternative narratives or stories of making through material experience. The Lee Mills archive project was this module’s most recent initiative.

Taking these creative methodologies into account, students were introduced, in a history and theory module entitled “Contextualising Craft Practice”, to the possibilities of considering those theoretical frameworks within which narratives of archival exploration currently persist. We read Georg Perec, Paul Ricouer and Hal Foster, on the narrative constructions that issue out of the activities of cataloguing and valuing items, including the very impossibility of archiving itself as a satisfactory method for classifying objects or artefacts. We explored the works of Dieter Roth, Song Dong, Illya Kabakov and Thomas Hirschhorn on the formation of archival installations through different narratives and political fictions. We dwelt on the differences between hoarding and collecting and the

values placed on objects inside and outside of the formal archive. We considered Freud's use of archaeological metaphors of the mind in conjunction with Susan Hiller's and Sarah Lucas' responses to his own collection of artefacts. We also thought about photographic tarrying with the archive through the work of Gerhard Richter, Christian Boltanski and Bernard and Hiller Becher. All of these examples brought new narratives of archival encounter into play: of digital versus material archives, of public versus private knowledges, of the received ideologies of material culture and modes of practitioner engagement, of what it might mean to really issue a response, and most importantly, why one would want to anyway?<sup>4</sup>

As a resource for primary research, Lee Mills thus served as an inspiration for new experiential encounters with material histories of the past through the handling of domestic textiles. Introducing differing conceptions of the archive from practitioner perspectives sought to engage students with the potential openings an intervention may disclose. For example, how might a practitioner, through the activities of making, bring the past to bear on the present, or vice versa? In what ways does a craft practitioner approach the archive, and how, through contemporising dormant domestic items, might we engage in the practices of research, of thinking with and through different materials and modes of making? With the aid of these questions, students produced illustrated essays on archival encounters, and alongside their professional practice module and through studio practice, they crafted some interesting, if not surprising narratives, for us, as members of staff. Several themes emerged in both the students' written work and through their direct engagement with items from the archive itself. The difficulty, however, lies in upholding the value of these student experiences, and to undertake such a task, an intertwining methodology, threading empirical and the philosophical approaches together, is required. As contemporary cultural formations, these student encounters must be approached from these perspectives.<sup>5</sup> It will be argued, within the context of this article, that as a repository of the home-crafts, the archive provides historical materialism with the experiential investigation it needs for a critical pedagogy of the present. It does this through two theoretical

**Comment [RB1]:** I am considering how different perspectives of thinking help to shape and form a reading of student work. The intertwining methodology requires a form of thinking that threads the empirical and philosophical together. Again, I am using 'intertwining' to resonate with the metaphors of textile craft making. Entwining threads in relation to the intertwining of different perspectives (alluding to the 'inter' disciplinary exchange within the methodology itself.

frameworks; firstly, through feminist narratives of intervention in the history of textile craft making, and secondly, through the “thought-images” of Walter Benjamin.

### **Feminist legacies**

Home to the unofficial traditions of women’s production, Lee Mills appeals to feminist readings of the engendered temporalities of cloth. Experiencing an archive of the hand-made brings the ideological space of the domestic interior out into the open, and with it, stories about home-based activities and their historical significance. As Pen Dalton clearly explains back in 1987:

[...] communicating through craft can give the woman tied to the home a voice outside to penetrate and influence the dominant sphere of cultural exchange. [...] It is up to us as critics, artists, craftworkers and feminists to seek out and support such work, discuss and criticise it and construct a new category of leisure crafts that is the authentic voice of the housewife herself, and to have the confidence to assess, to reject or to use the consumer crafts in women’s magazines to meet only our own identified needs and desires.<sup>6</sup>

How stories speak or are spoken about goes back to a concept of the archive as both receptacle of dominant ideological paradigms and lever for critical interventions. In the context of considering what constitutes a feminist intervention in the archive one would seek to explore the ways in which power is both produced by the archive and produces the archive. More importantly, if power positions women’s production through the ways in which this knowledge is authorised and spoken, the archive, domestic or otherwise, must be read, not only as the embodiment of dominant ideologies, but as the receptacle for narratives or stories that critically question them. Maintaining a focus on the engendered intervention within the context of the domestic archive thus requires that one sustain critical awareness of how knowledge is produced and disseminated. Histories of craft practice, when critiqued through feminist discourse, may act as important resistances to pre-existing and dominant paradigms of thinking and making. As a mode of engendered production, craft, whether at the level of

the written text itself or through the framework of textile practice, has deservedly received attention, particularly through feminist theory, psychoanalysis and continental philosophy.<sup>7</sup> As stories, they testify to what is included or excluded from archival knowledge; to what stories of interpretation continue to be re-inscribed within culture and what narratives of craft making are erased. These readings of 'woman's time' create an opening for a reconsideration of the redemption of craft experience, as articulated and expressed in the thought-images" of Walter Benjamin.

### **Telling Tales**

First published in 1936, Benjamin's "The Storyteller" is centred on Nikloai Leskov, a Russian novelist, playwright and journalist, who experimented with the short literary form. A travelling salesman and Russian representative of an English firm, Scott and Wilkins, which specialised in selling agricultural machinery to landlords, Leskov travelled the length and breadth of Russia in the 1800s, no doubt gathering stories along the way.<sup>8</sup> In the essay, Benjamin identifies two storytellers, what he calls "archaic types": the craftsman and the traveller, and he describes their intertwining relationship in the following way:

The resident master craftsman and the travelling journeymen [in the middle ages] worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been a travelling journeyman before he settled down in his home town or somewhere else. If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. In it was combined the lore of faraway places, such as a much-travelled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to natives of a place.<sup>9</sup>

Benjamin argues that the value of passing on stories from "mouth to mouth" is an experience that no longer carries currency in the aftermath of the First World War. With the advent of technological reproduction, and the emergence of new and accelerated modes of communication, the mass production and exchange of information, through newspapers and magazines, replaces the art of

storytelling with what Benjamin calls, “the isolated reading encounter”.<sup>10</sup> Whereas the storytelling mode of the past enabled the repetition and exchange of experience, information now serves as a method of explanation and alienation, rather than interpretation.<sup>11</sup> The de-valuation of repetition removes narrative thinking from oral transmission, and with it, the intimacies of exchange. As Esther Leslie puts it, in her reading of Benjamin’s essay, storytelling “mirrors a mode of processing and reconstituting experience. It intimates how experiences pass into and out of memory.”<sup>12</sup> In effect, the usefulness embedded in those stories that are passed on by the storyteller, whether as moral code, practical advice, proverb or maxim,<sup>13</sup> no longer retains the cultural currency and authority they once had. Benjamin, in methodological mode, anticipates the need to witness storytelling in the moment of its disappearance.<sup>14</sup> All is not lost of course. There is always some resistance in the emergence of new narrative assemblages responding to accelerated modes of information exchange. For Benjamin, this can be found in the activities of Dada and Surrealism. Accessing the materials of technological reproduction and applying the montage techniques of juxtaposition, generates a collage of new experience shaped and formed as a reaction to “tactical warfare”, i.e., the bureaucratisation of information.

Strategic experience is a symptom brought about by what is chosen to be valued by the institution that preserves items in an archival context. But, corporeal exchanges of experience bypass this logic in the moment of delivery. The nameless anonymity of the oral storyteller and the contents he or she passes on is, in the intimate exchange of experience, beyond the administrative system of prescribed criteria deployed for the purposes of retrieval. One never quite knows the destination of the storyteller’s journey.<sup>15</sup> The act of re-telling thus always already provides the opportunity for interpretation rather than mere explanation. This is its power as a mode of craft experience.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Chronicles of Student Experience**

Benjamin’s account of the storyteller, written in the context of the 1930s, provides some useful insights into contemporary narrations of the past. Students tell stories when they make. This is a



hidden and under-analysed feature of craft practice. In this collaborative project with the Lee Mills archive, students were encouraged to tell their stories of the archive within a studio context. Taking items from Lee Mills and rehousing them in the space of the studio, shifts the archive's meaning as mere repository to that of a material experience with historical artefacts. The re-enactment of the "act of telling" inadvertently staged an **archaic** exchange, similar to that undertaken by Benjamin's storyteller. Students became an iteration of "the artisan class" who brought home "the lore of faraway places".<sup>17</sup> **(Figure 3)** Explicit engagements with the personalised stories attached to and embedded within the items themselves, appealed to one student in particular, who used letters and photographs relating to donated items to reproduce an archive installation in miniature. Lee Mills was the subject matter for her craft practice, but the items were the trigger for telling stories through the piece itself **(Figure 4)**:

These experiences have been about the objects, but the process of finding them, the journey of discovery and story-telling are at least equally important to my practice. The nature of the archive and the atmosphere it projects has become part of my work.<sup>18</sup>

To treat the archive as an installation would mean to consider it as the location of a space, where meaning and value is derived from the relationships forged by the beholder's own interpretative attempts to make sense of the archive beyond its established and historic function as repository. An underlying mode of interpretation used to make sense of what might constitute this kind of archival intervention, is the autobiographical analogy. This is where the condition of one story is brought into contact with another, through resemblance and recognition. For example, most students were keen, in group discussions, to apply their understanding of archiving, as a method, to the practices of maintaining their own technical files as practitioners **(Figure 5)**. Other accounts appeared to dwell on the socio-political conditions of archiving itself, as if it were on a spectrum of possibilities, with institutionalised methods of archiving at one end and hoarding as an obsessive compulsive activity at the other. The collector sat somewhere in-between. Hoarding, as the obverse to established

**Comment [RB2]:** It is inadvertently mimicking Benjamin's discussion of the role of the 'artisan class'. I think I am making an analogy here between the student's act of telling and that of the traditional storyteller in Benjamin's text. In other words, what Benjamin says is lost is recuperated in this contemporary context.

archiving methodologies, may also be a cultural symptom or reaction to a “throw away” society.<sup>19</sup> Hoarding is out of sync with the archive as repository, questioning the role of archive as capitalist accumulation materialised, through its control of information through administrative strategies. But the hoarder is the sole custodian of material objects and with it the gatekeeper to what stays and what goes.

Students identified hoarding tendencies in the spaces of their lives; from family histories to archiving strategies. One student reflected on their own family inheritance of hoarding and collecting, and on interviewing her Father and Grandfather, explores why they chose not to throw items away:

I feel my Dad is a closet hoarder, not admitting that something has lived its purpose. When I asked him why he keeps pots of nails, screws and bolts in the garage (most of which have no head and couldn't be used again), he said “Simply, you might need it one day and that day will come”. Another person in my family is my Granddad. Most people use a shed for gardening tools but Granddad's 10ft by 8ft shed has much more. When looking around, I didn't know where to begin. I found everything from fishing rods to glass jelly moulds to an old dolly peg. He hoards things in jars, on little shelves, in old cupboards, which are all arranged in a special way. I asked him why he has so many things and he said “They were mainly given to us and it's just stuff that gets moved from one place to another. There's some unopened wedding presents in the wardrobe at the back”.<sup>20</sup>

Hoarding served to represent an intimate relation to a multitude of things in the world through the domestic interior. In the passage above, the student identifies the garage and shed as archival territories (Figure 6). Here, the story is passed on and re-told by the student, who interprets the tale by bringing Father and Grandfather together in a family scene of paternal inheritance. Through the act of re-telling, she describes the whole family as “sentimental hoarders,” herself and her mother included: “My Mum, Dad and I could be seen as sentimental hoarders of small collections but my

parent's hoards differ from mine and I don't see the value they see in the objects they insist on keeping."<sup>21</sup> What these domestic items represent then, are embedded stories passed on from object to object; a history of things which obeys the temporal logic of family inheritance. What is exchanged is subjected to constant re-interpretation. This example is akin to Benjamin's account of the intertwining relationship between storyteller and artisan: "one can go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful and unique way".<sup>22</sup> In this respect, the contemporary craft practitioner, whose narrative account of experience is derived from corporeal encounters with domestic objects, is precisely a form of fashioning that the re-telling of a story needs, in order to be interpreted and passed on.

The shifting character of the archive, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, can perhaps illuminate the condition of the private "hoard". In the nineteenth century, as an ideological effect of the rise of the bureaucratic age and as an outcome of technological invention, the belief developed that by capturing the contingent and ephemeral one might be able to measure the present, in all of its complexity. In this respect, the archive expanded as a field which sought to record materials and objects of the everyday.<sup>23</sup> The leisure crafts of knitting and crochet, which make up Lee Mills, including the ideologies of the twentieth-century presented within the pattern magazines, books and kits, are exemplary of the expanded field of the archive. It is rare to access both the literature that evidences dominant cultural trends alongside the material outputs of these ideologies: socks and gloves, hats, cardigans, blankets, table mats and cloths, including an unlimited supply of un-useable yarns. These objects take over the archival space. Their value as items for exchange, as materials, patterns and techniques, also have embedded within them, their (in)visibility within history as domestic items. Most pieces are anonymous in that they are not attributed to a particular person, company or organisation. Instead, they stand out as "phantasmagoria", the term Benjamin uses to speak about the objects of his own unique archival hoard of the nineteenth century, *The Arcades*

*Project*. This kind of project, where what is documented in written form, attempts to redeem the “trash of history”, by using discarded, forgotten and rejected items as a montage methodology, produces a new kind of archive for the future. An archive of the tangible (i.e., the documents through which one encounters the reception and exchange of objects within a given cultural moment), would according to Benjamin, house the many threads of “the expression of the economy in its culture”.<sup>24</sup> One could therefore encounter the function and meaning of Lee Mills through the private hoarding mentality that lies beneath, which distorts its “public” archival logic.

What this implies is that these home-craft items are the very threads of expression required for a critical redemption of the domestic. They not only give voice to the changing landscape of domesticity, their de-valued character as hand-made domestic things register the discovery of experience; a future condition of the archive through the fragmentations of its past.

### **The Journey Form**

Another student project used the journey form to produce a craft intervention outside of the archive. Student volunteers had to travel to Lee Mills from Huddersfield on the number 313 local bus to Holmfirth. The journey, usually taking place after peak times, led the student to reflect on the route itself, passing through villages on the way, picking up the over 60s, and heading to the centre of Holmfirth. With the aim of raising public awareness of the historical legacy of the domestic items in the archive to local inhabitants of the area, she instigated a yarn bombing campaign. Taking redundant balls of wool from the archive, she wrapped the bus stop pillar outside Lee Mills, leaving a note to advertise the Knit and Crochet Guild. (Figure 7) In this respect, the journey to and from the archive became a distinct narrative to be shared with members of the local community. Yarn bombing, unlike graffiti, has a different kind of critical resonance. For example, Brassai’s nocturnal photographs of graffiti on the streets of Paris capture a language of the wall, where the wider context of the city, its surfaces and corners are brought to life. Published in 1960, Brassai’s photographic collection of graffiti documents the ephemerality of the everyday.<sup>25</sup>

As a contemporary form of textile graffiti, yarn bombing wraps and winds its materials through the landscape, transforming through texture and colour. And in so doing, it inadvertently re-tells the story of Ariadne, who leads Theseus out of the labyrinth. Ariadne's unravelling yarn, like Penelope's weave, attempts to reverse time through counter-productive activity. As is well known, the Penelope of Homer's *Odyssey* is bound to unwinding her weave so as to ward off her suitors.<sup>26</sup> This involves the laborious and tiring activity of undoing a tightly woven structure at night.<sup>27</sup> It is equally a rewind that repeats Ariadne's heroic act of escape. As a critical repositioning of this myth, the simple act of winding yarn around a bus stop brings the interwoven structures of power, gender and identity embedded within the archive out of the domestic interior and into the public space of the local area. What is hidden is rendered visible. Colourful threads of yarn around a travelling marker stage an intervention within the landscape. Yarn bombing, as the term suggests, violates the urban environment. It is a contemporary form of street art utopianism, where the act of wrapping, enfolding and unravelling, illuminates existing features within an open arena. Yarn serves as a supplement for the transformation of space, not by chipping away or layering a surface through inscription, but by reshaping and remoulding existing three dimensional forms, or by creating new forms by filling in the negative space between boundaries. This method of making has its roots in the feminist craft practices of the 1970s and 80s, which sought to overturn the phallogocentric domination of the art world.<sup>28</sup> Akin to Benjamin's historical materialist, the yarn bomber produces a "redemptive image" in the landscape and "takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework".<sup>29</sup> These interventions, which are also very clearly documented in the recent literature on craftivism, register craft as an ever evolving and politicising activity in the world.<sup>30</sup> One might go so far as to suggest that, as an intertwining mode of thinking and making, craft is always already a socially engaged intervention: it is a human mediation within an external environment that actively disturbs the congealed and frozen estrangements of existing cultural formations.

### Writing in Images

Rather than pursue this line of enquiry through Benjamin's more established theoretical writings, it is perhaps more fitting to approach those personalised accounts within his corpus. Serving as memories through which many of his thought-images are constructed, these vignettes carry his thinking forward. In "A Berlin Chronicle" Benjamin explains how such recollections are disruptions to time, understood as an autobiographical, that is, chronological ordering of experience:

Reminiscences, even extensive ones, do not always amount to an autobiography. [...] Here, I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities. For even if months and years appear here, it is in the form they have at the moment of recollection. This strange form – it may be called fleeting or eternal – is in neither case the stuff that life is made of.<sup>31</sup>

There is something other to these thought-images. For Benjamin, this is not the process of mere reconstruction, but a way of understanding, of interpreting reminiscences spatially. This chronicle of experience reveals the potential of the domestic as a space of fragments, moments and discontinuities. The archive houses material forms where the dialectic of the future and past is circumscribed within them: the crotchet tea cosies beside the lace table mats, the gloves nestled against the boxes of dusty yarns, the different shapes, colours and sizes of material sources, alongside those items that seem to stand alone, beyond classification and without purpose. In this sense, the hand-made items are conditions of possibility for the shock encounter of the "redemptive image".

But what might constitute a critical redemption of the domestic, beyond the examples discussed in the sections above? Let us turn to the "thought-images" of certain household items in Benjamin's writings. For Benjamin, the uncanny stranger of "non-transparent space" would be the future that resides in those words, gestures or material things, which suddenly enter into our consciousness; "an echo awakened by a call, a sound that seems to have been heard somewhere in the darkness of past life".<sup>32</sup> Through allegorical acts of re-telling in *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, Benjamin chooses to write

with and through certain domestic items. Reflecting on his tacit and tactile learning as a child ignited by a “game” with his woollen socks, he creates a scene of the “now” of cognition. Burrowing into a wardrobe of clothes, much like an archive of material items, the dream-scene unfolds:

There I would come upon my socks, which lay piled in traditional fashion – that is to say, rolled up and turned inside out. Every pair had the appearance of a little pocket. For me, nothing surpassed the pleasure of thrusting my hand as deeply as possible into its interior. I did not do this for the sake of this pocket’s warmth. It was “the little present” rolled up inside that I always held in my hand and that drew me into the depths. When I had closed my fist around it and, so far as I was able, made certain that I possessed the stretchable woollen mass, here began the second phase of the game, which brought with it the unveiling. For now I proceeded to unwrap “the present”, to tease it out of its woollen pocket. I drew it near to me, until something rather disconcerting would happen: I brought out “the present”, but “the pocket” in which it had lain was no longer there. I could not repeat the experiment on this phenomenon often enough! It taught me that form and content, veil and what is veiled, are the same. It led me to draw truth from works of literature as warily as the child’s hand retrieved the sock from “the pocket”.<sup>33</sup>

In the German, “the little present” translates as “Das Mitgebrachte” which Benjamin places in inverted commas. In English, “the little present” not only indicates the gift, but also time. This scene speaks about the disappearance of the present through the act of unfolding a pair of socks. This image’s power is its ability to capture, in one moment, the whole of Benjamin’s philosophy of redemptive history. The early stirrings of dialectical materialism are in socks. They bear the process and its subsequent history within itself, the polarisation by the present of a moment of unfolding and enfolding through the reading encounter. This is a critical moment of cognition, where the profane illumination of the ‘now’ is simultaneously in disappearance.

In stark contrast, and with a momentary return to the critical repositioning of myth through feminist thinking and reading, Penelope tells a different story from within the domestic interior. Likening the practices of craft making to that of writing includes the complex play of the textual, where the intertwining exchange between making and knowledge production is subjected to figurations of the weave. The warp and weft serve as operational metaphors of the present and the past; the yarn that is woven becomes an intertwined structure. In this respect, a weave is not as easily undone as a pair of socks. The artist, Isabella Ducrot, goes so far as to explore the inherent complexities of undoing a weave and its implications for Penelope's story. Linking weave to time, Penelope performs the almost impossible. She attempts to slow time down, forcing "time to slacken its course". This defiant resistance to the established order, by putting the weave under erasure, brings with it the trace of damage and impairment. Ducrot writes:

[...] trying to unweave a piece of fabric is almost as hopeless as trying to arrest time. Anyone skilled in the craft knows that it is very hard to undo a piece of woven textile without breaking the weft; precisely because it is a continuous thread, the weft is what gives textile its quality and its durability, and severing the weft kills the weave. Perhaps that is why the weft has come down to us as a symbol of continuity.<sup>34</sup>

This battle with time is also a manifestation of a mode of making whose meaning is analogous to a manner or style of writing that Penelope is seeking to resist. The linearity of the weave structure is an architectonic imposition. It erects and fixes. Penelope treats the weave in another mode. She wills the technique of knitting upon the mathematical precision of the weave. Knit relies on a single unbroken yarn, unravelled and rewound. It can do and undo the past through a simple act of winding and unwinding. The thread of the story in weave is not the same as the ravelling potential of the yarn or indeed, the lightening flash of the "thought image". And yet, when one brings one methodology into contact with another, what is enabled is the critical moment of cognition; a necessary stepping-stone in the learning encounter.



A final example. This time, a technical response. One student identified a pair of gaiters from the archive which are believed to come from the Balkans. Intertwining observations of the item, artist influences, current trends and her hands on experience in the archive, she developed a product for women cyclists in an urban environment. Utilising smart materials to produce light reflective city gaiters, the socks are influenced by the manufactured landscapes of Edward Burtynsky, where the photographic imagery of the beautification of waste provides a critical commentary on the over-production of material goods in the twenty-first century. (Figure 8) This student not only encounters an item within the archive at odds with the majority of donations (most are from the United Kingdom), she repositions the gaiter to meet the concerns of a current global form of power. She writes:

I wanted to use a theme of nuclear power on a conceptual level, but was stuck on how to translate it visually and incorporate the use of metaphor, due to the fact that radiation is invisible and can only be detected by Geiger counters.<sup>35</sup>

What does one do with this image, of this student's desire to bring the technical innovations and concerns of the present to bear on the re-production of a domestic product? As an educator, might my role as an active reader of student work be to recognise the significance interpretation plays through maker experiences such as these? Whereas Benjamin reminds us that the disappearance of storytelling as an oral form is replaced by the "isolated reading encounter", the very practice of active reading, visual or otherwise, is subject to further analysis in a pedagogical context. Perhaps, by taking on the "thought-image", we can encourage our students to stage their own critical interventions in and through the archive. As a resource, Lee Mills provides a very raw and real experience of primary research. An intuitive and hands-on enquiry into the archive provided students with an opportunity to engage in tacit learning encounters and to articulate the tools of this learning through different narratives, whether visual, material, fictional, and/or critically reflexive. These formations of

encounter reveal knowledge acquisition through discovery; learning through making, sharing and imparting new skills across generations. Students embraced the importance of the unofficial traditions of the archive, of coming to realise that the stories housed within this space are always at risk; the danger of their material disappearance lies in their failure to be recuperated through the experiences of storytelling. And yet, maker responses can serve as the conditions of possibility for a new kind of theory, where interpretation through making and writing serves as an important platform for those critical moments of cognition that happen unexpectedly and without warning. In this respect, the tale of the storyteller as re-told to us by our students is a lesson to be learned and continuously repositioned within craft practice.

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<sup>2</sup> For further insights into this mode of craft practice, see in particular, Penny Macbeth and Claire Barber (eds.) *Outside: Activating Cloth to Enhance the Way We Live* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). Claire Barber's chapter "Outside Intervention", pp.17-32, discusses differing modes of engagement with community out-reach craft projects whilst Penny Macbeth's chapter "Patchwork of Dreams", pp.99-114, explores Jennifer Marsh's Dream Rocket project.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of littoral art practices and socially engaged practices, see Claire Bishop "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, 110, (Fall 2004): 51-79; and Grant H. Kester, *Art, Activism and Oppositionality: Essays from After Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> For further insights into the specific character of these archival engagements, see in particular, Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen (eds.) *Deep Storage* (Munich: Prestel, 1998); Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2008); Okwui Enwezor (ed. and essayist), *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. (Göttingen, Stiehl, London: Thames & Hudson, 2008); and more recently, Judy Vaknin, Karyn Stuckey, Victoria Lane (eds.), *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist* (Farrington: Libri Publishing, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> The analysis explores what constitutes a craft intervention through the reflective acts of re-telling told by students in their essays. I would like to thank all students for their contributions to this project, and in particular those who agreed to have their work cited as part of this article.

<sup>6</sup> Pen Dalton, "Housewives, Leisure Crafts and Ideology – De-skilling in consumer craft" in Gillian Elinor, Su Richardson, Sue Scott, Angharad Thomas and Kate Walker (eds) *Women and Craft*, (London: Virago, 1987), p. 36. Also see Jo Turney, "Here's One I Made Earlier: Making and Living with Home Craft in Contemporary Britain" *Journal of Design History* 17(3) (2004): 267-281; and Jo Turney, "Making Love with Needles: Knitted Objects as Signs of Love" *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 10(3) (2012): 302-311. Carolyn Steedman's *Dust* provides an alternative reading of historiography, with an account of the material residues and traces of the past captured through the practices of writing at the margins. Such readings may be adapted and used for feminist interventions in the "domestic" archive. See in particular Carolyn Steedman, "What a Rag Rug Means" in Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 112-141.

<sup>7</sup> Exemplary texts which read with, in and through a continental tradition of close reading include: Nancy K. Miller, "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic" in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1988); Janis Jefferies "Text and Textiles: Weaving across the Borderlines" in Katy Deepwell (ed.) *New Feminist Art Criticism – Women's Art Library* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 164-173; and more recently, Isabella Ducrot, *Text on Textile* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> The company was part owned by his English uncle (Scott) who sold agricultural equipment to Russian landlords. This was in the late 1800s. The machinery project was a failed enterprise.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn. (London: Pimlico, 1997), pp. 84, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", p. 88.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin writes: "Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it." Benjamin, "The Storyteller", p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Esther Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft" in Glenn Adamson (ed.) *The Craft Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), p. 387.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", p. 86.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> The production of archival material consists in the translation, mediation and commitment to written form is familiar to any reader of Jacques Derrida and the legacies of deconstruction. See in particular Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). For the purposes of this article, it is enough to indicate that the materiality of the voice through oral storytelling inscribes and writes through the act of telling itself.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> A written reflection provided by Elanor Davies. April 24, 2013, granted with permission

<sup>19</sup> An excellent account of discarded materials and objects through the cultural histories of assemblage can be found in Gillian Whiteley, *Junk – Art and the Politics of Trash* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> April Lyon – Essay archival Interventions (December 2012), granted with permission.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid..

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller", p. 107. Jean-Francois Lyotard's account of the *domus* as the home or collection where stories of personal experience are organised as archives can be considered within this context.

<sup>23</sup> According to Sven Spieker "In the nineteenth century, the role of archives changed from being depositories of legal titles to places where historians hoped to find the sediments of time itself. Not history, I hasten to add, but time in flux and ongoing. This concern with the contingent, with the present moment, and with the possibility of their archivization had important consequences. Obsessed with the idea that there was nothing in either nature or culture that could not be explained without recourse to time, the nineteenth century not only expanded considerably the definition of what constitutes a record, it also widened considerably the scope of the archive charged with collecting such records." Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive – Art From Bureaucracy*. (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008), p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 940.

<sup>25</sup> See Brassai, *Brassai Graffiti* (Paris: Editions Flammarion, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Penelope, wife of Odysseus, uses her cunning to delay the looming suitors at her door. On condition of completing a burial shroud for Laertes, Odysseus' father, she promises to choose another husband. But, each night for three years, she undoes a part of the shroud to avoid making a decision. See Homer, *The Odyssey* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), For a closer reading of the repetitive labour of Penelope's weave and its analogous links to the labouring activity of the woman writer – in particular the writings of Virginia Woolf – see Peggy Kamuf, "Penelope at Work: Interruptions in *A Room of One's Own*" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 6(1) (Autumn, 1982): 5-18.

<sup>27</sup> Alice Kettle's recent textile wall installation at the Chichester Gallery, Pallant House, showcases the epic poem of Homer through the power of stitch. Here, the *Odyssey* becomes part of the *Mythscapes* series of Kettle's work where

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text and textiles intermingle in an act of storytelling through the hands of the maker. This is also what Nancy Miller might argue is “a form of critical positioning which reads against the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity; to recover within representation the emblems of its construction”, Miller, “Arachnologies”, p. 80. In other words, a critical repositioning occurs through the act of making which in turn is analogous to a form of embodied storytelling.

<sup>28</sup> See in particular, alongside *Women and Craft*, Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock (eds) *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-85* (London: Pandora, 1987).

<sup>29</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*, p. 254. Benjamin indicates that this blasting is a “revolutionary chance in the fight for an oppressed past”.

<sup>30</sup> See in particular, Betsy Greer, “Craftivist History”, pp. 175-183, Kirsty Robertston “Rebellious Doilies and Subversive Stitches: Writing a Craftivist History”, pp. 184-203, and Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, “Craft Hard Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies for Craftivism”, pp. 204-221, in Maria Elena Buszek (ed.) *Extra/Ordinary Craft and Contemporary Art*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin “A Berlin Chronicle” in *One-Way Street* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 316.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>33</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* trans. by Peter Szondi (Harvard: Harvard College, 2006), pp. 96-7.

<sup>34</sup> Ducrot, *Text on Textile*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> Kitty Craske, “Professional Practice Report” (April 2013), granted with permission.