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Knit, purl, upload: digital mediations of craft

Abstract

In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in knitting and an accompanying set of leisure practices from 'stitch n bitch' groups and pub knitting circles to fibre festivals and knit meets. Alongside this renaissance is a growing presence of 'crafsters' and 'knitsters' on the web, with blogs and podcasts devoted to the craft and social networking sites connecting a global community of knitters. The leisure experience of knitting now proliferates across multiple media sites and flows through various lifeworlds and circuits of consumption. This technological expression of the craft provides an interesting juxtaposition for exploring meanings and practices of mediated leisure and this article will argue that web 2.0 technologies have given users new ways to think about and engage with their creativity that, in turn, have become an embedded part of their construction and enjoyment of leisure practice. Technology use can be understood as a reciprocal and interconnected aspect of knitting as leisure and the study of techno-cultural change marks a territory where distinctions between leisure and technology are increasingly dissolved. Knitting as a material craft provides a useful example of the way in which virtual networks and environments have reshaped the consumption of leisure in rich and dynamic ways.

Keywords: digital leisure; craft; knitting; technology use; consumption/production

Digital knitting?

In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in knitting as a form of leisure. From 'stitch n bitch' groups and pub knitting circles to fibre festivals and knit meets, new public sites for participating in knitting have emerged as part of a contemporary craft movement. Accompanying this renaissance is a growing presence of 'crafsters' on the web, with blogs, podcasts, social networking sites and folksonomies like Flickr and YouTube connecting a global community of knitters and providing them with a wealth of resources and support.¹ These kinds of web 2.0 social media are spaces of participation, consumption and production and for leisure practices like knitting the emergence of an associated participatory web culture can reshape the experience of the craft. The material, tactile processes of knitting are integrated with digital practices of livestreaming and the boundaries and practices of knitting are extended as material handicrafts converge with web 2.0 technologies.

Knitters photograph and blog about their projects and yarns, chat and plan face-to-face knit festivals via forums, search for podcasts to learn new skills, follow 'celebrity' knit bloggers and sell and exchange patterns and yarn via knitting networking sites. This craft-focused livestreaming codifies and tells stories about individuals' creative processes in ways that allow others to feedback, remake, modify, adapt and customise as part of a creative subculture and community (Fort, 2007; Rosner & Ryokai, 2009). This shifts the popular stereotype of knitting as a leisure pursuit of grandmothers and dull domesticity (Greer, 2008, p. 14) and challenges the notion of technology as the preserve of the 'digital native' (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008). Rather than thinking of knitting as a traditional handcraft outside of the spheres of technology, craft and ubiquitous computing have the potential to offer us new ways of exploring creativity as an activity that is a mix of the personal and the (networked) social (Rosner & Ryokai, 2009). This juxtaposition of the technological and the material and the personal and the social provides an interesting opportunity for thinking through the meanings and practices of digitally mediated leisure. Here, I argue that social media have given knitters new ways to think about and engage with their craft that, in turn, have become an embedded part of their construction and enjoyment of knitting as a leisure pursuit. The article orients around three key questions: How have technologies been integrated into the process of knitting as a cultural and social practice? In what ways are technologies extending and reforming the leisure experience of the knitter? In what ways do technologies enable and make visible processes of digital archiving as a part of leisure? In short, how does the hybrid of digital connections and real world interactions shape articulations of leisure and users' understandings and experiences of their leisure?

DIY leisure and 'knitivism'

Knitting has a long history spanning mass production, domestic practice, folk craft, art, high fashion, design, leisure, necessity and frugality (Turney, 2009). Hand knitting arguably dates back to eleventh century Egypt (Rutt, 1987), but the industrial revolution and the invention of the knitting machine took spinning and knitting out of the domestic sphere, with the growth of technology led commercial manufacturing resulting in the mass production of consistently gauged spun yarns and knitted goods. Manufacturing did not, however, render hand-knitting obsolete and it has a global and eclectic history spanning Russian civil wars in the 1920s, Haute couture in the 1950s and 1960s and a range of yarn types and techniques (Rutt, 1987). In Britain, the importance of knitting as a skill was emphasised in the 1940s as part of the wartime Ministry of Information 'make do and mend' home salvage campaign,

while, post-war, schools taught hand knitting as a useful domestic skill. In the Western world, the 1980s marked a decline in the popularity of knitting, with the availability of low cost machine knitted fashions making hand-knitted items expensive and uneconomical. The image of knitting in popular culture also shifted to one of old-fashioned, gendered and domestic tedium with the literature focusing on the ways in which home crafts reinforce domestic divisions of labour and blur the boundaries between work and leisure. Knitting, quilting and needlework are characterised as activities that reflect the time and resource poor status of women's leisure, which must fit around family and work obligations (Deem, 1986).

In contrast, the twenty-first century has seen a revival in the popularity of knitting (Parkins, 2004; Turney, 2009) and a growing body of research has explored the pleasures of meaningful leisure activities in women's lives (King, 2001; Stalp & Conti, 2011; Stalp & Winge, 2008; Turney, 2009). Here, the emphasis is on 'serious leisure' (Stalp & Conti, 2011) characterised by the attainment of skills and demonstrating the importance of craft as a therapy, as addictive enjoyment and as a source of creative satisfaction (King, 2001). Prigoda and McKenzie (2007) point to the collective nature of knitting and quilting circles and to the satisfaction derived from a communal activity that serves a number of latent functions beyond the production of a material object: a means of occupying the mind to stave off worry or loneliness, a link with past and future generations, an appropriate demonstration of their competence as women and mothers, and a source for accomplishment and pride as they decoded a difficult pattern or finished a garment. (p. 92)

Viewing knitting and home crafts as part of broader processes of connectivity, what Stebbins describes as collective leisure and what Gauntlett (2011) describes as making and connecting, link individual leisure practices to broader networks of craft culture.

The growth of do it yourself (DIY) craft culture, of which knitting is a part, itself has a history that encompasses professional and leisure practices, diverse forms of production and consumption, fine art, performance and fashion with activities spanning public and private spheres. From the post-punk Riot Grrrl DIY ethic of the 1980s to public 'Stitch and Bitch' knitting groups in the 1990s crafting has populated a new digital community (Fort, 2007). A growing body of the literature around craft web cultures has explored the potentials of knitting as a cyber feminist project, with web 2.0 technologies positioned as facilitators of local and global connectivity and political and civic engagement (Minahan & Wolfram Cox, 2007; Humphreys, 2008). Drawing on a history of resistance in arts and craft movements, knitting is reclaimed as a subversive vehicle and as an act of creative and social connectivity in a digitised

third space of cultural activity.³ Narratives of cyber feminism commonly discuss making and creativity not as leisure activities, but as empowering forms of online resistance to and subversions of gender identities (Pentney, 2008; Spencer, 2007). Similarly, the political functions of DIY knitter communities, in the form of guerrilla knitting, knit graffiti, yarn bombing and knit tagging, are seen as practices of activism or 'knittivism', urban resistance or environmental advocacy.

Alongside these accounts of feminist DIY citizenship are debates about knitting, and craft more generally, as a response to the global post-modernity and the acceleration and complexity of everyday life (Parkins, 2004). Knitting, along with a number of other lifestyle activities like gardening and cooking, is seen as providing an alternative temporality which allows individuals to create meaning outside of the spheres of domesticity or employment (Parkins, 2004):

The very popularity of television programs that feature food and cooking or the redesign and redecoration of household interiors or gardens, together with the many associated magazines and books, supports the suggestion that there exists a large population of consumers who want to be successful in creating their own aesthetically significant end product. (Campbell, 2005, p. 31)

This nostalgic reclaiming of craft is understood as a response to mass consumerism, globalisation and the homogeneity of the high street, reflecting a desire for individualisation and a playful and ironic trend for celebrating domesticity in popular culture (Greer, 2008; Minahan & Wolfram Cox, 2007):

Knitting is a way to slow down in a fast-paced culture, subvert producers of mass-manufactured merchandise, embrace the domestic, connect to people in their community, support communities across the globe, and express...personal style and creativity. (<http://craftivism.com/book.html>)

The renewed enthusiasm for hobbyist activities, combined with social and collaborative technologies, creates accessible and decentralised spaces for cultures of alternative-consumerism that are shared and showcased through global digital networks (Kuznetsov & Paulos, 2010) and through the growth of alternative craft markets and online marketplaces and boutiques such as Etsy and DaWanda. Craft is seen as a new mode of production concerned with a growing awareness of the origins and sustainability of our objects of consumption and the ethics of capitalist industry (Spencer, 2007). Indeed, Fort (2007) notes the echoes of Morris and Marx in the importance of the handmade as an opportunity to choose to consume outside of the boundaries of mass industry and capitalist production.

While these debates acknowledge new types of creative leisure production and feed into the literatures on the role of online community in local action and global

connectivity, they perhaps overstate the political and fail to engage with new landscapes of cultural consumption around craft and leisure. Indeed, they ignore the growing market around technologically mediated craft and the commercialisation of 'alternative' knitting practices, from publications aimed at online crafting such as 'Craft and Click' to weekend yarnstorming and graffiti knitting workshops. Critics suggest that narratives of third wave feminism and the reclamation of domestic arts also ignore the fact that knitting is also a form of individualistic consumerism enjoyed by western women with time, considerable disposable income and access to materials and technologies which enable hobbyist craft and which may in fact celebrate consumption and fetishism of desirable knitting products⁸ (Fort, 2007; Minahan & Wolfram Cox, 2007).

Similarly, they conceal the history of knitting as a necessity borne of frugality while also reinforcing craft as a gendered activity (Turney, 2009). As Pentney (2008) suggests, the history of knitting is enmeshed with gender, class and economic inequalities and, while community building, cyber feminism or political action might be incorporated into the knitting practices of some, the constraints on those for whom knitting is not simply about leisure cannot be ignored; knitting and knitters cannot be assumed to be homogenous in their practices, understandings or social contexts (Turney, 2009).

Perhaps in the context of debates around digital technologies and changing landscapes of leisure, we can more usefully understand web 2.0 mediated knitting practices as a continuum, with leisure and pleasure at one end of a scale that includes charity and outreach craft projects and protest activities and 'knitivism' at the other.

Accordingly, I will consider knitting techno-culture as leisure by drawing on data from a multi-sited, multi-modal ethnography of knitting sites and knit meets and from qualitative interviews with knitters engaged in blogging and social networking. Using the case study of Ravelry as a social networking site for knitting and crochet, I will highlight the interplay between digital and material leisure practices and will illustrate the ways in which the physical objects and the contexts in which they are created are augmented by digital lifestreaming (Rosner & Ryokai, 2010).

Leisure practices in a networked space

Ravelry is a specialist social networking site for knitting and crochet that incorporates many of the same features as other more generic social networking sites. It was launched in 2007; 2,000,000 users by February 2012 with around 35,000,000 forum posts and 3,500,000 craft projects (Forbes & Forbes, 2010). A video tour of

the site is available via vimeo (<http://vimeo.com/23274072>) and the key features of the site are outlined in a Ravelry tour (<http://www.ravelry.com/tour/getting-started>). Members create profiles that can include biographical information such as age and location as well as profile pictures and links to their other websites or blogs. Members construct and organise their own 'notebook' (see Figure 1) that indexes and details knitting or crochet projects, inventories knitting needles and crochet hooks and incorporates photographs of works in progress, finished objects (FO) and frogged items (knitting that has gone wrong or deemed ugly and ripped apart). The site also acts as a searchable yarn and pattern database with members active in creating, editing and building a growing collection of shared projects and information (see Figure 2). Members are invited to act as volunteer editors of pattern and yarn information or to offer technical or knitting technique help via the Ravelry help groups.

Members can link in from external sites by using 'ravel it' and 'queue it' browser extensions that connect Ravelry with newsreaders, mobile devices, desktops and RSS feeds. In addition to organisation tools, the social networking and communicative elements of the site are facilitated by forums, a diverse set of knitting and other interest groups (see Figure 3) and friend-related features that allow members to 'favourite' other users' projects, interact with and message other members asynchronously and contribute to discussions and 'knitalongs'.

Ravelry has three sub-shops that generate the income for site maintenance, a 'mini mart' that sells Ravelry branded products, the 'marketplace' where members can sell and exchange items and where advertising is hosted and the pattern store where users can sell their own patterns to the community. As of 2009, 191,000 patterns had been purchased by users to the value of \$1,250,000 USD with 98.7%

Figure 1. The project page of the Ravelry notebook.

Figure 2. The Ravelry yarn database.

of the money from these sales has gone to the designers) (<http://blog.ravelry.com/2009/12/11/pattern-store-news-gifting-and-more/>).

Networks of data

The data drawn on in this article comes from a two year multi-sited ethnography that spanned a number of digital and physical spaces and traced a fluid and shifting field. In line with the principles of a virtual ethnography (Garcia, Standlee, Bechhoff, & Cui

2009; Hine, 2000), the research included participant observations across a range of craft related webspaces and online and offline knitting festivals and events. A mix of email and face-to-face interviews were conducted with 46 participants, 32 women and 14 men, ranging in ages from 20 to 72, from across the UK and Europe, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Japan and Australia. All of the respondents were members of Ravelry and while Ravelry is one of a number of social networking and community driven craft websites (similar sites include craftster.org, launched in 2003 and spanning a range of 'indie crafts', knitideas, a community site for swapping yarn, patterns and project ideas and, specifically for crochet, café crochet.)¹⁰, no respondents were members of another online craft network and indeed displayed a resistance to competitors of ravelry (the facebook of knitting) describing them as 'Ravelry wannabees' or 'poor relations'. All respondents defined themselves as 'active' on Ravelry with definitions of active ranging from weekly posting to a Ravelry group to daily contributions to the site as a volunteer editor. On average, participants were members of 14 groups and 2

Figure 3. The Ravelry group space.

Knitalongs.

Geographically, groups and membership range from 7661 groups with 753,453 members in the USA to 1 group with 14 members in Azerbaijan.

Leisure, web 2.0 and prosumption

The social and collaborative elements of Ravelry exemplify what Baym (2000) and Pentney (2008) have described as online communities of practice and the articulations of online and offline community facilitated by Ravelry are explored later. However, the site also provides an example of the prosumption that characterises much web 2.0 social media (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

From its launch, Ravelry has relied on its community of users and has explicitly defined itself as a collaborative community (Forbes & Forbes, 2010). The creators, a Boston couple initially developing the site in their spare time, were overwhelmed by early demand; by 2008, a year after going live, the Beta site had a waiting list of 30,000 people with a 3 month wait time. They depended on fundraising from user-investors to 'ravelraisers' to finance new servers and site development and one of their responses to overwhelming demand was to develop technological solutions for people to be able to edit and help with his site. This emphasis on the volunteer labour and the ethos of community involvement continues, from the 23,000 strong group of volunteer editors that assist in ongoing database tagging and categorisation

to 'Ravel-ry help' wiki editors and 'Ravelry helpers' that answers questions and assist newbies.

In particular, Ravelry appears to generate a sense of user investment in both knitting as a practice and as an online space. The ethos of active community contributions being central to the development of the site is a feature highly valued by users:

Unfortunately I don't have anything particularly tech-y to contribute, I just wanted to say that Jess and Casey and the whole Rav team are astounding in the level of collaboration they encourage. The same anti-mass market ethos that is driving people to farmer's markets and places like Freecycle is alive and well on Ravelry. It's a joy to use Ravelry because the user truly feels like they're helping to build it. (Online forum comment on a profile of Casey Forbes the co-founder of Ravelry)

Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) suggest that the web 2.0 prosumer (Toffler, 1980) is willing to devote considerable time and effort, for no financial reward, contributing to the spaces they are involved in. Similarly, Humphreys (2008) argues that the generative creation of content, through the participation and the involvement and investment of community members, has social and democratising functions in web 2.0 spaces that foster creativity and community:

They aren't just a niche audience or a niche market – they are much too active and interactive and creative and productive to be cast just in the role of consumers. With the aid of the social software of blogs they generate a collaborative, intercreative, socially important community for one another. (Humphreys, 2008, p. 419)

In this sense, Ravelry can be seen both as a site that represents its members creative production as well as a site that is, in part, a result of members creative production. Ravelry is a site of leisure both in its capacity as a space for sharing material creativity and in its logic as a user 'made' social network that members willingly devote leisure time contributing to and, importantly, define this social labour as leisure:

It's kind of ridiculous how much time I spend on the site tagging and sifting and adding stuff, especially considering that could be time I spend in front of a movie knitting, I guess that I see my involvement in rav[elry] as part of my knitting now, it's a package deal that I'm now invested and investing in. (Jen)

These kinds of creative spaces represent a point of convergence for academic debates on the nature of online and offline community, on the new forms of

production and consumption in web 2.0 environments and on the meaning of identity, connection, participation and leisure in networked societies.

Integrating the material and the digital

The integration of knitting as a leisure practice with social media has an obvious starting point in the proliferation of what Torrey, Churchill, and McDonald (2009) describe as 'instructables'. Instructables are blogs, videos and websites that create a network of interconnected resources for social learning (Torrey et al., 2009). These networks of knowledge communities enable craft skills to be taught through online 'how to' guides. Beyond basic instruction user communities also form networks of expertise in what Kaye, Williams, and Oehlberg (2011) have defined as inventive leisure practices.

For new knitters online resources are vital sites for learning and 'becoming' a knitter occurs through and with the digital. While many may recollect being taught Downloaded by [The University of Edinburgh] at 05:05 24 February 2015 Leisure Studies 313 to knit as a child¹⁴ they struggle to learn techniques through books or do not know

anyone in their existing social network who can show them the basic skills:

I found it impossible for ages but knew that I wanted to master it [knitting] and perversely I was learning because I liked the idea of going to the pub knitting group in my local and getting out and doing something and meeting new people but I didn't want to go until I had some idea of what I was doing, like not wanting to go to the gym until you're fit enough to not embarrass yourself. Of course now I know that's ridiculous and that these groups are so willing to help but, online stuff and knitting have always been inseparable for me. (Sian)

These kinds of networks and sites like Ravelry also provide a forum for the professionalisation of leisure practices. Ravelry aims to provide a platform for independent designers and yarn producers to sell and share their work, breaking down the traditional models of recognition through formal publication or through sales in a conventional commercial environment. Amateur designers can upload their patterns to either sell or give away and members can trade and exchange yarn via stash swap message boards. The model of Ravelry advertising is low rate, self-service and affordable, aimed at small businesses and yarn producers (Forbes & Forbes, 2010). This both contributes to the community feel of the site and provides members with a space to blur the lines between leisure and work:

Of course it's everyone's dream to make a living out of their hobby, something they love, but somehow thinking about writing a knitting book, approaching a publisher, it

doesn't seem do-able. Ravelry and my blog and people getting to know my designs has made my hobby into something more than fun, it's still my fun but having this [online network] means that I can sell what I'm doing and keeping the blog is part of maintaining that 'I'm a crafter' image, you kind of have to have one [blog] now and you certainly have to have a rav[elry] profile. (Fiona)

For newbie knitters social networking sites like Ravelry and online instructables act as an entry point to multiple media sites that flow through various life-worlds and circuits of consumption. For members that knit as a profession a Ravelry profile, linked to a blog, personal retail site or Esty store acts as an important marker and identity as 'crafter'. Across these user types Ravelry acts as a site of leisure and pleasure as the boundaries of knitting are extended into new online and offline spaces and as the processes of knitting are extended to include a range of digital practices. It is these boundaries and processes that I now turn to.

Extending leisure practices: community and connectivity

Ravelry demonstrates how online social networking can also be an actor in global and local physical community building. Ravelry acts as a virtual 'community', in ways well documented in the literature, with the emphasis on the communicative creation of social meaning and shared experiences (Baym, 1998; Jones, 1995, 1997, 1998; Rheingold, 1993; Smith & Kollock 1999; Wellman & Gulia 1999). The forums on Ravelry cover a wealth of knitting, crochet and craft related topics but, like other online communities, the range of discussion topics extend well beyond the substantive focus of the site and groups are diverse and varied, addressing a plethora of subjects from high-risk pregnancies to Harry Potter fandom.

Ravelry groups and forums share the global reach and connectivity of other online communities but also emphasise the local, with the ability to browse groups by location and find local events. Face-to-face local knit meets and pub knitting groups and national and international Ravelry parties and 'knit weekenders' blur the lines between online and offline connectivity and turn collectively imagined virtual communities into new spaces for knitting leisure:

I've lived here for years and knitted for years, with maybe a couple of friends who I know knit, but it's always just been me at home or knitting on the bus and then I discover Ravelry and find out that here there are picknits, yarnbombs, knit in public days and this whole group of people who are knitting together and it has somehow given me and my knitting a new lease of life. (Val)

In this sense, the social features of Ravelry act in much the same way as other online communities by connecting groups at local levels, blurring online/offline boundaries and facilitating the organisation of events and activities. The offline

events spawned and supported by knit specific social network sites like Ravelry include weekend festivals and knit camps with workshops, talks and social events. These act as spaces to meet people in online networks as well as spaces to consume, learn new skills, display membership of knitting communities through merchandise (see Figures 4 and 5) and, importantly, experience the performative element of publicly displaying a traditionally 'domestic' activity. I want to suggest that this second performative dimension shifts knitting from personal leisure to public activity or shared leisure.

Online spaces like Ravelry have encouraged an extension of the boundaries of the craft outside of the domestic sphere and into a public leisure activity. As well as participating in the creative production of Ravelry as a web space, members are also active in pushing the physical boundaries of creativity and craft by making public the practices of knitting and by transferring the logic of online instructables to festival type gatherings. More explicitly, in feeling a sense of community and shared passion online, Ravelry members are inspired to reimagine the personal and private nature of their leisure in their construction of knitting as a communal, visible and performative practice:

I love the whole going to events, as well as talking about it on rav[elry] before and after, I love the whole 'in-joke' element of name badges and t-shirts and that stuff and the surreal-ness of a whole flock of knitters in one place, a whole public space full of people knitting looks so bizarre and out of place that I like feeling that I'm a part of it. People take pictures, ask what we're doing, it makes what seems so normal to me, to us, feel unusual and special, that it makes me remember that it is special. (Jen)

Figure 4. Ravelry merchandise.

Figure 5. Ravelry name badge for members to display their 'rav' username when attending knit events.

These activities shift knitting into new domains that circulate through seemingly incongruous spaces and practices of personal leisure, digital mediation and public articulation. In turn, these spaces and practices provide a new sense of authenticity that redefines participants' understandings and experiences of knitting as a form of leisure that is beyond the personal and the private and enmeshed in its digital articulations.

Extending leisure practices: lifestreaming the process of craft

Social networking sites for knitters are created around an aesthetic of creativity and through online and offline interactions and relations. Thinking beyond issues of

community and connectivity they also impact on the practice and process of knitting as a leisure activity. Knitting is remediated and reshaped with, through and in digital spaces and networks. In updating and adding to their Ravelry notebook and project, logs knitters engage with a variety of web 2.0 spaces adding another (digital) layer to the tactile process of knitting:

It's odd really, I'm creating an actual thing but I'm also writing about it in my blog, uploading pictures of it from my phone to flickr, then updating my [Ravelry] projects with labeling and note taking and commenting, then getting the pics from flickr into Ravelry, then looking at how other people have done it, getting into it [Ravelry] has kind of added a whole other element to what knitting is for me that's quite removed from what knitting actually is in my hands. (Phillipa)

For some respondents this was a process of making sense of the mundane ubiquity of micro lifestreaming practices, providing a foci for a range of activities such as blogging, vlogging and photography that coalesce and extend the physical, material practice of knitting into the digital field:

I think for me it gives a purpose to blogging and essentially uploading my life, it feels like less of a vanity project than just blogging about nothing and appeals to the bit of me that is completely wedded to uploading bits of my life. (Rachel)

For some the increased visibility of previously private leisure practices, exposed by blogs and knitting 'sets' on flickr, was connected to a desire for their individual leisure endeavours to be recognised by family, friends and online peers:

It's brought different elements of my life together, my flickr audience sees my side as a knitter, which was a home me and now it's a public me, and on my facebook page I can have a flickr badge which shows my knitting outside of places like Ravelry that are just for knitting people, it's like having a gallery that shows off what I'm doing. (Katherine)

This desire to create and contribute to online spaces resonates with Kuznetsov and Paulos' (2010) research on the rise of the expert DIY amateur suggests that contributors are 'authors' storytelling through a creative rhetoric:

Our participants, who create and repurpose personal objects, use online communities to broadcast self-constructed material things into the public sphere. In doing so, they symbolically project personal goals, values and practices in the digital domain. These contributions remain detached from the physical objects and states that produce them. (2010, p. 8)

Similarly, the knitted objects of bloggers and Ravelry members are 'detached' from their existence as the finished result of a private leisure practice and, as Kuznetsov and Paulos suggest, these detached objects are 'broadcast' through digital

lifestreaming activities. However, the digitally mediated process of detachment becomes an embedded part of the craft and is defined as part of the project and leisure practice of knitting. The activities of the material practices of knitting and the digital practices of blogging and participating in Ravelry become interconnected, and mutually meaningful, as part of a broader and redefined understanding of what knitting means as a leisure practice:

Oddly it's like the Ravelry part of knitting has become as important a part of it for me as the actual knitting. I think about how I present my work and how I photograph it to best effect – listen to me, my knitting has become 'my work'; this is what it's turned me into! (Denny)

This connection between crafting and lifestreaming is made increasingly visible by online and offline instructables and classes that focus on techniques for effective craft writing and photography; from 'Photographing Your Fibre' classes to a range of online articles on blog customisation, 'Crafting your online presence', and incorporating advertising on your craft blog, to e-learning classes focused on 'taking your craft blog to the next level'¹⁸ and video instruction on using social media marketing and managing creative businesses, again reflecting newer aspects of leisure activity as home enthusiasts are assisted in the shift from domestic leisure to small-scale commercial production.

Digital memory, the intransigence of craft and making process visible

Outside of potential visibility and commercial concerns, an important aspect of the creation of a knitted lifestream is the desire to create a digital archive or 'memory' of physical artifacts. Knitted garments and objects take time and effort to complete and finished items are often given away as gifts. The completed material object may therefore become transient, absent and invisible to its creator and the physical manifestation of the knitters' time, effort and skill is lost (Rosner & Ryokai, 2008). The process of blogging and archiving a finished object on Ravelry serves to create a digital memory of items and, importantly, of personal anecdotes and reflections on the contexts and experiences that surrounded the time spent knitting the object:

On a very basic level it's for technical notes on what yarn and needles I used and any mods. I made, but between Ravelry, my blog and flickr it becomes a diary of what was going on while this was taking shape, who I was thinking about, where I was. (Sian)

I don't think of it as a web thing, I think of it as my diary, almost like a photo album that I can look back on, remember [knitted] things that are long ruined or were never for me. It's a record of weddings, births, birthdays, holidays, that I have created.

(Jen)

While acknowledging the highly transitory and ephemeral nature of the digital, this online archive is seen as a stark contrast to the fragility and absence of a finished object and creates an online connection with the leisure practice as part of an ongoing temporal path. This digital archiving also highlights the trust in Ravelry as a space of continuity and permanence. As such the project of knitting includes the making of the material item, the 'making' of the digital space that represents and archives the material item and the 'making' of a digital record of skill, expertise and knowledge. Again these practices combine to reshape and extend what knitting means and serve to broaden the definition and experience of knitting to include these more diverse, mediated, leisure practices.

The importance of publicly documenting the process of knitting is also key in understanding the ways in which traditional leisure practices map on to social media. The processes of photographing yarn, needles and projects and of blogging mistakes and frustrations that occur are as central to the lifestreaming of knitting as the gallery-like display of the FO. Web 2.0 technologies allow knitters to reveal the process and progression of knitting in the same way that micro blogging tracks the banalities and normality of everyday life:

With Ravelry knitting isn't just starting something, finishing it and using or wearing it or giving it away. It has another layer now, I'm taking photo after photo at all sorts of unfinished stages and these photos actually become something creative that I'm proud of too, a visual smorgasbord that represents the piles of yarn sitting around my chair at home, it's like sending my knitting out to the world to be seen and shared with all the other knitting out there. It's a knitting equivalent of twittering about all I'm doing. (Fiona)

This activity of making the process of knitting visible challenges traditional definitions of handicraft as rooted in the feminine domestic sphere and extends the boundaries of personal leisure by establishing craft as a cultural and technical activity. It also poses an important challenge to the literature that emphasises the time-poor nature of women's leisure practices (Deem, 1986; Stalp & Winge, 2008) by demonstrating the extension of leisure through digital activities that add to the time knitting as a leisure activity consumes. Highlighting the process and the path that this leisure takes also shifts the focus from the completed object, and the pleasure that is derived from it, to the intangible and invisible pleasures embodied in that object and in the practice of knitting as a tactile and deeply embodied experience:

I think what all that photographing and blogging does is remind me and almost make me think about the basic happiness I get from knitting, it reminds me when I'm struggling with some pattern or I'm knitting in bed at 3 am to get a gift finished, that it's not

just about completion and deadlines it's about the pleasure of selecting a pattern and yarn, how nice it is when something is a joy to knit with and feels beautiful in your hands. (Sasha)

The visibility of the processes and stages of the craft also contributes to a digital demonstration of skill that, again, detaches the finished object from thoughtful and reflexive digital representations of progression and problems:

It has become less about the reality of the knitted thing and more about a growing collection and summary of my creativity, my skill and what I can do and what I have learn and am learning and about my desire for a space that reflects this creative side of me. I can't image how I would be able to do that offline, or without Ravelry, Flickr etc as my tools. (John)

The tools and objects of knitting combine with the finished item to produce shared, virtualised and fetishised digital paths. Ravelry lends itself to this process by enabling site members to coalesce around activities and projects that playfully celebrate this reflection on process and development. Groups form around activities and challenges such as '52in52', the aim to knit and document 52 items in 52 weeks, or around global events such as the Knitting Olympics²¹ (Humphreys, 2008) and Ravelympics.²² The Ravelympics, for example, is open to Ravelry members who wish to take on the challenge of completing a self-chosen project within the 17 days of the Olympics. During these events Ravelry hosts an Olympic village with daily updates including a parade of nations line up, flickr galleries including event 'training' and 'finishing line' entries and winner badges as medals for the blogs of those who complete the challenge. The Olympic village brings together teams in 'team villages' and members can join based on 'geography, shared interests, fandom, and frankly we don't know what-all' (Ravelympics FAQs). Activities such as these spawn a range of digital spaces and interactions across other social networking and web 2.0 sites as well as face-to-face meet ups or 'knittogethers' where groups come together to work on their individual projects in public spaces.

It's [Ravelympics] fun and silly but I think it's part of or an extension of that logic of bringing knitting and online lives together. Your Olympic entry is a physical object but the chat and blogging and stuff that goes on around what is basically just doing a bit of timed knitting, is fun and brings together people doing what they love in ways that wouldn't really work without Ravelry or flickr or blogging (Marshall).

These kinds of events connect the well documented merging of online and offline communities with the livestreaming activities that I have argued extend the boundaries of knitting as leisure. In facilitating an ethos of participation

alone/together they add another layer in an understanding of what connectivity and creativity mean in communities of networked leisure.

The changing landscape of knitting?

The aim of this article has been to provide an empirical example of the ways in which new technologies have enabled people to amplify and extend well-established leisure practices. The study of techno-cultural change marks a territory where distinctions between leisure and technology are increasingly dissolved and knitting as a material craft provides a useful example of the way in which virtual networks and environments have reshaped the consumption of leisure in rich and dynamic ways. In moving the focus away from knitting and its online articulations as a form of a new DIY Craftivism, we can understand the use of technology as a reciprocal and interconnected aspect of knitting as leisure. Technologies have extended the boundaries of knitting as a craft by providing users with real and virtual forums to discuss, exchange, meet and take pleasure in shared meanings and understandings. The creative practices of knitting are also extended through activities around online representations of process and completed objects. Knitting becomes not just a material task but also a broader project extended to the tasks of photography, blogging and representation. Web 2.0 technologies have given users new ways to think about and engage with their creativity that, in turn, have become an embedded part of their construction and enjoyment of their knitting.

Gauntlett (2011) argues that through creating and, importantly, sharing our acts of creativity we feel engaged and connected with the social world, investing it with meaning. For knitters, these newly defined boundaries and practices take a form of leisure popularly associated with old ladies, unwanted Christmas jumpers and the private sphere of the home and provide a forum for presenting knitting as a meaningful leisure activity, for performing the identity of 'creative maker' and for expanding and enhancing their leisure experience. Social networking sites in particular provide a space for knitters to produce and consume their leisure experience in new and profoundly mediated ways that fragment and augment traditional practices of knitting at the same time as investing them with new forms of social meaning, engagement and connectivity.

Notes

Knit on the net <http://www.knitonthenet.com/> knitcast <http://www.knitcast.com/> and yarn-harlot <http://www.yarnharlot.ca/blog/> are notable illustrative examples. While Stitch n Bitch, founded by Debbie Stoller of Bust (<http://www.bust.com/>) has spawned global pub/ social knitting circles including the London branch 'stitchldn' <http://www.stitchldn.com/>

A phrase re-employed as part of a current zeitgeist of craft as thrift, for example, the 'Make do and mend': <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/make-do-mend>

For example, www.craftster.org, an online community for DIY craft with the motto 'No tea cosies without irony' uses the term craftser or crafty hipster as a homage to the pioneer peer-to-peer sites Napster and Friendster.

For example, see <http://knittaporfavor.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.glittynittykitty.co.uk/> <http://yarnbombing.com/> and

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/yarnbombingukdiy/>

See, for example <http://magpiemarket.blogspot.com/> and <http://www.misofunky.com>

<http://www.etsy.com/>, <http://en.dawanda.com/>

<http://crossstitcher.themakingspot.com/blog/new-craft-click-bookazine>

<http://www.wightaway.com/>

A critique that would find support from my own research where respondents refer to a brand of particularly desirable yarn as 'crack silk haze' in the light of its 'addictive' qualities and expensive price tag.

See <http://www.ravelry.com/minimart> and <http://www.ravelry.com/marketplace>

<http://www.craftster.org/> <http://cafecrochet.ning.com/> <http://www.knitideas.com/>

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An online or offline event where people knit together or for a collective cause.

<http://www.ravelry.com/groups/browse/location>

<http://www.tbray.org/ongoing/When/200x/2009/09/02/Ravelry> (accessed 2 January 2011).

Interesting examples of this can be found as part of a V&A project that collected a series of stories of how people learned to knit many of which refer to being taught as a child by a relative

http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/features/knitting/your_stories/index.php

For example, the 2010 London-based iknit weekender: <http://www.iknit.org.uk/iknit-weekender2010.html> and Knit Nation <http://www.knitnation.co.uk/> also launched in London in 2010.

A class run at the Knit nation festival in July 2011 http://www.knitnation.co.uk/full_schedule.html

<http://www.craftypod.com/2010/09/10/craftypod-121-putting-ads-on-your-craft-blog-with-je-na-coray-of-modish/> and

http://blog.craftzine.com/archive/2011/07/crafting_your_online_presence_7.html

<http://craftypodpublishing.com/node/161>

<http://www.craftypod.com/2010/08/16/a-free-video-class-me-teaching-social-media-mar->

keting-from-i-heart-art/

Meaning modifications or adaptations made to a pattern or design.

http://www.yarnharlot.ca/blog/archives/2010/02/10/the_2010_knitting_olympics.html

<http://blog.ravelry.com/2008/07/25/ravelympics/>

<http://www.ravelry.com/groups/ravelympics-2008/pages/Events-FAQs-and-How-Tos>

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