

Craftivist Clay: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Ceramics

by

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Abstract

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Since the late twentieth century, the social engagement of craft emerged as a primary concern for both makers and activists. While “craftivism” was quickly defined by the work of a few, this thesis expands previous considerations of craftivism as both theoretical construct and making method. Considering the emergence of craftivism as *method*, this paper examines the work of ceramic craftivists, analyzing their practices and produced works within a context of increased political urgency, using ceramics as a microcosmic exploration for craftivism in a given craft media. This thesis will analyze the efficacy of this method in contemporary ceramics, seeking to clarify both the import and impact of craftivism in a world overwhelmed by both activist causes and material goods. This thesis questions and complicates the history of craftivist theory, its role in contemporary ceramic practice, and its efficacy as a whole, exploring the extent to which craft can create social change.

Keywords: craftivism, craft, ceramic, maker, activism, method, feminism, clay, activist, object

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Dedication

To Theresa, for telling me to dedicate it to myself.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The popularity of craftivism as subject for makers and scholars expanded in past years, buoyed by the Maker Movement of the early 2000s. Craftivism, the term, suggests a kind of activism, resistance, or social protest through the craft position, whether in its making, display, or performance. These kinds of interventions or actions are typically used for “positive” activist causes, often promoting an end of stigma (for example, AIDS or abortion), protesting against militarism or war, or connecting communities through craft processes and events. While amateurs, hobbyists, and the DIY community have readily embraced this popular buzzword, most of its literature reflects the efforts of makers working in fibre or textiles. Craftivism has come to be defined by these works, as a historicized movement of the 1990s and early 2000s. The contextualization of this method as movement, however, ignores craftivism's potential in a wide variety of craft media to enact diverse activist and resistive actions. Rather than limit craftivism by media or time and place, this thesis reimagines and redefines craftivism as a *method* of working, by specifically examining the use of craftivism and craftivist techniques within contemporary ceramics. This thesis defines craftivism as an activist or resistive articulation from the craft position, and is contingent upon the definitions of craft and activism that will be explored further in this document. The emergence of craftivism in contemporary ceramics can be traced through the performative and subversive works of the twentieth century, and has expanded in recent years with works by ceramicists such as Ehren Tool, Theaster Gates, Michael J. Strand, Julie Green, Clare Twomey, and numerous others. The emergence of craftivism in ceramics points to the urgency of the contemporary political moment and the necessary impulse of craft-workers to respond consciously. This thesis redresses the neglect of craftivism and its implications in ceramic

criticism and literature, necessarily broadening the discourse of political craft.

1a: Context:

As it stands, explorations of clay's political potential have been limited to illustrative resistance, or works that use the ceramic object's surface or the narrative quality of sculpture to depict cultural critique, subversion, or opposition. Texts such as *Confrontational Clay*¹ and *Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics*² explore the ceramic surface as site of criticism, but ignore the emergence of performance, social practice, and relational aesthetics in contemporary ceramic work. Similarly, craft readers and texts such as *The Craft Reader*³ and *New Directions in Ceramics*⁴ limit explorations of craftivism to either a small section, or continue the fallacy that craftivism only exists in the fibre media.

In recent years, the craft discourse has rapidly expanded, integrating new practices, processes, materials, and theories. In the late twentieth century and early twenty-first, makers incorporate new processes and practices that reflect both the material reality and political urgency of their times; working with technologies such as rapid prototyping and 3D printers as well as destabilizing hierarchies inherent in their disciplines, turning to non-traditional, non-archival forms of practice like unfired ceramics and site-specific works; as well as reflecting on the contemporary state of the Western world, addressing feminism, post colonialism, and a host of activist motivations. New literature is needed to reflect both the historical nature and the contemporary moment of craftivist ceramics.

1 Judith S. Schwartz, *Confrontational Ceramics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

2 Paul Mathieu, *Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

3 Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader*, edited Glenn Adamson (New York: Berg, 2010).

4 Jo Dahn, *New Directions in Ceramics: From Spectacle to Trace*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

1b: Research Purpose and Methods:

The purpose of this research is to illustrate the historic emergence of contemporary craftivism as a method, to illustrate the potential of craftivism beyond one specific material, and to critically examine and complicate the efficacy of craftivism. This thesis first, redefines craftivism, in opposition to many previous texts, as a method rather than a movement, exploring what craftivism can mean through a feminist lens, using craft, object, and feminist activist theory. After re-positioning craftivism, the text traces craftivism's emergence in ceramics from the mid-twentieth century in the Western, studio craft sphere. Finally, the use of primary museological research, interviews with ceramicists, and critical theory expands and critiques craftivism as a method of working and producing, as well as questions craftivist exhibition and collection strategies. The results of this work are; a necessary reconsideration of craftivism that broadens its implications and provides a foundation for continued research in other craft materials; the examination of a neglected history in ceramic literature, as well as a powerful and emergent trend among contemporary ceramics and; a theoretical critique of craftivism that examines its efficacy in a modern world overwhelmed by material production and activist causes.

While it may appear so, this investigation of craftivism in ceramics is more than the effort of niche scholarship. In using ceramics as a cultural microcosm, this thesis questions the role of craftivism more broadly, as well as the political role of craft today. This thesis takes established understandings of craftivism and necessarily broadens them to new media, complicating craftivism's established stereotypes and increasing its potential for makers. The results of this thesis – a comprehensive redefinition of craftivism, an articulated history of ceramic craftivism, and a critical analysis of the

method at work in contemporary ceramics – will be of principle interest to both craft scholarship and craft work in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, as well as beyond the geographical scope of this work. This thesis expands both craftivist and ceramic scholarship, interrogating the two with new frameworks and a feminist lens. This thesis moves beyond the DIY or IndieCraft publication market and critically explores craftivism as an emergent, critical method in contemporary craft practice.

This thesis utilizes new frameworks to explore craftivism beyond its commonly accepted definition as craft directed toward social and political causes, using craft and feminist theories to define the contemporary status of craft as flexible, positional, and expanding. Combined with explorations of feminist activisms, which necessitate dialecticism, assembled communities, and tactical uses of positionalities, this new definition of craftivism moves beyond the often superficial levels of previous writings and common understandings, and considers craftivism from a distinctly contemporary perspective that allows for the critique of projects working in a variety of craft media. After redefining craftivism, this new definition is applied to the neglected history of craftivist ceramics, exploring the emergence of such a method in studio ceramic practice since the late 1980s.

In addition to a critical analysis of craftivist literature and theory, and a historical analysis of craftivist ceramics, I interviewed a number of ceramicists utilizing the craftivist method, in an attempt to synthesize critical and making perspectives, resulting in an understanding of craftivism that reflects both the material and processual specificity of craft-work and its critical impacts in broader scholarship. These interviews were approved and supervised by the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University, and sought

to explore the practice of craftivism on a personal level. This was necessary for two reasons. First, craftivism has traditionally been defined by the writings of its makers and second, craftivism has the potential to be co-opted by scholarship, effectively reducing its radical potential.⁵ These interviews address both of these challenges, asking ceramicists to self-identify, reflect on their projects, and situate themselves among their contemporaries, as well as discuss their motivations. The questions asked, as well as interviewee consent, can be found in Appendix A.

I conducted primary museological and archival research at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon. This research centred on two exhibitions, *Gestures of Resistance* (curated by Judith Leemann and Shannon Stratton, 2010) and *Alien She* (curated by Astria Suparak and Ceci Moss, 2015/2016), which offered two, distinct approaches to curating and exhibiting craftivist works. These approaches offer frameworks to consider both the curation and exhibition of work, as well as the role of the museological institution in radical craft practices.

Using varying forms of research – primary, museological and archival, critical and feminist theory, and primary maker interviews – I approach craftivism from a variety of positionalities, in an effort to analyze its successes and failures, and provide a framework for future explorations of craftivism in other media that is both critical and inclusive.

1c: Scope:

While the practice of political craft is certainly not limited to the Western, studio craft sphere, this thesis will limit its scope to craftivist works in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom in the 20th and 21st centuries. These

⁵ Craftivism was quickly defined in the early 2000s by texts such as: Betsy Greer, *Craftivism: The Art of Craft and Activism*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014).

boundaries limit the project to (typically) craft professionals whose works are often found in established museological and educational institutions. Furthermore, this scope reflects this author's positionality, as a ceramicist and maker involved in the greater North American ceramics community. While this text is not necessarily reflective of a maker's perspective, the understanding of and desire to consider ceramics, rather than another craft material is based from personal preference and interpersonal connections.

1d: Outline of Document:

Chapter Two: Literature Review addresses both relevant previous writings about craftivism, and their dependence on fibre-based projects. It further looks to ceramic scholarship, and the ways in which political engagement is typically considered a “surface subject,” or political critique as surface decoration for the ceramic object. These writings fail to synthesize ceramics’ political history with its contemporary potential, as more ceramicists engage with radical, new practices such as performance, social practice, interventionism, and more. Finally, the literature review looks to writings on feminist theory, activism, and craft theory, to reconsider craftivism as a method, rather than a historicized movement. In doing so, this thesis redefines craftivism, expanding its critical frameworks beyond fibre and contextualizing the method within broader discourses.

In Chapter Three: Rethinking Craftivism, I address both the established histories of craftivism, as written by authors like Greer and Buszek, and the neglected ones. This section analyzes craftivist practices in contemporary ceramics as they emerged from the mid-twentieth century, drawing influence from movements like Funk ceramics and looking to the feminist influences of the second and third waves on craft discourse. This section further analyzes the use of craftivism as *method*, as a tactic in the proverbial toolbox of contemporary ceramicists. It looks to early craftivist ceramic for their

influence on following ones, and highlights notable and successful craftivist projects in the twenty-first century.

Chapter Four: Craftivist Ceramics reflects upon the state of the field today, critically examining the use of the craftivist method in the twenty-first century and drawing from a series of interviews conducted with ceramicists engaged with craftivism. The contribution of these interviews within the thesis is two-fold. Firstly, the advent of craftivism as a genre, or movement, was largely driven by makers, albeit ones mostly working in fibre. This thesis seeks to honour and interrogate that strategy, placing the maker's self-identification at the fore, and simultaneously critiquing the practice and efficacy of this identification, as well as its implications within the craftivist works. Secondly, the interviewed ceramicists function as witness to their own works, as many craftivist works are performative, distributed, and non-archival. This first-hand experience is necessary, as the author has not seen many of the works in person. This also offers these interviewees an opportunity to reflect critically on their engagement with diverse publics and the ways in which activism was taken up by themselves and participants/audience members. This chapter also analyses different uses of the method by contemporary ceramicists, grouping them by their particular aims and practices. This method of categorization is intentionally broad, seeking to analyze similar uses of the method with feminist and object theory, in order to consider the efficacy of craftivism more broadly.

Chapter Five: Efficacy of Craftivism turns to new considerations of craftivism, looking at both the successes and failures of previous approaches before suggesting new considerations of the future potential of craftivism. This section looks at both making and curatorial strategies of craftivism, using primary research from the Museum of

Contemporary Craft (hereafter known as MOCC) in Portland, Oregon. This section interrogates and complicates the use of craftivism, looking at its efficacy as an activist tactic, as well as critiquing the works themselves from an artistic and craft-based position.

Finally, Chapter Six: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations draws conclusions from previous chapters, summarizing the design and results of the project, highlighting new considerations of craftivism made possible through ceramic based inquiry, and looking to the potential of both craftivist making and research. This section explores the implications of this project, a microcosmic examination of craftivism in ceramics, by pointing to the potential of the craftivist methodology in other craft media like jewellery, glass, metal or wood working, or interdisciplinary work. This section summarizes the reexamination and extension of craftivist scholarship made clear in the preceding chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Definitions

2a: Literature Review

Almost all writing on craftivism was produced *after* 9/11/2001. This includes work that claims craftivism as its inspiration as well as work that addresses many of the issues inherent in craftivism,⁶ such as performance, social engagement, and the political potential of craft without using the specific term “craftivism.”⁷ Situating craftivism as a twenty-first century phenomena neglects its historical precedents, as craft has been used as political and activist mechanism the world over, and has been particularly politicized since the Arts and Crafts Movement.⁸ As a term, and as a genre of scholarship, however, craftivism has its roots in the twenty-first century.

The advent of craftivism addressed a new moment of art historian and critic Claire Bishop's “social turn,” following the rise of Third Wave feminism, the democratization of craft, and the advent of the Internet age.⁹ This particular branch of critical engagement holds many of the same values of Third Wave feminism such as

6 See Betsy Greer, “Craftivist History,” in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 175-183.

Betsy Greer, ed., *Craftivism: The Art of Craft and Activism* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014).

7 Glenn Adamson, “Directions and Displacements in Modern Craft,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 10:1 (2009): 18-33.

Sandra Corse, “Chapter 1: Defining Ground: Issues for Craft” in *Craft Objects: Aesthetic Contexts: Kant, Heidegger, and Adorno on Craft* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 9-31.

Namita Gupta Wiggers, “Craft Performs,” in *Hand + Made: The Performative Impulse in Art and Craft*, ed., Valerie Cassel Oliver et al. (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2010), 27-33.

Arden Hagedorn and Stephanie Springgay, “‘Making’ our way through: DIY and crafting communities in Toronto,” *Craft Research* 4:1 (2013): 11-30.

Matthew Kiem, “Theorizing a transformative agenda for craft,” *Craft and Design Enquiry* 3 (2011): 1-21.

Louise Mazanti, “Super-Objects: Craft as an Aesthetic Position,” in *Extra/Ordinary*, 59-83.

8 Michele Krugh, “Joy in Labour: The Politicization of Craft from the Arts and Crafts Movement to Etsy,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 44:2 (Summer 2014): 281-301.

9 Stella Minahan and Julie Wolfram Cox, “Stitch 'n Bitch: Cyberfeminism, a Third Place and the New Materiality,” *Journal of Material Culture* 12:1 (2007): 5-21.

Alla Myzelev, “Creating Digital Materiality: Third-Wave Feminism, Public Art, and Yarn Bombing,” *Journal of Material Culture* 47:1 (Spring 2015): 58-79.

community building, DIY engagement, and amateurishness.

Craftivism, since craftivist and author Betsy Greer's coinage in 2001 has been marketed to a very specific audience of affluent, female, Western craftspeople. These particular, pink covered texts were almost immediately relegated to the "chick lit" section of art theory, marketed and branded for amateur female makers. While a mandate of craftivism *is* accessibility, particularly in the fibre arts, which are the focus of these texts, they weren't taken seriously as a result of their particular presentation. The issues considered, such as quiet craft, slow craft, and meaningful engagement with materials were narrowly limited by the format of personal essays and project descriptions, particularly in Greer's *Craftivism: The Art of Craft and Activism*.¹⁰ While a benefit of craftivism is that it is deeply personal, these texts were marketed to a non-academic audience and received limited critical engagement.

It is texts like these that came to define craftivism, bringing to mind colourfully "yarn-bombed" trees and knitted covers for military tanks. The majority of these texts feature almost exclusively fibre-based projects with *Extra/Ordinary* featuring one essay on ceramics and lone ceramic and jewellery based interviews in *Craftivism*.¹¹ It follows that the majority of journal articles, masters theses, and web publications feature fibre and textiles as the sole means of craftivist production. Often, fibre and textiles are used as the historical, feminist precedent to craftivism, as a long-standing form of feminine subversion, activism, and resistance,¹² materials to contemplate gender and labour, or to

10 Maria Elena Buszek, ed., *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

Greer, *Craftivism*, 2014.

11 Jo Dahn, "Elastic/Expanding: Contemporary Conceptual Ceramics," in *Extra/Ordinary*, 153-172.

Greer, "Interview with Gabriel Craig," in *Craftivism*, 89-96.

Greer, "Interview with Carrie Reichardt," in *Craftivism*, 143-154.

12 Tove Hermanson, "Knitting as Dissent: Female Resistance in American Since the

present an antithetical kind of activism that opposes confrontational or antagonistic activisms,¹³ as well as Internet activisms.¹⁴ Most often, feminist theories of the Third Wave become relevant, as the values and temporal positionality of the movement correspond with the rise of the Maker Market and the popularity of fibre-based craft.¹⁵

For the last fourteen years, craftivism has been dominated by the fibre arts. Although this is not without its reasons (which will be explored in the following sections), this dominance produced a *genre* of craftivist literature that has provided a foundation upon which later writing has come to rest. While craftivism continues to grow as a new discourse and method of making, its acceptance of craft media beyond fibre is lacking, as Greer herself only used craftivism to specifically describe a ceramic work *this year*.¹⁶ The numerous works that discuss craftivism in these ways clearly demonstrate the popularity and recent growth of craftivism, however, it also reflects a need for literature that moves beyond fibre, engages with craft's complex history, and incorporates a diversity of craft practices. Existing craftivist texts do not ignore the depth or complexity of craftivism, but by grouping makers as merely a collective, media specific response to the concerns about the state of the world, do the method of craftivism a disservice.

Ceramic criticism presents its own set of limitations as many publications discuss its political potential, but typically as a depictive medium. That is, these publications highlight the surface of the ceramic object as an artistic surface upon which subversion,

Revolutionary War," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, Paper 696 (2012).
 13 Christina Hughes, "Gender, craft labour and the creative sector," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 18:4 (2011): 439-454.

Betsy Hosegood, "Whip Your Hobby into Shape: Knitting, Feminism, and Gender," *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 7:2 (2009): 148-163.

14 Tal Fitzpatrick and Katve-Kaisa Kontturi, "Crafting Change: Practicing Activism in Contemporary Australia," *Harlot* 14 (2014).

15 Tram Nguyen, "From SlutWalks to SuicideGirls: Feminist Resistance in the Third Wave and Post-feminist Era," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 41:3&4 (Fall/Winter 2013): 157-172.

16 Betsy Greer, "Clay Culture: Ceramic Craftivism," *Ceramics Monthly* (March 2016): online. <http://ceramicartsdaily.org/ceramics-monthly/article/clay-culture-ceramic-craftivism/>.

societal critique, and political content becomes possible and potent.¹⁷ Other texts on the state of contemporary ceramics have considered the impact of practices such as performance, social practice, and relational aesthetics, but mention craftivism (if at all) as a side-note, qualifier, or dismiss it as a recent “trend,” hardly worth considering.¹⁸

While these two discourses have not interacted in a meaningful way, on a larger scale than one article by Betsy Greer, the political potential of craftivism has been meaningfully analyzed and critiqued, specifically in a 2011 Special Issue of *Utopian Studies*. This entire journal, including an introduction by Buszek and activism scholar and art historian Kirsty Robertson (whose work with Keri Cronin documents the activism and art of contemporary Canada, was a careful consideration of the potential pitfalls and co-option of craftivism, as well as a critical examination of successful (albeit fibre-based) projects.¹⁹ While some included articles consider the economies of craftivism²⁰ others consider its history.²¹ Still others combine the two to analyze the rapid growth of the handmade market in the early 2000s (often referred to as the Maker Market or IndieCraft), examining the role of commodity and capitalism in craftivism, as well as critiquing the gendering of labour and complicating the feminist politics of previous

17 Ruth Chambers et al., ed., *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramics Practice* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007).

Matheiu, *Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics*.

Judith S. Schwartz, *Confrontational Ceramics*.

18 Jo Dahn, *New Directions in Ceramics: From Spectacle to Trace* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Peter Dormer, *The New Ceramics: Trends and Traditions* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

19 Maria Elena Buszek and Kirsty Robertson, “Introduction,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 197-200.

J. Keri Cronin and Kirsty Robertson, ed., *Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture and Activism in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011).

20 Travis Joseph Meinolf, “Common Goods,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 352-357.

Sarah Amato, “Fit to a T: Spray-On Clothing, Craft, Commodity Fetishism, and the Agency of Objects,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 285-302.

21 John Freeman-Moir, “Crafting Experience: William Morris, John Dewey, and Utopia,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 202-232.

Erin Morton, “Mary E. Black and the Progressive Possibilities of Weaving,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 321-340.

works on craftivism.²² Additionally, Buszek and Robertson provided space for makers to speak on craftivism as well, writing that “artists are too often left out of conversations about what their work “means” and [we] feel strongly about the need to incorporate makers’ voices into dialogues such as those we hope this issue instigates.”²³ The journal also included “The Craftivist Collective Guide to Craftivism,” which uses the word “craft” to cover a narrow group of practices, mostly cross-stitching and quilting. While the “collective guide” argues that craftivism is novel, engaging, and reaches different populations than traditional activism, it stops short of examining its own biases and projects critically.²⁴

The scholarly gap here exists between craftivism and other craft media, specifically ceramics. In redefining craftivism shortly, we can look to craftivism as a far-reaching method with the potential to be used in a variety of craft media. Having covered the literature of craftivism in the twenty-first century, I will turn now to a new definition of craftivism, based in contemporary craft theory and feminist considerations of activism. This new definition will serve as the basis of the research in this document, effectively moving beyond the works that (however well-intended) limited craftivism to fibre-based craft and the political potential of clay to its imagery.

2b: Definitions

Given both the long history and radical potential of craftivism, a new definition is

22 Jack Z. Bratich and Heidi M. Brush, “Fabricating Activism” *Craft-Work, Popular Culture, Gender*, *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 233-260.

Nicole Dawkins, “Do-It-Yourself: The Precarious Work and Postfeminist Politics of Handmaking (in) Detroit,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 261-284.

Kristen A. Williams, “Old Time Mem’ry’: Contemporary Urban Craftivism and the Politics of Doing-It-Yourself in Postindustrial America,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 303-320.

23 Maria Elena Buszek and Kirsty Robertson, “Introduction to Artists’ Statements,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 342-343.

24 Sarah Corbett and Sarah Housley, “The Craftivist Collective Guide to Craftivism,” *Utopian Studies* 22:2, Special Issue Craftivism (2011): 344-351.

needed in order to explore craftivism as a method of making, rather than a collective of makers or a movement. A specific historic moment and a specific group of makers inform the current, widely accepted definition and resulting publications.

Craftivist practices and methods emerge continuously and exponentially from settings that range from grassroots initiatives to academic and institutional exhibitions as the need for activism, and craft's ability to meet it, is constantly in flux and shifting. As craft discourses become increasingly interdisciplinary, or exponentially broad, or continuously expanding,²⁵ the need to identify these shifts within the discourse grows, particularly as craftivism continuously takes craft beyond *walls* and *boundaries*. Craft and activism jointly move from the home, the school, the museum into public spaces and realms. Given the continual growth and trend of craftivism, and given the general misconceptions about craftivism, and its writing's dependence on the fibre field, a new definition must be both specific to this historic moment and broad enough to embrace the fuzzy and blurry boundaries of both the craft and activist discourses.

This new definition will consider a broad, interdisciplinary, and expanding sense of the idea of “craft,” as a typological group of objects, as a method of making, as a professional discipline, and as a verb. It will consider the socio-political implications at work in Western, professional craft (that is, craft that participates in public engagement and exhibition in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and the U.K.). It will also consider the notion of activism from this specific perspective, keeping in mind that activism is more nebulous and multifaceted than this paper could even begin to explore. This definition

25 Glenn Adamson writes that in order to fully consider the implications of craft, and craft criticism, the discipline must be unbound from the narrow confines of art, museums, or studios, and instead acknowledge the “enormous range of cultural practices” and futures possible through craft.

Glenn Adamson, “Introduction,” in *The Craft Reader*, ed., Glenn Adamson (New York: Berg, 2010), 4.

considers activism as it specifically relates to the visual, to making, and to protest in the Western world in order to explore more broadly the efficacy and complications of this particular method of making.

Craft's particular position as a cultural discourse, one entrenched in disciplinary hierarchies and networks, reflects a history of politicization and marginalization that allows craft (or rather its makers and intersections) to realize affinities, in aesthetics and motivations, with other marginalized positionalities and identities. Noted craft scholar, Glenn Adamson, in *The Invention of Craft*, explains that craft was culturally constructed and positioned during the Industrial Revolution as the "other" to commercial and industrial production. As the two methods of cultural production began to define one another through difference, a false dichotomy of cultural production was propagated and continues to this day. This resulted in a "constructed inferiority" of craft, based on craft's inability to describe itself beyond the deceptively simple single moniker (as inept as the term "art," one might say), and perceived technological stagnation in comparison with advancements made in design. In cultural discourse, craft is often referred to in "opposition" to art or design, emphasizing this constructed inferiority, when, in fact, these disciplines (and their arbitrary monikers) are overlapping, congruent, and generally fuzzy and *porous* in their (however constructed) boundaries.

The craft position is one that has been marginalized through industry, capitalism, colonialism, gender, professionalism, and other networks of power. Beyond the mere perceptions of the marginalization of craft *as a whole*, craft makers, particularly women, people of colour, and those of low socioeconomic position have been marginalized within cultural production, often producing work for low compensation and recognition.²⁶ There

26 Lucy Lippard, "Making Something from Nothing (Toward a Definition of Women's 'Hobby

has been a particular *violence* enacted upon craft in the advent of industrialization and subsequent years, rendering craft objects and their makers vulnerable in the wider market. “And yet,” write Bratich and Bruschi, “we see persistence, the preservation of knowledge, the transmission of skills and wisdom across generations of affinity circles, the recomposition and extension of craft into new spheres. Activism can ground itself in and draw strength from this resilient subjective process.”²⁷ This position offers craft an ability to communicate *with* and *through* other marginalized discourses, ones that necessitate both activism and resistance.

While craft is almost certainly a marginalized position, it is not a stagnant one. Despite craft tropes and stereotypes that describe the discipline as “traditional,” “antiquated,” or “unchanging,” -- all words that express a certain type of resistance to technology, growth, or change -- the reality could not be more different. Craft is a continually expanding position, much like any mode of cultural production. Using “position,” to describe craft, rather than “discipline” or a “typological set of objects,” follows teacher, writer, and curator Louise Mazanti’s theory on craft as “super-object.”²⁸ Mazanti’s essay acknowledges the shared boundaries between art, design, and craft, arguing that each of these categories are socially constructed around specific assumptions of the *kind* of objects they contain. She writes:

If the term *material culture* covers all man-made objects, we could say that under this umbrella, art, design, and craft objects play different roles -- roles that originate in historical, economical, political, and philosophical conditions, which are not fixed positions. And I would like to propose that the role of craft objects is the most blurred of the three. I therefore suggest that we move from the “making” to the “being” of craft, from the “process” to the “doing,” to the role it

Art’),” in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (New York: Berg, 2010), 484.

27 Bratich and Brush, “Fabricating Activism,” 253.

28 Louise Mazanti, “Super-Objects,” 61.

Mazanti developed her theoretical position of crafts as independent from art and design in her doctoral dissertation in craft theory from the Danish Design School, Copenhagen, 2006.

performs in contemporary culture.²⁹

By understanding the “being” aspect of craft, we can move beyond a specific set of practices or materials, beyond a kind of “handmade” authenticity, to an expanding position that encompasses a variety of conditions and individuals. Furthermore, her metaphor of “super-object,” is particularly useful in understanding the craft object’s “semi-autonomy,” and propensity to actively engage in life praxis, and thus its ability to *do* activism and resistance:

Semi-autonomy means that craft, on the one hand, refers to the fundamental idea about art as existing in an autonomous space -- referring to its own aesthetic logic -- and, on the other, refers to the more profane everyday object that is theoretically framed by material-culture studies and a general design discourse. The super-object simply materializes what could be called the dichotomy between art and life, referring to both spheres at the same time.³⁰

Hence we can understand craft as a semi-autonomous position, and one that is continually expanding. Since we can consider craft *beyond* traditional materials and means, the position of craft can be explained as one that is expanding interdisciplinarily. Think of the conceptual expansion of craft through feminism and identity politics in the seventies and nineties; of the material possibilities of rapid prototyping, 3D printing, fabric printers, and more; of the affective potential of craft when interpreted through performance, new media, and social engagement. This perspective moves craft beyond its materials and processes, to a flexible and fluid position with expansive possibility. Consider the origins of the word craft, in its German origin *kraft*, meaning power. Bratich and Brush point to this power as potential, ability, or capacity, rather than a constraining domination or hierarchy.³¹ In this way, craft relates to other English versions like

29 Mazanti, “Super-Objects,” 61.

30 Mazanti, “Super-Objects,” 62-63.

31 Bratich and Brush, “Fabricating Activism,” 248.

witchcraft, statecraft, or warcraft, as a position of skill and practice that enacts systematic effect in the world.³²

Mazanti's position is supported by, or perhaps influenced by, the writings of French philosopher, Jacques Ranciere in his "Aesthetic Regime of Art," defined in his text *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*.³³ While describing "art" rather than "craft," Ranciere's aesthetic regime argues that art (or craft, in this case, as a particular position driven by aesthetic concerns) is semi-autonomous, as it can stand apart from life praxis, as something capable of standing apart from life with the ability to comment on life -- and is therefore autonomous -- whilst simultaneously participating fully in life (perhaps as a dish, or textile), and is therefore heteronomous.³⁴

I find this semi-autonomy to be particularly appropriate for craft, as craft objects carry aesthetic and conceptual perspectives while participating fully in the praxis of life, often as functional objects with specific *uses*. While, arguably, all art has *use*, whether it be communication or decoration, craft has the potential to be *used* in a domestic setting, as tableware, textiles, furniture, jewelry, and more. Even if a craft object is not specifically intended for domestic use, it often refers to use through form and historical precedent. Craft's semi-autonomy provides its ability to participate most fully in life praxis and offers a potential for political and activist engagement.

This semi-autonomy can be considered in a wholly different way, as the ability of an object to communicate about itself, and about something else simultaneously. In *Thinking with Things*, Columbia professor Esther Pasztory writes: "There are only communicative things." Pasztory writes that it is impossible to separate art from all other

32 Ibid., 253.

33 Jacques Ranciere, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Boston: Polity Press, 2009).

34 Ibid., 28-29.

categories of things, therefore eliminating the possibility that *only* art can comment critically on life. All things, according to Pasztory, communicate something, but the “informational capacity of some objects is greater than – and different from – others,” and craft objects contain multiple levels of this information capacity.³⁵ Craft objects communicate something about use, form, aesthetics, and, often, maker, in their mere existence. Through differing methods (some craftivist), such as aesthetics, performance, or distribution, these craft objects continue to communicate information and critique of the outside world, increasing their potential as politically potent objects.

Educators Matthew Friday and Kerianne Quick, with the co-writers of “The Affective Craft Manifesto,” (2013) write that, “through craft’s engagement with everyday use, craft makes the world intelligible.”³⁶ This “intelligibility” suggests the ability of craft explain, expand, and challenge existing conceptions through its semi-autonomy and communicative capacity. We can look to the works of potter and performance artist, Roberto Lugo, and the ceramicists of the Québécois Clay Movement (a term coined by ceramic collector and critic Garth Clark in 1991) for examples of ceramic tableware that specifically works to challenge hegemonic representations of race, gender, and sexuality.³⁷

Roberto Lugo’s pottery (2012 - present) combines the form and materials of traditional, European porcelain with graffiti aesthetics, choosing people of colour to occupy visual spaces typically reserved for white, aristocratic subjects. His work challenges stereotypical depictions of people of colour, inserting non-white narratives

35 Esther Pasztory, “Chapter 1: Things,” in *Thinking with Things: Toward a New Vision of Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 11.

36 Matthew Friday and Kerianne Quick, “(Affective) Craft Manifesto,” *The Website of The Journal of Modern Craft*. *Journal of Modern Craft*, January 15, 2013, <http://journalofmoderncraft.com/articles/affective-craft-manifesto>. (Accessed March 05, 2015).

37 Robin Metcalfe, “Campfire Girls,” in *Camp Fires: The Queer Baroque of Léopold L. Foulem, Paul Mathieu, and Richard Milette* (Toronto: Gardiner Museum, 2014), 125.

into cultural production historically reserved for ruling classes of Europe.³⁸ Québécois ceramicist Léopold Foulem and his contemporaries produce work with similar objectives, choosing instead to depict queer narratives through ceramic sculptures and functional tableware.³⁹ These provide examples of craft's semi-autonomous position, its ability to comment critically on hegemonic networks of oppression while still participating in life as objects.

While craft objects can offer critique through aesthetic and conceptual articulations, craftivism necessitates activism within these critiques and life praxis engagements. Professor at the University of Newcastle and author Loong Wong writes that:

[A]ctivism, as such, is a dialectical process where power and resistance is always played out. Thus, although domination is constraining, it also provides us with opportunities for action. New forms of activist politics can thus be realized particularly when people relate to each other through shared values and identities.⁴⁰

Wong's particular emphasis on a "dialectical process" in a zone between resistance and power defines activism as a means of engagement that necessitates a resistance against a dominant power/ideology/network etc. And the opportunities for such engagement are endless, as the mechanisms of society are constantly decentered, constantly in flux. Process dictates the creation of craft objects, and there is a dialectical relationship between the maker and the material, the user and the final product. The communicative abilities of craft lend themselves to a specific participation in life praxis. Just as activism is realized through interpersonal relations driven by shared values, so too is the craft

38 Blair Schulman, "Roberto Lugo: Not Fearing the Message," *Ceramics: Art and Perception* 98 (2014): 48.

39 Metcalfe, "Campfire Girls," 127.

40 Loong Wong, "Activism.," in *International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies*, edited by Stewart R. Clegg and James R. Bailey. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 25. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412956246.n8>.

position, as its marginalized position allow it to realize affinities with other marginalized discourses.

Between craft and other marginalized positions, craftivism is situated as a sort of “elsewhere” or “othered” kind of activism, advocating for silenced or oppressed perspectives with unconventional materials and methods, at least as far as activism is concerned. Furthermore, craftivism is practiced *less often* than other kinds of activism, as it demands time, materials, and conceptual attention beyond the gathering of bodies or use of a hashtag. Craftivism can be considered a “fringe” practice of activism. Feminist theorist Ana Maria Alonso writes that:

If we view hegemony in historical and processual terms, then the attempt by dominant groups and classes to impose a “discursive regime” on the whole of society can be seen as subject to contestation and never fully achieved. Struggle becomes possible and spaces for counter-discourses and for practices of resistance are opened up. As Teresa de Lauretis argues, there is always a ‘tension of contradiction, multiplicity and heteronomy’ between ‘the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the else-where, of those discourses.’⁴¹

These definitions of activism point to two things. First, that activism occurs in a dialectic zone between dominant discursive frameworks and those subjugated and oppressed within them, and second, these frameworks are shifting and relational, decentered and personal. A craftivist product, therefore, must be articulated from the position of craft and must engage in a dialogue of resistance against some dominant force.

This definition of activism may seem superficial or vague, but craftivism is enacted on a variety of political and social levels. A maker's positionality within these diverse political networks is particular and can achieve a variety of awareness. These activisms can include political activism and just as easily personal activisms. Advocacy

41 Ana Maria Alonso, “Gender, Power, and Historical Memory: Discourses of Serrano Resistance,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed., Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 405.

for a positive cause or a marginalized viewpoint is possible as well, as advocacy necessitates both articulation and an awareness of existing perceptions within discursive networks. Additionally, these activisms may be quite small, everyday acts of resistance. Chapter Four: Craftivist Ceramics (Interviews, Categories, Critiques) provides an in-depth exploration of the different *kinds* of craftivism at work in contemporary ceramics. These categories account for different perspectives within the craft position as well as different kinds of activisms.

It is additionally important to note that this definition of activism necessitates the “coming together” of disparate groups and individuals, the “other” and the “else-where,” through “shared values and identities.” While the history of craft is a complex one, its marginalization by the greater art discourse as functional, decorative, or even gendered is something that must be considered by contemporary theorists. As such, and as the craft position embodies the art/life dichotomy, craft is able to engage with these hierarchies in a tangible manner. By directly addressing the (often) negative stereotypes of craft as purely functional, decorative, or applied, and by inserting its materials and processes into a resistive action, craftivism directly confronts multiple networks of power in a single object, action, and/or individual maker. As such, we can define craftivism, for practical purposes, as an activist or resistive articulation (one that necessitates an engagement with life praxis and diverse networks of power) from the craft position, as expanding and diverse as it is.

By redefining craftivism as a tactical method, rather than a movement or genre of the early twenty-first century, this thesis seeks to redress the limits of previous craftivist writings. By necessarily expanding our understandings of craft to include a variety of practices and media, as well as reconsidering activism as dialectical, community oriented,

and tactical, we can see the ways in which this new definition aligns with previous definitions of craftivism, while expanding them to increase its potential in craft discourse. The consideration of craftivism in a previously underresearched medium contributes to and complicates the method, as clay-based projects offer new considerations of the ways in which craft *can enact change*.

Chapter 3: Rethinking Craftivism (Methods and History)

In 2012, ceramicist Meg Roberts began *Plants for Patients* in Fargo, North Dakota, a craftivist ceramic work that would later become a fully, fledged non-profit. Roberts threw several small pots on the wheel, and glazed and fired them. She then invited and organized community members to fill the pots with small plants that required little care (like succulents or cacti) at a social, planting event. Then, community members were asked to write brief messages of support, intended for women who had recently undergone a medical abortion procedure. These messages communicated care and support from a diverse community to patients dealing with both an (sometimes) emotional procedure, and additional stigma. These potted plants and messages were placed on a stand in the Red River Women's Clinic, the sole abortion provider in the whole of North Dakota where, Roberts estimates, approximately 65 per cent of patients took one home.⁴²

The power of Roberts' project lies not in the numbers, although she had distributed more than 1000 planters in 2014 (and the project is ongoing), but in its ability to gently confront the stigma of abortion through craft. While there are multiple projects that challenge abortion stigma through imagery or persuasion, *Plants for Patients* engages community members to move beyond the divisive dichotomy of pro-choice/pro-life, and instead become "pro-compassion." The physical and tangible engagement between community members and the pots, between people and plants, forces a kind of care that is reflected and communicated in the written messages passed along to the patients. The impact of *Plants for Patients* is twofold; it engages community members,

42 Monica Moses, "Meg Roberts' Plants for Patients," *American Craft Council*. March 07, 2014, <http://craftcouncil.org/post/meg-roberts-plants-patients>. (Accessed March 05, 2016).

confronting abortion stigma and encourages compassion for their neighbours.

Participation in this project necessitates a setting-aside of stigma, or polarizing views, of abortion and its patients, in order to participate in the planting and writing letters of support. The letters do not tackle the debate, but rather offer support and empathy alone. Secondly, this project supports the true, yet neglected, centre of the abortion debate, the patients themselves, with communal empathy and a small, physical token of care and growth.

While this project exhibits traits that have become commonly associated with craftivism-as-movement, such as a feminist perspective, the use of communal labour, and a positive outlook on a complex issue, it is more appropriate to look at Roberts's work as the utilization of a specific method, with a specific history, including that of the craftivist movement. While this example does include the characteristics mentioned, they are in no way inclusive or universal, or indicative of the complex potential of the craftivist method. The method at work here situates craft as an articulative position from which activism and reproductive justice politics are potent and engaging. Roberts' approach to craftivism-as-method reflects both her personal values, her positionality within craft (as a potter), as well as the positionality of the project within a wider community, as it creates change through tangible interactions through craft objects.

3a: Craftivism as Method

Having established the semi-autonomy of the craft position, it is evident that craft is able to engage with hierarchies and networks of power (the zones between power and resistance) in a tangible manner.⁴³ This emphasis on tactility, on the sensuous nature of

⁴³ It would, perhaps, be helpful to consider craftivism as an example of 'globalization-from-below,' as opposed to 'globalization-from-above,' particularly from an anthropological point of view. There is potential here to explore craftivism in a variety of disciplines, particularly

the object, separates craftivism from other forms of activism, as craft's tactility and physical presence, as well as its recognizability, accessibility, and the skill and labour of its makers, are at the fore, rather than the volume of a chant, the size of a group of protesters, or the popularity of a #movement on the Internet. Craftivism depends on its ability to mediate relationships between individuals, whether through touch, memory, or acknowledgment of another skill or labour. Stereotypical visions of activism rely on volume, on the amassed, the biggest, and the most heard. Activism is commonly depicted negatively, as protesters blocking streets, shouting loudly, and carrying signs and placards. In the Internet age, activism is still measured by volume, as organizers turn to digital petitions and hashtagged movements, although some question the efficacy of such actions.⁴⁴

Protest takes many forms, and to position craftivism *against* more traditional activism would perpetuate a false dichotomy. Craftivism often offers something different than most activism, something quiet and personal, based on individual labour and points of view, with the intent to build community and engagement between persons. Although several craftivist works (particularly early works), involve the labour of several people, the strength of the work is not in the *number* of makers participating, but in power of collective agency -- a challenge to quantitative measurements of activism over qualitative. Greer, in her "Craftivist History," writes that:

The visual impact hit me as something imperative to consider, for it was a form of protest without yelling. In a heated debate, it is easy to be drowned out among the many voices; wouldn't it be harder to dismiss something tangible, like a piece of political art or handmade charitable donation?⁴⁵

from a social or economic standpoint. For further reading, consider: Gordon Mathews, G. Ribiero, and Carlos A. Vega, eds, *Globalization from Below: The World's Other Economy*, (London and NY: Routledge, 2012).

44 Fitzpatrick and Kontturi, "Crafting Change," online.

45 Greer, "Craftivist History," 177.

In contrast to the large and loud aspects of traditional activism, craftivist works can appear small, quiet, and intricate by contrast. Rather than (or perhaps in addition to) gather and march, for instance “Take Back the Night,” and “Slut Walks,” the Craft Cartel chooses instead to craft small vaginas and fling them over power lines (*Cunt Fling-Ups*, 2013) to protest and draw attention to inequality and stigmatization of female sexuality and anatomy, claiming public space as a space for all genders.⁴⁶ These craftivist acts are smaller, and more detailed, than their activist counterparts, elements that contribute to craft’s ability to subvert hegemonic norms and to tangibly realize resistance and activism.⁴⁷

In art historian and critic Tami Katz-Friberg's essay reviewing the *BoysCraft* exhibition, she points to the detailed nature of craft as a gendered means of resistance. She explains (drawing from feminist critic Naomi Schor) that details and embellishments are viewed as excessive, decadent, and feminine as a means of expression. Given modern art's elevation of pure form and minimalism, detail and decoration have become outdated and gendered aesthetics. Craft and craft processes embrace the decorative, the small, the detail, subverting the hierarchies of modern aesthetics and “[blurring] the relations between center and margins, between major and subordinate elements and between foreground and background.”⁴⁸ Craftivism can be seen as detailed activism, work that is

46 Betsy Greer, “Interview with Craft Cartel (Rayna Fahey and Casey Jenkins),” in *Craftivism*, 120.

47 These sorts of qualifiers of craftivism, as small, gentle, detailed, etc., constitute a specific gendering of language around craftivism as an “effeminate” activism. This gendered language continues the legacy of previous craftivist literature that strongly links craftivism with Third Wave feminism and the legacies of the Feminist Art Movement. While this thesis uses some of this gendered language, there is room for criticism and continued study to examine the implications of gender in craftivism, eventually moving toward a gender neutral understanding and description of the method.

48 Tami Katz-Friberg, “Craftsmen in the Factory of Images’ from BoysCraft,” in *The Craft Reader*, 599.

not grand, sublime, or universal, but rather detailed, particular, odd, and ornamental. This subverts patriarchal and hegemonic interpretations of activism and resistance, and links the craftivist method with feminist aesthetics.

Craftivism has traditionally been defined by the fibre arts. This is not without reason. It remains, however, that the most *visible* and well-known examples of contemporary craftivism are fibre projects such as Marianne Jørgenson's (with help from the London's Cast-Off Knitting Collective) *Tank-Cozy* (2007), Cat Mazza's *Nike Blanket Petition* (2003-2008), the protests of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle of Calgary's *Peace Knit Banner* (2007), and the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* (started much earlier in 1987 and ongoing). This *kind* of craftivism is notably defined by the subversive use of domestic handicrafts that were typically reserved for women and marginalized as women's labour. The focus of most of these works is the military industrial complex or the state violence of the hegemonic, Western world. Craftivism is often thought of as a "women's movement" and has its roots in the wartime activism of women, the feminist making practices of artists in the 1960s and 70s, and the Riot Grrrl, DIY ethos of the 1990s.

Knitting, perhaps the most common craftivist media, is the subject of the majority of craftivist publications and attention in the last twenty years. The massive popularity of fibre and textiles as a craftivist media has its origins in Western wartime and advocacy – suffragettes made their own banners, women in the first and second World Wars knit troop movements into scarves and hid secret messages in knitting patterns in newspapers.⁴⁹ In the United States, female labour was central to textile boycotting of

49 John Mitchenson and Molly Oldfield, "QI: How Knitting Was Used as Code in WW2?" *The Telegraph*, February 18, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/qi/10638792/QI-how-knitting-was-used-as-code-in-WW2.html>.

Great Britain and to the success of the Revolutionary War.⁵⁰ Knitting became emblematic of other handicrafts such as quilting, embroidery, crochet, felting, and sewing as female-centric methods of resistance.

Feminine handicraft offered modes of self-expression for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where a communal knitting circle, quilting bee, or personal sampler offered a chance for collaboration, conversation, and personal opinion, choice, and agency. *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* by psychotherapist and feminist art historian Rozsika Parker provides an in-depth examination of these sorts of opportunities, as well as the sometimes oppressive position of the making of textiles and their constituting of the feminine as characteristic of emotive, domestic labour. These methods of “feminine” self-expression, while limited, offered a means of personal protest and agency, particularly in times of war and conflict, when feminine labour was encouraged as patriotic, moral labour of the home, but also as a means to politically participate in the nation-state. In “The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and Production of Alternate Discourses of Power,” authors Pristash, Schachterle, and Carter Wood establish needlework (and more broadly, textile and fibre crafts) to be a form of discourse, as “a form of rhetoric with the potential to shape identity, build community, and prompt engagement with social action.”⁵¹ Considering these forms of “feminine handicraft” to be rhetorical devices, contributes to a historic narrative that foregrounds the political use of craft in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

50 Hermanson, “Knitting as Dissent,” online.

51 Heather Pristash, Inez Schachterle, and Sue Carter Wood, “The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and Production of Alternate Discourses of Power,” in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*, ed. Goggin M. Daly and Tobin B. Fowkes (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 14.

More recent craftivist works, like Mazza's and Robert's exhibit active protest against military involvement, capitalism, sweatshop labour, and environmental degradation, in addition to asserting agency of the self. These works constitute some of the most well known "craftivist" works of the canon, as the method has been conceptualized as ~~crafting~~ efforts of the communal, female protesters. The particular historical moments that produced these works, exemplify the climate from which craftivism emerges. These works, and others like these, such as *Blood Bag Project* (2012), the *Uterus Flag Project* (2010),⁵² or the continued practice of charity quilts, became representative of the craftivist movement, and they were quickly adopted as examples in short, periodical writings and craftivist anthologies in the early 2000s.⁵³

Although commonly accepted, it is worth reiterating here that contemporary craftivism is not the first iteration of political craft. Often positioned as a fix and foil for the modern, industrial world, craft's political potential has long been recognized as a potent expression of the individual maker. While political narratives have been present nearly as long as making itself, the notion of craft itself as inherently political stems from the theories of Ruskin and Morris following the Industrial Revolution. The notion that craft-work is inherently politicized specifically differs from craft's ability to communicate political or activist narratives, as the ceramic vessel, fibre tapestry, wooden carving, and numerous other craft objects have depicted since antiquity.⁵⁴

Both Ruskin and Morris, while deeply utopian in their visions, positioned craft, and the craft aura, as politically potent expressions of non-alienated, and therefore

52 For images of these projects, see Greer, *Craftivism*, 2011.

53 See Julia Bryan Wilson's "The Politics of Craft," Betsy Hosegood's "Whip Your Hobby into Shape: Knitting, Feminism and Construction of Gender," Buszek's *Extra/Ordinary*, Levine's *Handmade Nation*. See bibliography for full citations.

54 Richard T. Neer, *Style and Politics in Athenian Vase-painting: The Craft of Democracy, Ca. 530-460 B.C.E.*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

meaningful and fulfilling labour, in opposition to the division of labour, or alienated labour of industrial mass production. The aesthetics of craft were, to them, an expression of joy in the work. In 1888, Morris wrote, in “The Revival of Handicraft” that “we do sorely need a system of production which will give us beautiful surroundings and pleasant occupation, and which will tend to make us good human animals, able to do something for ourselves, so that we may be generally intelligent.”⁵⁵ The import of craft, found in its purity, engaged making, and humanity, was a necessary counterpoint to the industrialized making processes of textiles, furniture, and tableware, arguably providing both the maker and consumer with a sense of humanity in the light of emerging capitalism and exploited workforces. More than that, however, Morris saw craft as a way to “make intelligible” the efforts of our labour -- just as we formed craft, it formed us. These concerns about production and consumption remain, as movements against globalization and sweatshops grow, and for organic, fair-trade, and green products have deeply influenced contemporary craft movements.⁵⁶

The Arts and Crafts Movement recognized its own utopic thinking. While he considered labour and its alienation seriously, Morris didn’t consider his efforts to be big enough to overwhelm encroaching industrialization. Instead, he encouraged small, sustainable workshops and enterprises, labour solidarity and organization. In workshops, the ideals of a unified and intelligible life could be realized, as the “social solidarity and the production of objects necessary for life combined.”⁵⁷ While he would be remembered as (quoting Stansky) “a warm heart and a mistaken enthusiasm,”⁵⁸ the links that Morris

55 William Morris, “The Revival Of Handicraft,” *Fortnightly Review* (November 1888), online, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1888/handcrft.htm>.

56 Krugh, “Joy in Labour,” 282.

57 *Ibid.*, 283.

58 *Ibid.*, 288.

and his contemporaries established between craft and leisure (or pleasure), and craft and unalienated labour are not to be taken lightly. These links politicized the craft position in relation to production, capitalism, led to further gendering of “domestic” craft against “professional” craft, and situated craft as a subaltern discourse in the creative economy.

Furthermore, the West is not the first or only site of politicized craft. It is important to make the distinction here, between the reality of political craft practices and the scope of my thesis. Craft has been used politically the world over, and as we examine female-centric methods of resistance in second and Third Wave feminism, it must be emphasized that these are not the first or only examples of women staging protest through craft. Chilean women crafting arpilleras have depicted social unrest and resistance for decades, as have the Indian Sujuni, Khatwa, and Bhuj textile panels.⁵⁹ There are numerous examples of female-centric and craft-centric projects of resistance in a global scope, but given the space of this thesis, this examination is limited to Western craftivism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, keeping in mind that this is not a uniquely Western mode of expression or activism.

Craftivism can be seen as a reflection of feminist values, combined with the urgency of the 21st century political climate.⁶⁰ Greer points specifically to the accelerated “War on Terror,” but this urgency could be (and continues to be) felt elsewhere, in the economic recession of 2007/2008, in climate change, the refugee crisis, the anti-sweatshop movement, the fight against institutionalized racism, water rights, migrant labour abuses, resource scarcity, and more. Craftivism emerges because makers (specifically women) reject the hierarchical standards of the patriarchy, whether that

59 Neha Singh Gohil, “Knitting activist gives a stitch about war,” *Orlando Sentinel*, March 19, 2007, http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2007-03-19/news/KNITTING_1_knitting-mazza-iraq-war.

60 Greer, “Knitting Craftivism: From My Sofa to Yours,” in *Craftivism*, 8.

standard is things that are made “well,” by a single author, or things that can be contained or sold. Craftivism resists commodification, is often given away for free, abandoned, or “installed” in public spaces. Craftivist makers embrace the amateur spirit of DIY, making, often without regard for technical skill or accomplishment, to express personal creativity and sentiment, or seeking fulfillment in the productive use of their time and labour. The Revolutionary Knitting Circle of Calgary’s protest of the G8 summit in 2002, used a knitting circle “sit-in” to protest the corporate nature of the summit, calling for the community to “knit” itself together, creating soft barriers of protest that did not succumb to commodification or violence, but rather peacefully and productively established a community of “social criticism of corporatization, globalization, and capitalism.”⁶¹

At best, the movement was constellated and flexible, allowing a myriad of makers (in a variety of media, as we will see shortly) to address diverse and networked positionalities of power. Craftivism acknowledges the interconnectedness of oppression, the labour of the unnamed and oppressed, the marginalizations between modes of making and ways of being in the world. In a round table entitled “The Politics of Craft,” (2008) artist Allison Smith said, “We forget that even today Nikes are made by workers. We [in the craft position] tend to think of mass-produced “machine-made” things as if they’re totally devoid of human hands and workmanship, but machines aren’t making these things; people are making these things.”⁶²

The position of craftivism encourages reflection on the craft label, its position, and implications, as makers continue to wrestle with the craft labour of those around the

61 Beth Ann Pentney, “Feminism, Activism, and Knitting: Are the Fibre Arts a Viable Mode for Feminist Political Action?,” *thirdspace: a journal of feminist theory and culture*, 8: issue 1 (2008). Online. <http://journals.sfu.ca/thirdspace/index.php/journal/article/viewArticle/pentney/210>. (accessed March 06, 2016).

62 Julia Bryan-Wilson, Liz Collins, Sabrina Gschwandter, Cat Mazza, and Allison Smith, “The Politics of Craft: A Roundtable,” in *The Craft Reader*, 624.

world, often exploited and underpaid for skills the Western world glorifies as “studio craft.” As craft intersects with activism, makers consider not only craft’s marginalized position, but also its privileged one, as these interventions often require time, money, and skills not easily afforded. Craftivism is a safe space, a place that acknowledges violence (historic and contemporary) and productively works to combat it. The work of fibre artists in particular, coming out of the Third Wave feminist movement, acknowledge the fraught history of feminine handicraft, choosing to embrace the agency of choice in craft, and using it to specifically address issues of violence and oppression against women.

In rethinking craftivism, it's necessary to explore its positive potential, as a means of making that disrupts hierarchies, creates community, facilitates reflection, and allows for positive, productive activism – but it is equally necessary to think of it critically. There is a critical need to consider craftivism as a method, rather than a historicized movement. Further than that, craftivism's origins in feminist discourse, Riot Grrrl aesthetics and subsequent writings often neglect professional craftspeople, in their desire to render craftivism accessible.⁶³⁶⁴ Craftivism, as a method, is approachable from a variety of positions, including the (arguably) privileged one of professional craftsperson. Furthermore, professionals (in this case, ceramicists) engage with different aesthetic issues and histories than amateurs, and their work must be held to the standards of their field. Here, we can introduce Claire Bishop's essay on the *Social Turn*, which strongly advocates for aesthetic considerations in ethically based projects, like craftivism. In a continued examination of craftivism, this thesis will both advocate for the method (as a

⁶³ Riot Grrrl aesthetics can most clearly be seen in the *Alien She* exhibition (2015/2016), and consist of DIY, punk, and handmade influences. Riot Grrrl is a specific subculture of feminism’s Third Wave, distinguishable for its music (like Bikini Kill), distributed networks via the internet, zine production, and amateur, DIY motivations. For an expanded look at Riot Grrrl and its cultural implications, please see Marisa Meltzer, *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).

⁶⁴ Buszek, 2011; Greer, 2014; Levine, 2008.

valid, contemporary way of making) and also be critical of its literature, works, and makers, as we would of any project at a professional level or existing in the public sphere of craft.

In examining craftivism's established history and redefining craftivism as a method, there are links to be found between craftivism-as-movement's motivations and political implications and the potential futures of craftivism-as-method in a variety of media. The politicization of fibre-based practices in the nineties by Third Wave feminism is both reflected and challenged by other forms of craftivism. Craftivism-as-method reveals much about the potential of craftivism, which isn't entirely tied to the values and aesthetics of Riot Grrrl, but rather continues to respond to more contemporary political moments, aesthetic shifts, and rhetorical strategies. My examination of ceramic craftivism reveals much of the differences that can be enacted by a variety of materials and makers, as different tools to suit political needs.

Craftivism can be seen as the making and doing of activism via craft, but its flexibility and constellated nature mean that it cannot be contained to a historical movement, but rather can reflect the contemporary moment in its continued use and study. To consider craftivism to be a method, particularly in ceramics, likens it to other making techniques, tactics, and methods in the ceramic fields. So often, a ceramicist defines their work as pottery, or themselves as potter, in order to describe the way in which they make. The same goes for sculpture/sculptor, art/artist, social practice/social engagement, hand-building, installation, performance, site-specific works, and more. If these qualifiers can define the *ways in which we make*, then why not craftivism? Each of the aforementioned, ceramic qualifiers connotes both a material or technical process and a set of ideological precedents, values, and challenges. Craftivism-as-method fits both of

these qualifications as both a technical process (as it is tied to the craft position) and as a set of ideologies, albeit constellated and shifting ones. While craftivism has been described as movement, makers superficially united by their use of fibrous media, I am more interested in the use of the method by *disparate* individuals in the same media, without calling it a movement, but instead considering craftivism as a tool in the arsenal of contemporary makers.

My consideration of craftivism as method is driven by key differences between the limits of craftivism-as-movement and the potential of craftivism-as-method. First, a material engagement with ceramics differs from the established craftivists working in fibre, but is no less able to be described by the craft label. By extending craftivism beyond its prescribed movement, and that movement's motivations and positionality, we can see that craftivism is at work in various media by various makers, with diverse reasoning and activist inspiration. This reconsiders craftivism as more than a mere misnomer (perhaps fibre-vism, or knitivism would have been more accurate) to a missed opportunity. Secondly, I want to consider this method as feminist tactic, as a form of oppositional consciousness as theorized by postcolonial feminist theorist, Chela Sandoval, in *The Methodology of the Oppressed*. While Sandoval's text speaks to the oppression, feminism, and technologies of power at work for women of colour, her articulation of resistance as differential, with the ability to move between and within identities and discourses, is a helpful way of understanding the flexibility of craftivism as a tactic of resistance in hegemonic networks. "Today," she writes that, "the differential remains at an extreme juncture:

It is a location wherein the aims of feminism, race, ethnicity, sex, and marginalia studies, and historical, aesthetic, and global studies can crosscut and join together in new relations through the recognition of a shared theory and method of oppositional consciousness. The differential occurs when the affinities inside of

difference attract, combine, and relate new constituencies into coalitions of resistance.⁶⁵

In this way, we can see the ability of craft to “attract, combine, and relate” to other discourses as a specific asset in creating new “coalitions of resistance,” particularly as craftivism is used to bring attention, discourse, and change to marginalized positionalities. Craftivism can be considered a tactic of the differential, or an ideological “location” wherein a variety of contentious ideologies and ideas can intersect and interact, bringing together the concerns of the material and aesthetic qualities of craft, as well as the politics and activism of both the craft position and its makers.

In considering craftivism as a tactical method, one capable of moving between discourses and studies, media, location, and motivation, it becomes clear that to describe it as a mere movement of the nineties and early aughts does both a disservice to both the makers involved, and the myriad of projects neglected by the literature produced. Defining craftivism as a movement limits its potential and theorization by future makers, either outside the established parameters of time, or material. This thesis intentionally considers craftivism as method in order to explore the potential of the tactic, as it’s employed by various makers for multiple activist intentions.

Meg Roberts’ project, *Plants for Patients* illustrates how craftivism, the method, establishes connections between the semi-autonomous, and traditionally marginalized, position of craft and the feminist politics of abortion (from compassion to access to care), communal empathy and engagement, as well as awareness for marginalized patients. It encourages an intersection between all facets of the abortion debate, morality, politics, religion, health care access, economics, through the simple act of throwing pots and

65 Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 64.

planting plants.

The craftivist method resists hegemonic expectations of craft as stagnant, traditional, and passive, offering makers a reflexive and resistive method that can flexibly respond to the makers positionality and the contemporary moment. Craftivism encourages makers to consider their simultaneously privileged and marginalized positions, and to move with and through these positionalities in unexpected, public, subversive ways. Craftivism contributes detail, oddness, and small change to the activist position, challenging notions that resistance must be powerful, angry, or backed by a large group of people. As a tactic, craftivism offers makers a chance to engage with their politics productively, to position their resistance as creative, humorous, kind, and object-based.

3b: Craftivist History

In identifying the history of craftivism, we can see how and why craftivism became narrowly defined as more “movement” than “method,” as well as insert the neglected, ceramic craftivist works into this history, to draw comparisons and contrast between media. This section serves to contextualize contemporary craftivism as a specific tactic that responds to concerns that become most relevant post-1989, as performance, deconstructed hierarchies, feminism, and identity politics intersect with craft discourse.

3b1: The Coinage of Craftivism

“Craftivism” the term, is most commonly attributed to author and maker Betsy Greer, who “coined” the word after September 11, 2001. Greer attributes the initial phrasing of “craftivism” to both a friend of hers at a knitting group, and acknowledges that the Church of Craft⁶⁶ used the word online before Greer purchased the domain name

⁶⁶ The Church of Craft used the word “craftivism” in a workshop before Greer's coinage and she

craftivism.com.⁶⁷ Greer's coinage of the word is rooted in a specific moment, post September 11, 2001, as a response to the fear and anger she (and others were experiencing):

Craftivism is an idea whose time has come. Given the states of materialism and mass-production, the rise of feminism, and the time spanned from the Industrial Revolution, the beginning of the 21st century was the right time for the evolution of such an idea.⁶⁸

The contemporary iteration of craftivism is an *evolutionary* one, drawing influence and historical significance from a variety of previous actions, motivations, and artistic movements.

Greer's understandings of craftivism, and her subsequent explanations of the term, reflect a contemporary outlook grounded in fear and reflection on the global state (from a particularly Western position following the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City. While living in New York City, the impetus to coin craftivism stemmed from Greer's desire to produce *positive* change in the wake of such a traumatic event. Activism, she felt, consisted of negative emotions, of yelling, and protesting without producing positive change.⁶⁹ Craft, on the other hand, provided an opportunity for reflection and consideration of one's ability to *create* in the face of alienating fear and global unrest. Greer's definition of craftivism re-positions craft as an "active" and "productive" social action, as opposed to a "passive," domestic task, removed from the concerns of the world. The timing *was* right, as Greer said, for the Internet was gaining popularity and accessibility, allowing for the assemblage of both crafting and activist communities, the quick and convenient sharing of information, and the democratization

credits them accordingly.

From Greer, "Craftivist History," 178.

67 Ibid., 178.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

of skill sharing. Given the anxieties of the contemporary moment, and the accessibility of creative communities online, craftivism provided the option for *productive activism*, as an outlet for channeling one's own activism and resistance within a rapidly growing set of communities and resources.

While craft had been theorized, and enacted as a political mechanism previously, the Third Wave feminist movement of the 1990s provided new tools and perspectives to craft's political arsenal, introducing amateurism, the DIY ethos, low-brow "punk" aesthetics, and accessibility, producing the IndieCraft movement of the early 2000s and the beginnings of contemporary craftivism.⁷⁰ This particular feminist movement marks a specific turning point in the history of craft, and craftivism. It comes after the "fall of the Wall" in 1990, after the performative and "Social Turn" in contemporary art, and a full generation after the seventies feminist reclamation of handicraft. Claire Bishop, in her 2006 essay, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," notes that the proliferation of "practices less interested in a relational *aesthetic* than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity," (arguably, craftivism) can be dated (if tenuously) to coincide with the early nineties as "the fall of Communism deprived the Left of the last vestiges of the revolution that had once linked political and aesthetic radicalism."⁷¹

In short, the timing was right for craft to embrace the values of Third Wave feminism, emphasizing performance, community building, amateurism, and modes of making that deemphasized hierarchies and professional skill. Following 1989, a variety of projects emerged in both avant-garde, subcultures (like Riot Grrrl), and craft, "artists using social situations to produce dematerialized, anti-market, politically engaged

71 Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *ArtForum* (February 2006): 179.

projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life.”⁷² These practices of the avant-garde (the focus of Bishop’s essay) echo the sentiments of Riot Grrrl, seeking community and politicized agency and blurring the lines between cultural production and life, as Riot Grrrls distributed their art freely (through zines) or used it functionally (as home decor or apparel).

3b2: Feminism and Craftivism

While Riot Grrrl feminism provides the necessary starting place for 21st century craftivism, we can trace the Third Wave adaptations of craft to their foremothers in the 1960s and 1970s. Simply put, the second wave feminist reclamation of handicraft provided valuable artistic interventions and theory for later generations participating in handicraft. Judy Chicago’s seminal *Dinner Party* (1974-79) attempted, in part, to call attention to the handicraft of “anonymous” female makers, to illuminate the skill, labour, and agency of the handcrafted good, particularly through ceramics and textiles. While it can be argued that Chicago’s work, and much of her work with Miriam Shapiro, as well, was essentialist feminism, drawing from the universalism of the “female body,” their work drew attention to the gendering of labour, particularly domestic labour and handicraft. But as craft scholar Glenn Adamson writes in his chapter, “Feminism and the Politics of Amateurism,”: “As far as the present day went, the logic of the Feminist movement demanded that a woman artist should create work that would attain broad cultural legitimacy, while also being somehow identifiable as 'women's work.’⁷³

Furthermore, these artists encouraged the use of amateurism as a strategy of resistance. Adamson writes:

Feminists conceived of amateurism as a strategy that held both the traditional home and the mainstream art world at arm's length. Craft was the most material expression of that strategy. It served double duty as a symbol of unjustly quashed

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (London: Berg, 2007), 150.

creativity, and a token of the Feminist desire to break out of the stultification of domesticity.⁷⁴

While this was a common strategy, one that persists well into the contemporary moment and was deeply important in Riot Grrrl, many Feminist artists, like Chicago took issue with this, running her workshop for *The Dinner Party* with the high standards of a “master artisan,” with little tolerance for anything less than professionalism.⁷⁵ The seventies' reclamation of handicraft (especially knitting) as “feminist” was not without contestation or conflict. The radical feminists' reclamation of knitting was complicated, as it represented both the history of female labour, and the history of female subjugation. While Chicago, Shapiro, and Faith Wilding's work fought to acknowledge and confront the history of unrewarded, unnoticed, invisible female labour, they formed a contentious relationship with domesticity and the politically potent and rewarding aspects of handicraft took a backseat to its amateur aesthetics, rendering it contentious among feminist and non-feminist knitters alike.⁷⁶

What followed this feminist reclamation of handicraft in the 1980s was equally important. The formation and rise of the feminist art collective The Guerrilla Girls and their impact on feminist art is not to be understated.⁷⁷ The Guerrilla Girls' confrontational interactions with institutions reflect a similar punk-like, anti-establishment attitude that would serve future Riot Grrrls and female artists well in the nineties and early aughts. In addition, the politicization of craft work was accelerated by the ongoing occupation of Greenham Common, Berkshire, beginning in 1981. While the goal of this “permanent counter-cultural emplacement” was to protest American nuclear policies, it soon became

⁷⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 158.

⁷⁶ Harmonson, “Knitting as Dissent,” online.

⁷⁷ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 158.

a key site for British Feminists.⁷⁸ Writes Adamson, “It also served, rather more incidentally, as a hub of amateur craft production. Homemade banners, clothing and makeshift shelters constituted a powerful collective aesthetic, which was powerfully influential on certain Feminist artists.”⁷⁹ The feminist response to both the marginalization of female labour, and the rampant sexism and racism in art institutions, was growing and becoming an active part of cultural institutions and discussions by the late eighties. Riot Grrrl would be continuation of these efforts, resulting in early, feminist craftivism in the Western world.

3b3: Twentieth Century Ceramics

The reconfiguring of craft practices in the 1960s and 1970s extends beyond the fibre movement, clearly. In ceramics particularly, the influence of Funk ceramics, and later, abstract and sculptural ceramics, brought new levels of social critique (through irony and humor) and expanded the potential of the decorative vessel through volume and scale.⁸⁰ The works of Robert Arneson during this time provide key insights into the conceptual links between ceramics and feminist art practices at the time. Arneson's works, such as *Funk John* (1963) called into question ceramic's marginalized position, and the politics of amateurishness, of “hobby pottery.” Using humour, bold glazes, and self-referential modeling techniques (such as handbuilt coils), Arneson drew parallels between his work and the kinds of work made by introductory students of ceramics. The “Funk” subversion of ceramic norms quickly devolved into “a derivative confection of brightly colored glazes, finicky workmanship, and lame visual puns.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, the Funk movement laid important groundwork for ceramics that engaged in social critique

⁷⁸ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 152

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 148

⁸¹ Ibid.

and embraced amateurish aesthetics, both relevant in the emergence of ceramic craftivism.

Advancements in the field of “art” ceramics were summarized at the 1982 exhibition *Ceramic Sculpture* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, bringing together “funk, verisimilitude, abstraction, and installation.”⁸² This exhibition highlighted some of the rethinking around ceramics that had occurred in the past 30 years, particularly the move away from function while still referring to the vessel, as well as the shift from the tabletop to the wall.

Peter Voulkos’s work was highlighted in this exhibition, and had been celebrated for the thirty years prior as “The New Ceramic Presence,” vessels that pushed boundaries of scale and material, that embraced abstract expressionist tendencies and dismantled boundaries between art and craft.⁸³ In addition to Voulkos's artistic accomplishments, a large amount of his acclaim revolves around the *myth* and performance of Voulkos as a maker and artist. Nearly every mention of Voulkos’s work is accompanied by an anecdote of his masterful abilities with clay and at the wheel.⁸⁴ While this isn't entirely unique to Voulkos (M.C. Richards is a notable example of performativity in ceramics), Voulkos’s ability to handle clay was legendary, and grows more so by the year. In a batch of writings following Voulkos’s death, several other makers pay tribute, bringing up, again, his masterful ability to handle clay. Rudy Autio, Voulkos’s friend, colleague, and co-founding artist at the Bray wrote that, “He was the Babe Ruth, the Mozart of Clay Art.

82 Dormer, *The New Ceramics*, 21.

83 Rose Slivka, “The New Ceramic Presence,” *Craft Horizons* 21:4 (July/August 1961), 30-37.

84 I am a former Montana resident (where Voulkos did his undergraduate work in painting at Montana State University and then returned as a founding artist at the Archie Bray Ceramics Foundation in Helena), and I cannot express how many stories I have heard from professors and fellow ceramicists about Pete “at the wheel.” This has occurred not only in Montana but also in my discussions with ceramicists all over the U.S. and Canada.

There was never anybody like him.”⁸⁵

Voulkos’s mythos comes out of much more than his ability to make, his relationship with the material. I suggest that Voulkos’s public engagement with the material, his *performative* engagement was revolutionary for the media, in addition to his conceptual and sculptural gains. Much of the myth surrounding Voulkos is as much about performance as it is about skill. Potter and fellow Bray resident Ken Ferguson wrote, “...Peter developed a unique throwing demo. He obviously got some energy from the audience, but he didn't want to answer questions from them about what he was doing. He kept them at arms' length, making fun of his work, playing music, developing unique rapport. Peter was always in control of the situation. The work made during these demos was serious. He was after something. He actually had the courage to try new things while doing a demo. I admired that very much.”⁸⁶

Voulkos’s commitment to “serious” work during demonstrations combined with the myth that surrounds leads me to believe that the performativity of Voulkos’s practice was central. This could be interpreted as the development of the stereotype “artist as lone genius” in ceramics, but, in fact, much of Voulkos’s career was community driven, working in open studios with colleagues and students. While Voulkos was certainly not the only ceramicist to explore performativity (Mary Caroline Richards is a notable example), he is perhaps one of the best-known ceramicists in the twentieth century. I would suggest that this performativity is central to the development of craftivism in the later half of the twentieth century, as makers like Joel Pfeiffer continue to expand the practice of ceramics beyond studio walls, facilitating public engagement with both the material and method of contemporary ceramics.

85 Rudy Autio et al., “Peter Voulkos,” *Studio Potter* 30:2 (June 2002): 97.

86 Ibid., 108.

3b4: Early Ceramic Craftivism

I would like to turn now, to two projects that exemplify early ceramic craftivism, and given their temporal proximity to Third Wave feminism and the DIY movement, can be seen as two of the most influential early works for ceramic craftivists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Joel Pfeiffer's *Clay Stomps*, began, like Voulkos's performances, out of the spirit of necessity and ceramic practice. Pfeiffer has hosted a myriad of clay stomps since the 1970s, when he began the events in order to crowdsource the labour necessary to mix clay's dry ingredients with water, in order to circumvent the expensive shipping fees from wet clay.⁸⁷ A *Clay Stomp* basically involves a community effort to mix the dry materials with water to produce clay with their feet and bodies, mixing the clay on a tarp, typically outside. Given the precariousness of the situation, participants are forced to interlock arms and lean upon one another, physically connecting a community through labour and touch. In a recent interview, Pfeiffer described his first clay stomp and the "transcendence" of the communicative process. He said:

I got the dry ingredients, laid the tarp in the backyard, knocked on neighbors doors, asked if they wanted to stomp. [I had] no idea of the impact, [but] there's nothing like connecting to the earth and to other human beings at the same time. It was win-win. Through that process of transcendence, it doesn't matter if you do or know art, it's fun and you get to meet people that you've never met before. It crosses all levels and lines in communications. Like music, art is communication. [It's] the engagement of the process.⁸⁸

Joy, laughter, and a feeling of accomplishment characterize these events in Hartland, Wisconsin when the stomped clay is often turned into community murals and artworks. Pfeiffer made an important adjustment to the clay stomp model in 1980. After realizing that there were important groups of people being routinely left out of his stomps

⁸⁷ Joel Pfeiffer, interview by author, February 3, 2016.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

since 1974, Joel took the *Clay Stomp* to a senior citizen nursing home, doing an indoor clay stomp for the seniors, their caretakers, and families. The participants then used the clay to make tiles, and eventually a mural.⁸⁹ The flexibility of the clay stomp is necessary for its efficacy as a social practice work.

In 1989, Joel proposed *Clay - A Healing Way*, the first international clay stomp. He had proposed it to the U.N. a few years earlier, but the idea finally got traction in 1988 at the Soviet-American Citizen's Summit. The work proposed two clay stomps, in the U.S. and the, then, Soviet Union, with the clay used to produce "Peace Murals" at both sites, as visual reminders of the citizen's desire for peace during the Cold War.⁹⁰

The first stomp was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Over 5,000 people attended, first mixing the clay, and then fitting it into mural-sized tiles with impressions of positivity and peace. One of the tile molds was elevated to ensure equal access to the elderly and those with disabilities. There was also an area for participants to write messages and include photographs that would travel with the work to Leningrad. The work was salt-fired, and transported, via crate, with a delegation of thirty, to Leningrad in July of that year.⁹¹

On July 30, the Soviet stomp took place on the banks of the Neva River. There was a live band, large-scale puppetry, and over 2000 participants. "It was," says Pfeiffer, "my first reverse stomp."⁹² Pfeiffer remembers that a huge dump truck showed up with the clay, but rather than mined and processed raw materials, was filled with clay that had been pulled directly from the ground. Participants were stomping, but also breaking up

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Lynn Preston, "The politics of clay: the American-Soviet mural project," *School Arts* (1990): online. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+politics+of+clay%3A+the+American-Soviet+mural+project.-a08972913>

⁹² Joel Pfeiffer, interview by author, February 3, 2016.

clumps, pulling sticks and rocks from the mix. Many of the participants chose to cover their faces and hair in clay, jumping into the river at the end of the day to wash it off. One of the amazing things about a clay stomp, says Pfeiffer, is that it doesn't require language, and that was certainly the case here as thousands of participants carved images of peace into a new mural, while connecting and forming community with the U.S. visitors.⁹³

The American mural was installed in the Leningrad Peace Park, with Soviet media and television coverage. Likewise, the Soviet mural was unveiled at the Milwaukee Art Museum, accompanied by 12 Soviet delegates.⁹⁴ Each "action" in this craftivist work, engaging in resistance against hegemonic views of fear and war-mongering that were still prevalent in 1989, contains an opportunity for interpersonal connection and dialogue, regardless of the participant's ability to speak the other's language. Joel's use of "non-verbal" communication, in the form of touch, art making, laughter, and ceremony, offered multiple occasions for a "coming-together," of disparate selves. Furthermore, the work had ongoing effects, as several of the participants became pen-pals, and the murals are still exhibited today. It was not, however, without difficulty. Says Pfeiffer, "Yes. My phone was tapped. Yes. I was followed by the KGB. Wanting peace is controversial."⁹⁵ This is perhaps most telling, in reference to the activism portion of this project. Yes, Pfeiffer's work brings together disparate bodies, but may be quickly lumped into the "feel-good" corner of activism, as the results were positivist depictions of a post-war experience. Peace, however, is political, and in light of the hegemony of the

93 Ibid.

94 A concise history of "Clay – A Healing Way," via Lynn Preston, "The Politics of Clay: the American-Soviet mural project," *The Free Library* (May 1990), [http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The politics of clay: the American-Soviet mural project.-a08972913](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+politics+of+clay:+the+American-Soviet+mural+project.-a08972913) (accessed March 14, 2016).

95 Joel Pfeiffer, interview by author, February 3, 2016.

Cold War, certainly an act of resistance.

This project is notable in terms of craftivism for both its practice, performance, and aesthetics. The stumps embrace community, dialecticism, and amateurishness. Pfeiffer facilitated the coming-together of thousands of people through proximity, touch, and a material engagement. The works produced reflected all levels of ability, and reflected the genuine sentiments of community members, regardless of their ability to work in clay. In facilitating exchange, the objects themselves contributed to a growing dialogue, re-situating the efforts of those across the world into familiar locations, with memories of the same, clay-stomping activities. Pfeiffer's work challenged the state's participation on the Cold War by providing an opportunity for dialogue, friendship, and craftwork between disparate communities.

The second craftivist project I'd like to touch on, that took place in the same two-year period, is the *Empty Bowls Project*, founded by Lisa Blackburn and John Hartom, both art teachers from Michigan at the time of the project's founding.⁹⁶ They say:

The Empty Bowls Project started serendipitously. We imagined it would be a one-time-only luncheon at Bloomfield Hills Lahser High School, in suburban Detroit, where John was teaching ceramics...We decided to challenge the students to make enough bowls to serve a soup luncheon to the school staff in exchange for their donations of money for the food drive.⁹⁷

This was the first iteration of *Empty Bowls*, and what followed was a call to action in the form of a national project, in which they challenged potters, in May of 1991, to raise \$1 million dollars by October 16, World Food Day. In relatively short order, *Empty Bowls* events began to pop up in communities nationwide. Although they failed to meet their goal in the first year, it was met many times over in the next few.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Lisa Blackburn and John Hartom, "Empty Bowls At Twenty," *Studio Potter* 39:1 (2011): 20.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Stella E. Anderson, Betty S. Coffey, Heather Dixon-Fowler, "The Empty Bowls Project: Creating, Leading, and Sustaining a Social Enterprise," *Entrepreneurship: Theory and*

The events are fairly simple in their structure. Local potters (whether they are professionals, students, or amateurs), throw, glaze, fire, and donate bowls. On the day of the event, participants “buy” a bowl, fill it with food (most often soup and bread), and the proceeds benefit a local food charity or project. Again, flexibility plays a huge part in the success of this project, as it can adapt to serve the communities that participate.

Still, Blackburn and Hartom strove to form a “grassroots” movement, rather than one-off projects.⁹⁹ They spoke at several conferences and universities, encouraging listeners to host their own *Empty Bowl* event in their own community. Thanks to the flexibility of the events, and the universal nature of their components (bowls, bread, and soup), *Empty Bowls* projects have occurred in over 15 countries, including an annual event at Toronto's Gardiner Museum. Rather than being proprietary (or authorly) with their idea, Blackburn and Hartom strove to “give it away,” to local organizers and communities.¹⁰⁰ So although the impetus for *Empty Bowls* is from two makers, the execution of it, which involves potters and organizers partnering with host institutions, local chefs and restaurants, and a local food “need” is a true communal effort, bringing together a host of individuals to address the local issues of poverty and food based social justice. The only requirements that Hartom and Blackburn ask be met are that it has *Empty Bowls* in the title, includes an educational component to raise awareness of needs in the local community (which is often a representative of a local organization who can specifically speak to the conditions of hunger in that particular community), and that all money raised is donated to an organization that will feed people in need.¹⁰¹

Part of the success of *Empty Bowls* as a campaign against hunger is its local and

Practice (2014): 1238.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1239.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1239.

specific nature. As Hartom says, “Many people may feel that alleviating hunger is too big or complex to even make a dent in solving or addressing individually. *Empty Bowls* provides something that anybody can do. Everybody has something to share and contribute to making and *Empty Bowls* event successful and to do so is to have a clear and significant impact in the local community.”¹⁰² As a project, *Empty Bowls* is replicable and scalable, with an emphasis on creating community, educating that community, and making a financial difference in a local organization fighting hunger. As a craftivist model, it is the public’s engagement with craft that makes this struggle tangible, as the metaphor of an “empty bowl” is placed directly in a participant’s hands, negotiating the social roots of food justice.

These two projects give context a history of ceramic craftivism, beginning in the late 1980s. Ceramics has a long history of performativity, particularly since the 1960s and 1970s, and these were among the first “social practice” works in the ceramic canon. Many works still follow these two models, as we’ll address, but these are not the only forms of ceramic craftivism, particularly as these are both rooted in “feel-good” ideologies where the resistance to a particular power is found in creating connection, community, and positivity between individuals, and in the case of *Empty Bowls*, financially contributing to a community’s hunger assistance programming. These projects advocate *for* something, rather than rally *against* an injustice, unlike traditional forms of activism.

3b5: Riot Grrrl and DIY

In late 1989 and early 1990, a large feminist movement, known as Riot Grrrl or Third Wave feminism emerged out of the Pacific Northwest. The anonymous work *Riot*

102 Ibid., 1241.

Grrrl manifesto banner, (exhibited in Portland at the MOCC and the Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) as a part of *Alien She* (2015), an exemplary exhibition of Riot Grrrl craft) is particularly helpful in understanding not only Third Wave feminism, but also its qualities that gave rise to contemporary craftivism. After giving a brief description, here, of the ways in which the *Riot Grrrl manifesto* appears in craftivism, I will discuss the defining characteristics of the movement in greater depth.¹⁰³

“WHAT IS Riot Grrrl? BECAU.S.E we will never meet the hierarchical BOY standards of talented, or cool, or smart. They are created to keep us out, and if we ever meet them they will change, or we will become tokens.”¹⁰⁴

The amateurish, or the DIY aesthetics of craftivism emerges from Riot Grrrl movement. Riot Grrrl is often explained as a female offshoot of the punk movement, and shares many of its aesthetics and fashions. Riot Grrrls, and Third Wave feminists, however, would strongly disagree with this sentiment as Riot Grrrl often subverted punk and called into question its hierarchies and values. While these qualities could also be attributed to a “punk” aesthetic, purely, Riot Grrrls encouraged “feminine” aesthetics that didn't meet “the hierarchical BOY standards of talented, or cool, or smart.” This included Hello Kitty logos, baby doll dresses, handmade, glittery patches, and knitted legwarmers.

“BECAU.S.E we girls want to create mediums that speak to U.S.. We are tired of boy band after boy band, boy zine after boy zine, boy punk after boy punk after boy.... BECAU.S.E every time we pick up a pen, or an instrument, or get anything done, we are creating the revolution.... We ARE the revolution.”¹⁰⁵

103 A similar version of this has been attributed to Kathleen Hanna, perhaps the most famous Riot Grrrl. Her *Riot Grrrl Manifesto* appeared in the *Bikini Kill Zine* in 1991.

104 “Riot Grrrl Manifesto banner,” text from *What is Riot Grrrl?* Flyer, author unknown, undated (c. 1992) from *Alien She Curatorial Text*, Astria Suparak and Ceci Moss, 2015.

105 Ibid.

This punk-ish aesthetic is more than rejecting hierarchies of skill; it also constitutes a reworking of domestic labour. Rather than struggle with domestic labour (and knitting) like their foremothers in the seventies, Riot Grrrl's embraced the choices of other women, even if that choice was engaging in traditionally feminine labour, like knitting, cross-stitching, cooking or entertaining. Riot Grrrl craftivism encouraged women to create their own outlets and opportunities, and did not engage in judgment. That sort of judgment, of knitting as "female" or "invisible labour" was the sort of male-centered-judgment that Riot Grrrls fought against. Rather, Riot Grrrl's embraced craft for its radical potential as a medium. It was relatively easy to learn, some materials (though not all) were inexpensive, and they could distribute and receive skill-sharing knowledge between one another, particularly through zines, which included a variety of DIY and craft-based projects. Rather than consider craft to *only* be the anonymous labour of women, historical and potentially exploitative, Riot Grrrls reimagined the potential of craft as meaningful work, making with potential, and creative production with a voice.¹⁰⁶ The use of an amateurish aesthetic was tactical here, just as it was for feminists in the sixties and seventies.

"BECAU.S.E I need laughter and I need girl love. We need to build lines of communication so we can be more open and accessible to each other. BECAU.S.E we are being divided by our labels and philosophies, and we need to accept and support each other as girls; acknowledging our different approaches to life and accepting all of them as value."¹⁰⁷

Rather than position craft, particularly fibre-based craft, as mere, domestic labour, the Third Wave feminists saw craft's potential to empower makers, build

106 Pentney, "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting," online.

107 "Riot Grrrl Manifesto banner," 2015.

community, and create opportunities for networked collaboration. Pentney considers the Third Wave practice of knitting and DIY projects as feminist, writing, “Knitting can be used for feminist goals because it is grounded in a gendered cultural practice that can readily be politicized for different purposes by different groups and individuals.”¹⁰⁸

In fact, it is feminism, which craft scholar Glenn Adamson calls responsible for many of the 20th and 21st century shifts in thinking about craft. He writes:

...The importance of Feminism to the craft discourse is much more than a matter of gender. The re-politicization of craft that occurred in the 1970s – an infusion of urgency and ideas that had little to do with Arts and Crafts lineage – is the single greatest influence on the contemporary DIY or 'crafter' scene, which combines the expression of subcultural identities with an attempt to create anticorporate commercial opportunities. Equally, Feminist theory has been important in its contention that craft is best seen as a pervasive, 'everyday' activity, implicated in the contingent flux of modern life.¹⁰⁹¹¹⁰

The inclusion of feminist thought into the craft discourse proved essential for the emergence of craftivism, as craft became politicized anew, first in the seventies, and again in the nineties. Between craft's new radical potential, and its ubiquitous position, it's no wonder that craftivism emerged as popular method of working.

Like their second wave foremothers, Third Wave feminists made their own clothes, domestic goods, generally not to support an entire household, as had been done in the past, but still functional work. Riot Grrrl craft also moved beyond the domestic sphere, infusing craft into public works of art, Riot Grrrl craft saw the advent of “Not Your Grandma’s” craft movements, as knitters and other makers took their foremother’s crafting techniques to the streets, making large banners, sculptural objects and “yarn-

108 Pentney, “Feminism, Activism, and Knitting,” online.

109 Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 4.

110 I would, additionally, like to point out here that DIY has been around much longer than the 1990s. Art critics Janet Koplos and Bruce Metcalf in *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft*, discuss the impacts of the G.I. Bill post-WWII, and its impacts on free education and increased home ownership, which in turn, produced professional craftspeople, and an increase in DIY or hobby crafts in the home.

bombing” public spaces¹¹¹. It is these techniques that come to represent early craftivism. The displacement of domestic craft into public spaces represents a shift to the way we think about female labour, and where it should be. By inserting the private, domestic, and often invisible labour, a sphere associated with the feminine, into the public, nation-state, and non-domestic sphere, often associated with the masculine, these works confront gendered assumptions about craft, using the intrigue of its spatial and temporal juxtaposition to communicate various activist “truths.”

Various artists utilize these techniques such as Marianne Jørgenson, LJ Roberts, The Revolutionary Knitting Circle of Calgary, and others, so much so that yarn-bombing, or fibre-craft-made-public has come to define the genre of craftivism. More specifically, Jørgenson's *Tank Cozy* (2007), colloquially referred to as the “Pink Tank,” juxtaposes the private and public, relying on the combined labour of London's Cast-Off Knitting group and herself, likely performed in private spaces. Jørgenson surrounds a public monument of the state's might, a decommissioned tank with a pink, patchworked “cozy,” recalling a teapot or kettle. In this way, Jørgenson shows a kind of ownership over the tank, a kind of containment made possible in the private sphere. She calls into question the value of private labour, as it obscures, here, the symbol of the state's labour and military prowess.¹¹² The absurdism and amateurism of the project subverts standard hierarchies, rendering the tank impotent and laughable beneath this product of feminine, domestic labour.

Third Wave feminism owes its successes to decentralized, non-hierarchical power structures, open communication and community building, opportunities for self-

111 L.J. Roberts's particular works, such as *Mom Knows Now*, (2003) have become emblematic of public sphere knitting.

112 Pentney, “Feminism, Activism, and Knitting,” online.

identification and complex gender politics within the feminist movement. In *Girl Power*, Marisa Meltzer discusses the Riot Grrrl movement's media blackout¹¹³, and how its lack of centralized leadership was responsible for the publicly perceived failures of the movement. She writes that:

Being a Riot Grrrl was an inherently political act, and one could want to take part in the movement both for the feeling of belonging and for the activism. Punk rock has never purported to be about central stars, so showing any interest in the spotlight was frowned upon....¹¹⁴

While this may be true, particularly of the musical aspects of Riot Grrrl, these central tenants of self-identification, decentralized power, and communication and community building were what perpetuated both Riot Grrrl and craftivism in local, grassroots forms.

The advent of the Internet was a crucial, albeit *late*, acceleration of Riot Grrrl, Third Wave feminist, and craftivist community.¹¹⁵ The rise and accessibility of the Internet played a key role in the acceleration and longevity of Riot Grrrl, long after major media outlets had declared the movement dead. The Internet provided a platform, resource, and meeting ground for Riot Grrrls, as well as their DIY projects. The Internet provided an alternative to the zine, or perhaps an extension of it, as a platform for skill sharing and democratization. Given the rapid rise of the Internet Maker Movement (or IndieCraft), DIY's commodified cousin, several papers have addressed the ways in which the Internet was instrumental in crafting alternative commercial spaces, hobbyist and DIY groups, and open source skill sharing.¹¹⁶

113 The Riot Grrrl media blackout began in 1992, and never officially ended, as a response to the rampant co-opting and confusion in the media as to Riot Grrrl's philosophy and participants, as well as the media's tendencies to both infantilize and hyper-sexualize the movement as a whole. For a complete explanation, see Meltzer, *Girl Power*, 33.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ For more information on the growth of craft communities online, please refer to Pentney, "Feminism, Activism, and Knitting," and Carolyn Wei's "Formation of Norms in a Blog Community." For full citations, see bibliography.

¹¹⁶ Please see Bratich's "The Digital Touch: Craft-work as immaterial labour and ontological

In ceramics, the role of the Internet is not to be underestimated, either. While online ceramic communities have not received near the attention of fibre and textile communities, they likely emerged at the same time, comparing and sharing clay bodies, glaze recipes, firing strategies, and fabrication techniques on forums and in chat rooms. In more recent years, the performativity of ceramics has shifted to the Internet as the performative demonstration (made legendary by Voukos) has gone viral, fueled by Instagram, YouTube, Vine, and Periscope. These new technologies have broadened the audiences for these demonstrations and performances, growing exponentially by the year. Unfortunately, this thesis has neither the time nor space to fully explore the growth of ceramic communities online, but will briefly say that they similarly follow the timeline set forth by the authors examining DIY culture and the Internet, *and* that the performative ability of ceramics has expanded with Internet access.

Glenn Adamson attributes the popularity of DIY culture, IndieCraft, and craftivism to the Internet's ability to flatten and distribute the ideals of these movements instantaneously. "Paradoxically," he writes, "while craftivist art claims the political and aesthetic values of immediacy, materiality, and 'slow culture', it travels the world instantaneously – via blogs, websites, and email attachments"¹¹⁷ This, he concludes, is responsible for the "intellectual shorthand," that seems to dominate craftivist works like *Tank Cozy* or *We Can't Get In. We Can't Get Out* as pink yarn provides a simplistic symbol for feminism, female labour, and queer identity rolled into one. The true nature of

accumulation," Yair and Schwarz's "Making Value: Craft in Changing Times," Jakob's "Crafting your way out of the recession? New craft entrepreneurs and the global economic downturn," Krugh's "Joy in Labour: The politicization of craft from the Arts and Crafts Movement to Etsy," Bratich and Brush's "Fabricating Activism: Craft-work, Popular Culture, Gender," Hughes's "Gender, Craft Labour, and the Creative Sector," Duffy and Hund's "'Having It All' on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self-Branding Among Fashion Bloggers," and more, unmentioned. For full citations, see bibliography.

117 Glenn Adamson, "Directions and Displacements in Modern Craft," 26.

these works, he says, is in the image of these works, not in their process or materiality. I'll address this in chapter three, when I discuss dispersal methods of craftivist projects, but I find the Internet to be secondary to the experience of the work in *life*, while still quickly distributing its message and values. Might something be lost in translation? Yes, but something always is, and it could be that through these translations, we find ruptures and new opportunities for resistance. I am thinking now of ceramicist Aaron Nelson's works *Pixel* (2013) and *Chain(ge)* (2013), which uses QR codes and cell phones to quickly disseminate messages, or allows viewers worldwide to view, tweet at, and change the work physically in real time.¹¹⁸ Perhaps a “flattening” occurs between the works and the audience, or perhaps we can consider the ways in which craft communicates *beyond* materiality, beyond form. So much of our romantic notions of craft revolve around touch, and while the Internet and image-based sharing denies us that touch, it offers us an opportunity to consider the ways in which craft communicates without tactility.

The DIY movement of the late nineties and early aughts was a central influence for many young, ceramic makers that utilize craftivism. Nicole Gugliotti specifically points to this influence, saying: “in my [MFA] thesis, I actually focus a lot on the band, *Bikini Kill*, and *La Tigra*, and the way that they unite really serious political content with fun dance music, and what I feel like is a beautiful, fun, situation. So, for a long time, they were a huge inspiration to me.”¹¹⁹ The rethinking of craft labour and reconfiguring of craft “spaces” that became central in Riot Grrrl craft are central tenants in most, if not all, craftivist projects. Contemporary craftivism emerges as a method influenced by: the social turn and relational aesthetics; Third Wave feminism’s values and destabilizing of

118 Aaron Nelson, *Pixel*, 2013. Steel, rare earth magnets, repurposed Hycroft china, digitally printed decal.

Aaron Nelson, *Chain(ge)*, Porcelain, aluminum, digitally controlled LEDs.

119 Nicole Gugliotti, interview by author, January 31, 2016.

aesthetic hierarchies and; a contemporary anxiety about the state of the world made sharp by events like the fall of Communism, September 11, 2001, and the 2007/2008 economic crisis. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that the craft community would reflect the political urgency of such moments, given the clarity that such accelerated and globalizing moments can lend to craft.

Craft historian Paul Greenhalgh, timely in 2003, writes that, “whenever the industrial society appears to tip into an especially consumerist phase, real or imagined, and particularly when respected thinkers identify the age as decadent and greedy, craft and design are wont to reveal themselves as the forces of anti-Mammon.”¹²⁰ In addition to the politicization of craft by feminism, these particular historical moments demand a kind of contemplation and reflexivity of the citizen-subject, one uniquely accessed by the tactility, time-spent, and reflection inherent in craft-work.

Drawing on ceramics history of communal engagement from around the same time, the craft lineage of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is undeniable as we begin to look at craftivism *outside* of its accepted limits of feminist, fibre-based projects. The contemporary craftivist method is situated as a tool with a long history of political and performative craft, influenced by the world views of the late eighties and early aughts, and reframed through amateurism, DIY, and feminism, and propelled by the Internet. This method is one that can be and *has been* embraced by a variety of craft media, including ceramics, as we will look to in the next chapter.

120 Paul Greenhalgh, *The Persistence of Craft: The Applied Arts Today* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 9.

Chapter 4: Craftivist Ceramics (Interviews, Categories, Critiques)

This chapter explores the intricacies of the craftivist method in contemporary ceramics, looking to the opinions of makers, the categorizations of projects, and their critical impacts. This chapter seeks to explore the continued history of craftivist ceramics – as it draws influence from the performativity, social critique, and amateurishness of twentieth century ceramics, early craftivist projects like *Empty Bowls* and *Clay-A Healing Way*, and the impacts of both the feminist politics and DIY radicality of the Third Wave. This chapter will first, examine the identification and positionality of contemporary ceramicists working with the craftivist method from interviews conducted by the author in 2016. Then, I will examine different categories and trends in craftivist ceramics, looking at the *ways in which* clay and activism can enact and perform together. These categories, while flexible and combinable, serve to differentiate and critique different uses of the method. The categories are private, craft advocacy, illustrative, dialectical, performance, communal, and charitable. Finally, I will take a critical look at three, well-known craftivist works, in order to begin an analysis of the efficacy of craftivism. This analysis will continue in Chapter Five.

4a: Identifying as Craftivist

The ceramicists I interviewed were selected from the research I conducted on ceramic craftivism, and every attempt was made to interview nearly every ceramic maker mentioned here. Echoing the sentiments expressed by Buszek and Robertson in the *Special Issue: Craftivism of Utopian Studies*, the maker position is central to understandings of craftivism. Given the museological, critical, or scholarly hierarchical positionality of those *outside of* or looking at craftivism, there is often the potential for co-option, manipulation, or misrepresentation. In an effort to avoid that, as well as to

acknowledge makers' contributions to the existing status of craftivism, the efforts and opinions of ceramicists are central to this thesis. Given both the heavy studio practice of many of these makers, many were unable to conduct the interviews, however, I was able to interview eight makers, six over the phone, and two in a written interview. The interview process was overseen and approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at OCAD University. The questions asked, REB case number and approval, and interviewee consent forms are provided in Appendix A.

The unfamiliarity that these makers have with craftivism as method, or with one another as craftivists, rather than just ceramicists, brings me to an important impact of this research. Nearly every maker I interviewed asserted that until this interview, they *had not* identified as craftivist, but after our discussion, either considered themselves or their work to be craftivist in some way. This thesis is meant to be a resource for makers to identify their methods and colleagues as craftivist, for critics and historians to identify craftivist works, and in this recognition, to encourage critical investigation of the political potential of craft through both making and writing.

While self-identification is important to makers, it might matter less to critics, who are generally more concerned about the work produced than the maker's self-positionality. As a movement, craftivism was largely self-defined by makers, and writers who interviewed them. Greer, herself, in coining craftivism, came up with the term within a group of makers. As a method, however, self-identification is less central, as craftivism is a tool employed by self-identified artists and makers, potters and sculptors, ceramicists and ceramists. The goal of this writing is two-fold: to give voice to those makers utilizing craftivism, and to provide a resource of these voices for future critics, historians, and makers.

This is not, however, an attempt to dissuade makers from self-identifying in ways other than craftivist. I'll list some responses below that point to the flexibility of the craftivist label and the diversity of those utilizing the method. Again, the use of the method is flexible and reflexive, and can be used in a variety of media and motivations, regardless of the maker's self identification. I include these conversations, these examples, as an effort to first, give credence to the voices of makers in craft and second, to point to the disciplinary murkiness of craft, even in the simple act of *naming* oneself.

Paul Greenhalgh writes that:

Some makers and thinkers have revealed themselves unhappy with the nomenclature 'craftsperson'. Others have worn it with undisguised pride. Whether for or against it, however, most have professed an unsureness as to what exactly it means.... One can take possession of the word, latch on to any number of previous and partial definitions and develop an individualized philosophy, aesthetics, technology, ethnology or economy of craft. We can all hunt for clothing in this wardrobe of meanings and emerge dressed as the craftsperson of our choice. But there are grave disadvantages also in a signifier that has no stable significance.¹²¹

Just as with 'craftsperson,' 'craftivist' can be a contentious label, a shifting one, particularly as the etymology of craft grows continuously more nebulous. This thesis seeks to offer a new wardrobe option for those sifting through for a garment that fits. No, not all makers will come to identify as craftivist, nor should they. Instead, this thesis gives credence to those who choose to, or choose to make with the craftivist method specifically in mind. This thesis provides context for those makers, and for those writing about them.

Within the process of naming oneself, we must consider the positionalities of these makers, and the locations they straddle in their practice. The desire to call oneself an artist, maker, ceramist, ceramicist, craftivist, or any combination or alternative of these

121 Paul Greenhalgh, "The History of Craft," in *The Culture of Craft*, 20-21.

reflects the economic, social, and historical circumstances of craft.¹²² While Richard Notkin considers himself an artist, Carrie Reichardt moves fluidly between extreme craftivist, artist, and activist, changing several times during a single conversation.¹²³ These combinations, these 'clothes' can be switched, shifted, discarded, and reworn depending on the locale of the maker, depending on the economic, or historical advantages that this might bring.

Carrie Reichardt has been working with politically motivated craft (and art) for several decades which most recently takes the form of ceramic, mosaic murals and art objects, made from recycled tiles and plates as well as her own, handmade tiles, and had several thoughts on the word craftivist, as well as what differentiated her work from the works of other craftivist organizations like the London-based Craftivist Collective (which, coincidentally, does mostly fibre based projects). She says,

I usually call myself an extreme craftivist, because, you know, craftivism especially in the UK has been mainly defined by The Craftivist Collective, who have the do's and don'ts of craftivism, which, to be honest, I don't believe you can tell people how to be an activist. There are differences. You always know if a movement is growing if it has splinter groups. I don't believe in that. You know, politically not the same, me and Sarah. I know her, she's a good friend of mine, I admire and respect what she does, but I'm an anarchist. I don't believe in telling people how to be. I don't believe you can tell people they have to be polite, or they have to be this, or you have to quiet, or introverted. I believe that if you feel passionately about something and you want to do something, one of the best ways you can do anything is to turn it into a creative response, be it performance, be it music, be it art, be it craft, be it sewing...¹²⁴

Ehren Tool, a performative potter and Gulf War veteran, when asked about

122 I'd like to briefly address my decision to use the term "ceramicist" to describe those who work in clay, despite being corrected, politely, by a number of "ceramists" in the field. I have not found a definitive answer on the appropriateness of either, but have found both to be acceptable by a variety of respected makers and writers. Ceramicist is the most familiar to me, how I identify myself as a maker, and therefore will be used in this paper, with respect to those who call themselves "ceramists," "ceramic artists," or any other title.

123 Richard Notkin, interview by author, February 18, 2016.

Carrie Reichardt, interview by author, February 5, 2016.

124 Ibid.

craftivism, had a laugh, and then came back to his own self-identification, which, for him, is much more about the content of the work, than the media itself, thus eschewing the craft (and art label). When asked, “What do you call yourself?” Tool responded,

A mediocre potter.... One reason I don't call myself a potter is I don't want to offend “real potters,”” ya know, like, I went to Vietnam and made cups there, I went to Thailand and made cups there, and boy, those guys! They really know what they're doing... So yeah, potter, uh, artist. I don't know. I just make cups, you know. What's that make me? ...My wife calls my work, “war awareness work,” that's, I think, appropriate. I don't really care if you're for or against the war, but if you're ignorant of what's happening in your name? That's a little more offensive.¹²⁵

Interestingly, both Tool and Reichardt conflate their artistic identities with their political or activist ones, resisting the terms “craftivist” and “potter” for their negative connotations, but also in self-awareness of their own personal politics. This reflects the “method” of craftivism, rather than the use of the term as “identifier.” The method of craftivism allows for makers to identify in a variety of ways (often influenced by their personal politics) and still engage in activist tactics in their work.

Both Jeni Hansen Gard and Nicole Gugliotti are founding members of the Socially Engaged Craft Collective, a collective resource, blog, and maker profiles for those in “socially engaged craft.”¹²⁶ Hansen Gard, whose work typically consists of communal meals or shared experiences over handmade pottery, says:

When I think about the Socially Engaged Craft Collective, I don't think that everybody in that thinks that they are an activist. But, I think that it is actually, more connected than, maybe, meets the eye... I think that most people who are interested in social engagement are interested in it because they believe they can change something. I like the word, craftivism, actually.¹²⁷

Hansen Gard's conclusion to her musings on socially engaged craft reflect the responses

125 Ehren Tool, interview by author, February 3, 2016.

126 “About,” Socially Engaged Craft Collective, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://sociallyengagedcraftcollective.org/about-2/>.

127 Jeni Hansen Gard, interview by author, February 5, 2016.

of the other ceramicists, as they “arrive” at craftivism through the conversation.

Like Hansen Gard, Nicole Gugliotti was at once excited by the craftivist label, but hesitant to use it on herself, saying, “There's just a lot I don't know. So maybe I haven't called myself that, or wouldn't call myself that, but I like it?!” Still, Gugliotti says that contemporary ceramics is ripe for a renewed discussion around socially engaged work, relational aesthetics, and the communal aspects of ceramics. She says, “ I was like, “Hey! Hasn't craft always been relational?” If you take away this bullshit-Western lens, hasn't artwork always served a greater function to connect people? Whether it's being on a wall, or a ceremonial object, or a cup, or it's marquetry in a room, hasn't it always served a relational purpose?”¹²⁸ Connecting the relational positionality of ceramics with its potential to bring people together, to form community (perhaps for an activist cause) is central to craftivism and Gugliotti’s desire to situate it as such reflects a growing trend among younger ceramicists toward more social works.

Richard Notkin, an established ceramic artist who has spent his career wrestling with social critique, identifies strictly as an artist. He explains that his desire to work in ceramic is driven by the materiality of clay, rather than his self-identification as a potter or ceramicist.¹²⁹ Notkin pointed out that the willingness to engage with more social practice seems to be a trend among artists a generation younger, but credits his own and others of his generation's work on social critique or commentary with the precedent for critical and social engagement via clay.¹³⁰ Perhaps he's right, given the urgency and interconnectedness of the political climate post-1989. As Notkin and his contemporaries responded to issues of their time, the responses were art-based, statutory objects that

128 Nicole Gugliotti, interview by author, January 31, 2016.

129 Richard Notkin, interview by author, February 18, 2016.

130 Ibid.

would fall into the “Illustrative Resistance” category of craftivism that follows in this chapter, whereas younger makers were more inclined to social practice, performance, and distributed works following the social turn and the destabilization of art-hierarchies that helped cement the work of Notkin and his contemporaries.

Both Vipoo Srivilasa, organizer of *Clay for Nepal*, and Abby Silver, U.S. Manager for Potters for Peace, said that they don't consider their organizations to be craftivist, but Silver did consider her own, public arts and sculptures, to be craftivist. I will address the craftivist shortcomings of organizations later in this chapter.¹³¹

Given the broad range of responses, I do not see the self-identification of craftivists to be central to craftivist work. As a method, rather than a movement, craftivism doesn't require an adherence to a group philosophy or ideal but, rather, allows craftivist works to be constellated and diverse, to address a host of positionalities and motivations, to respond reflexively to specific injustices. This is not to say that craftivism (the word) isn't important, it is. This thesis seeks to facilitate the coming-together of disparate media in the craftivist method, in order to analyze it more fully and rigorously, necessarily complicating the context of the method. As Carrie Reichardt said, “Craftivism existed long before the word existed. It's just that giving something the lexicon of language, making it a word, enables people to come together.”¹³²

4b: Categorizing Craftivism

While craftivism often resists classification in craft or activist discourses, often as a result of its radical potential to move between and through boundaries, most of the craftivist projects in the scope of this thesis fall into certain categories. These categories –

131 Abby Silver, interview by author, February 16, 2016

Vipoo Srivilasa, interview by author, February 24, 2016.

132 Carrie Reichardt, interview by author, February 5, 2016.

private, craft advocacy, illustrative, dialectical, performative, communal, and charitable – are not intended to be limiting, but rather to explore the complexities of the craftivist method within various enactments. These categories serve to illuminate the frameworks in which craftivist projects partake, the ways in which they can meet and impact the world around them.

These categories are flexible and overlapping, most projects fit into more than one discernible category. These categories are not intended to draw divisions between makers and kinds of projects, but to better understand the potential of craftivism in different forms. The political potential of these projects depends on a variety of factors, the maker’s positionality, the community’s, the method of engagement, the tactility of the craft object... and so much more. In examining each individually, this chapter explores *how* certain iterations of the method function, and what the efficacy of each can be. In doing so, I hope to complicate and problematize craftivism as movement, illustrating fissures and cracks between makers superficially aligned in their craftivism, and illustrate the breadth, density, and muddiness of craftivism in the contemporary moment.

4b1: Private: Personal, Reflective, or Contemplative Craftivism

In her chapter, “Craftivist History,” in *Extra/Ordinary*, Betsy Greer writes that “[craftivism] was about using what you can to express your feelings outward in a visual manner without yelling or placard waving. It was about paying attention and not letting your anger consume you, it was about channeling that anger in a productive or even loving way.”¹³³ This, perhaps, is the most basic definition of craftivism, channeling activism intentions into productive or loving actions. Its impact can be as widespread as a national exhibition or a large community event, but can also be intimate, and personal, as

133 Greer, “Craftivist History,” 183.

anger around injustice is transformed through the productive, often meditative, processes of craft. This form of the craftivist method can be small, individual and intimate, and still engage with the maker's activism.

When we consider activism, we often ascribe to a belief that to be political is to be public. Hannah Arendt's definition of the political (still held to be a dominant belief in mainstream discourse) is any action performed in public.¹³⁴ Johanna Hedva takes issue with this, in her recently published, "Sick Woman Theory," writing that, "if being present in public is what is required to be political, then whole swathes of the population can be deemed a-political -- simply because they are not physically able to get their bodies into the street."¹³⁵ Hedva continues to disrupt the binary between public and private, and the assumption that private space is somehow not political, or that public space is fully accessible or somehow free of networks of power, when we know this to be untrue. She concludes that the "Sick Woman Theory is an insistence that most modes of political protest are internalized, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible," and while reflective, personal, or private craftivism does not necessarily reflect illness, fragility, or oppression, it reflects the necessity of considering private actions to be activist ones.¹³⁶ Similarly, craftivism makes activism *accessible*, although this shifts between media, availability, and the maker themselves. In her essay, "Don't Get Angry, Get Cross-Stitch," Jamie Chalmers writes that, "traditional forms of political activism can be overwhelming, and for many people they're simply not feasible."¹³⁷ The accessibility of craft allows transforms "political power into something more manageable."¹³⁸

134 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

135 Johanna Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory," *Mask*, January 2016, <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>.

136 Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory."

137 Jamie Chalmers, "Don't Get Angry, Get Cross-Stitch!" in *Craftivism*, 38.

138 Ibid.

Private craftivism, or craftivism that takes place *outside of* or *beyond* the public sphere, can be as simple as meditating on the state of the world, or escaping it for your health, through craft practices. Private craftivism resists commodification of both the object and labour, as private craftivism is personal and may not generate a “product” for sale, much like the works of Riot Grrrls and Third Wave makers. Private craftivism resists the ableist politics of activism, performing resistance for the self, unseen and unheard, although the accessibility and privilege of the ceramic media might undermine this. Private craftivism was a central tenant of many early craftivist writings, but was often generalized as a “feel-good” sentiment which minimizes the political potency of such an act. Even when practiced with others, private craftivism can facilitate dialogue, kinship, and community through shared aims and frustration. Hedva writes, “The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself... To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care.”¹³⁹

While one could describe the practices of several makers that constitute private craftivism, this facet of craftivism defies example and definition, but rather serves as both a private and contemplative arena for personal craftivism *and* is the common starting-place for both craftivist makers and projects. In an interview with Sabrina Gschwandtner for *American Craft* magazine, Faythe Levine said, “I believe the simple act of making something, anything, with your hands is a quiet political ripple in a world dominated by mass production...and people choosing to making something themselves will turn those small ripples into giant waves.”¹⁴⁰ We can consider private craftivism to be valid activism, and to be a common starting point for many of the makers that follow.

139 Hedva, “Sick Woman Theory,” online.

140 Faythe Levine, “Craft: Embracing Empowerment and Equality,” in *Craftivism*, 58.

4b2: For Craft's Sake

Many craftivist projects refer back to craft as the subject of their activism, such as Michael J. Strand's *artStimulus* projects (2010, 2011, 2013) or Gabriel Craig's *Pro Bono Jeweler* (2007). Making the visibility of craft practices central, these projects are often performative and public in nature. While craftivism for craft's sake may seem indulgent, insular, and self-congratulatory, I would argue that the performance and visibility of craft can be an activist position; given the marginalization of craft practices, from the gendered situatedness of fibre and textile crafts or merely the marginalization of craft in the face of art and industry, the positionality of craft is both political and disruptive. In performing or "making-visible" craft practices, these makers assert their own agency and relevance in a world that seems content to merely share their efforts via the Internet, or ignore them all together. While the Internet may be a "public space" that performative craftivism occupies, the impact of an interpersonal exchange with craft is used for immediate impact by the following makers. By taking craft to the streets, similar to the public craft of Riot Grrrl, these makers challenge the erasure of the maker in industrial production, forcing the public, consumers, to become aware of making practices for both positivist and critical reasons.

Gabriel Craig, a jeweller, metalsmith, and craft activist, is one of the most obvious examples of craftivism for craft's sake and I find it necessary to include him here for his several performance works that specifically advocate for the visibility of craft. In 2007, Craig began the *The Collegiate Jeweler* performance series in Richmond, Virginia. Since then, Craig has changed the name of the performance series to *The Pro Bono Jeweler*, and has performed in streets across the U.S..¹⁴¹ The performance follows a

141 Gabriel Craig, "The Pro Bono Jeweler," Gabriel Craig Website, accessed March 21, 2016,

relatively simply format of setting up his jewelers bench and tools in a public space and engaging the public in a discussion about jewellery, craft, and the handmade, trading a handmade piece (usually a ring) for their participation. This work resists the commodification of both Craig's time and labour, and gives value, instead to the cultural experience of jewellery and the dialogue between participant and maker.¹⁴²

Similar arguments could be made for a Toronto-based project, *Pedal Power* by Danica Drago in Toronto, Ontario, wherein Drago built a participatory potter's wheel, powered by a stationary bike and audience member.¹⁴³ The process of throwing a ceramic form on the wheel becomes collaborative as Drago controls the form, but the cyclist controls the speed of the wheel. By taking process of throwing into the public, as well as involving audience members, Drago advocates for the visibility of both the ceramicist and ceramic object.

Similarly, the work of Michael J. Strand cannot be understated in the history of ceramic craftivism. Strand, a professor at the University of Fargo, creates nationally recognized projects that typically use cups as a form of exchange, either for dialogue and community, like in his multiple iterations of *artStimulus* (2010 Dwight, ND; 2011 Red Lodge, MT; 2013 Dwight, KS), which involves delivering handmade cups to residents with small notes of greeting and positivity attached.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, the *Cuplomacy - U.S. Senate* project (2014), and the *MisfitCup Liberation* project (2012), facilitated exchange through cups.¹⁴⁵ These works, particularly the *artStimulus* series, focus on the visibility of

<http://gabrielcraigmetalsmith.com/index.php/projects/the-pro-bono-jeweler/>.

142 Ibid.

143 Maya Wilson-Sanchez, "Design + Community," *Xspace Cultural Centre*, accessed March 21, 2016, http://www.xspace.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2016Essay_DesignCommunity_01.2016.pdf.

144 Michael J. Strand, "artStimulus," Michael J. Strand Website, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.michaeljstrand.com/#!artstimulus>.

145 Michael J. Strand, "Cuplomacy – U.S. Senate 2014-15," Michael J. Strand Website, accessed

craft in community, helping to create and enact community through the use of a handmade object. Strand's other projects, like *Cuplomacy* and *Cupumenical* (2011), engage with other discourses (politics and religion, respectively), through a handmade object and move *beyond* the craftivism for craft's sake method, using the object as an initial mechanism to spur further dialogue.¹⁴⁶

Craftivism for craft's sake is also seen through the work of indigenous, First Nation, and aboriginal craft workers. The continued practice of traditional crafts often asserts a marginalized (or minority) identity in a dominant culture. The resistance to cultural decline, or cultural assimilation, through preservation, assertion, and distribution of craft aesthetics and practices, can come from economic or artistic motivations. Work made by indigenous artists often affirms dominant cultural standards through its traditional practices and aesthetics, imbuing it with "good craft values" and the romance of disappearing techniques; values that equate to collectability.¹⁴⁷ These kinds of works exist in a complex relationship with dominant culture, particularly as some artists deliberately engage with the contemporaneity of their positionality. Some work, like that of Carolyn Concho, embraces the traditional aesthetics and techniques, producing incredibly intricate works that communicate with long lineage of potters, "steer[ing] a careful path through the traditional and innovative," as she uses both traditional imagery, but fires in a modern, electric kiln.¹⁴⁸

Similarly the works of Robyne Latham, a Yamatji woman from Western

March 21, 2016, <http://www.michaeljstrand.com/#!/cuplomacy---us-senate>.

Michael J. Strand, "Misfit Cup Liberation Project," Michael J. Strand Website, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.michaeljstrand.com/#!/misfitcup-liberation>.

146 Michael J. Strand, "Cupumenical-2011-present," Michael J. Strand Website, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.michaeljstrand.com/#!/cupumenical>.

147 Moira Vincentelli, "Clashing with Clay Mother: Pueblo potters who subvert the tradition," *Interpreting Ceramics* 15 (2013). <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue015/articles/02.htm>.

148 Ibid.

Australia, explore the historic trauma of the lynching of Aboriginal men through ceramic sculptures (*PODS3* 2014), using traditional and non-traditional methods and sacred plants in the saggar firing process.¹⁴⁹ Anita Fields, a member of the Osage Nation, uses traditional imagery in non-traditional forms, using clay to make sculptures of dresses, clothing and moccasins rather than pots.¹⁵⁰

Diego Romero, an artist and potter with mixed Anglo and Cochiti Pueblo descent, makes bowls and figurines that effectively subvert the expectations of Pueblo pottery from a dominant position by mixing Pueblo techniques and aesthetics with imagery and styles from different cultures, from ancient Greece to comic books.¹⁵¹ His works, with irony and humor, confront the realities of his position, “instead of the sentimentalized revival ware that dominates the Native art market,” depicting issues that face his community such as poverty, unemployment, single-parent households, cultural resilience, AIDS, substance abuse, and more.¹⁵² This work advocates for visibility, not only for indigenous pottery, but for its makers and communities as well. It is through craftivism, through a subversion of dominant ideologies and economies that the contemporary practices and complex issues of these makers come to the fore.

4b3: Illustrative Resistance

Perhaps the oldest form of the craftivist method, the “illustrative resistance” method of craftivism uses the craft object as both surface and subject to depict

149 “Robyne Latham,” Shepparton Art Museum, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.sheppartonartmuseum.com.au/icaa-gallery-item/!/303/item/10>

150 Denise Neil-Binion, “Anita Fields: NY.O.KA^SKA WA.K'O Y.NA WA.KA.XE VKY,” *First American Art Magazine* No. 0 Pilot Issue (Spring 2013): 19.

https://issuu.com/firstamericanartmagazine/docs/faam0_complete/20

151 Ibid.

152 “Diego Romero,” Clark + Delvecchio, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.garthclark.com/Artist-Info.cfm?ArtistsID=87>.

marginalized, activist, or political perspectives.¹⁵³ The craft object's semi-autonomy is what gives this method its potency, as the ceramic vessel is able to traverse the line between life and not-life. By this, I mean that the object is still semi-autonomous, capable of being separate enough from life to comment upon it, but still partaking in the experience of life praxis. Since antiquity, pots have been used as a surface to communicate narrative, political, religious, and otherwise. This narrative element is seen widely in other craft media, but the specific potency of pots lies in their use, or use potential. In ceramic sculpture, illustrative resistance refers to both the history of the narrative vessel, as well as the narrative and political potential of the sign "ceramic" but also "art" proper, as sculpture often avoids or resists the marginalization of the craft stigma.

In the "illustrative resistance" method of craftivism, makers use the form of the pot, or sculpture, as a surface on which resistance or activism is played out. The forms of these works carry political connotations as well, as craft objects with semi-autonomy, rendering them charged with activism in both form and decoration. The field of "illustrative resistance" craftivism in ceramics is broad and rich, but I wish to focus on two trends that have emerged within the scope of this thesis, the use of craftivism in ceramics to depict queer and decolonizing narratives.

Take, for example, a 2014 exhibition, curated by Robin Metcalfe, at the Gardiner Museum in Toronto of the work of Léopold L. Foulem, Richard Milette, and Paul Mathieu, entitled *Camp Fires: The Queer Baroque of Léopold L. Foulem, Paul Mathieu,*

¹⁵³ Richard T. Neer, *Style and Politics in Athenian Vase-painting: The Craft of Democracy, Ca. 530-460 B.C.E.*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Richard Milette.¹⁵⁴ While Metcalfe's curatorial statement (and much of the exhibition literature) focused on Susan Sontag's definition of "Camp,"¹⁵⁵ much of the work utilizes the uncanny as a tool of affect, with particular attention to the aforementioned criteria of the notions of familiarity/unfamiliarity and the hidden come to light, particularly in terms of a queer sensibility.¹⁵⁶ Each of these three artists refers to the history of ceramics, through the use of historic and familiar forms (often domestic) and decorative styles, such as kitsch figurines, figurative sculpture, or historically based pottery forms. This familiarity of form, however, is quickly displaced through subversive, often shocking imagery and decoration, revealing an uncanny effect in the work. Furthermore, by emphasizing issues of queerness, each of the works "reveals" something that can be seen as "hidden" by the dominant, patriarchal discourse.

Richard Milette exhibited a series of sculptures, which appear, at first glance, to be Greek Hydria vases with broken surfaces, almost more fitting to a historical or anthropological display than an art exhibition. While *any* of the works selected would suit for an example of illustrative resistance, I choose Milette's work for its specific use of ceramic tropes and forms, which function as the familiar "home-ness" of the uncanny, and are effectively subverted with Milette's subject matter. Elaborately and elegantly crafted, these works carry a history of craftsmanship and decoration that refers to Greco-Roman pottery through Milette's use of an appropriated form and subsequent historical

154 "Camp Fires: The Queer Baroque of Léopold L. Foulem, Paul Mathieu, Richard Milette," The Gardiner Museum, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://www.gardinermuseum.on.ca/exhibition/camp-fires>.

155 Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Picador, 2001), 275-292.

156 Following Freud's definition of uncanny as "unheimlich," as a subversion, turning, or rejection of "heimlich," which can come to suggest both notions of home, and that which is kept away. The implications of such can be read as a critique or affecting of cisheteronormative relationships or frameworks. For a further examination of the queer uncanny in ceramics, please see: Mary C. Baumstark, "Queer Craftivism," *bone dry bodies*, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://bonedrybodies.weebly.com/blog/queer-craftivism>.

colour scheme. On closer examination, however, these vases are cracked and covered in contemporary imagery and text, such as an image of Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* (*Hydria 13-3462 with Gold Marilyn Monroe* (1988)) and phrases like "L-O-V-E" in a four by four grid (*Hydria 13-6189 with Love* (1990)). Two such vases, eponymously reading "FUCK" and "HOMO,"¹⁵⁷ force the viewer to reconcile a work that is, at once, a familiar form with its unfamiliar and disconcerting surface. The uncanny turn, therefore takes place as an affective moment when the viewer registers that this pot is *not* Greco-Roman despite its form, but in fact exhibits contemporary, queer, and arguably offensive surface decoration. Through the use of the uncanny, Milette is able to effectively subvert and queer the discourse of ceramics, inserting the personal and political into "inter-related notions of mastery, authenticity, monumentality, and purity."¹⁵⁸ As the work transgresses historical tropes, it engages in various forms of resistance through the inclusion of a queer narrative juxtaposed with a tradition form, forcing the inclusion of the queer object into museological considerations.

While the *Camp Fires* exhibition is the largest one of queer ceramics to date, less established artists are using the craftivist method to combat cisheteropatriarchy in a variety of exhibitions. Northern Clay Center's 2015 exhibition *Sexual Politics: Gender, Sexuality, and Queerness in Contemporary Ceramics* included works that queer the ceramic discourse from Ron Geibel, Dustin Yager, Jeremy Brooks (whose work queering narratives on plates was in the 2015 NCECA Biennial as well), Mark Burns, Kathy King, and Christina West. In San Francisco in 2015, the exhibition *Rad(ical) Fun(ctions)* featured "Nicki Green and Caitlin Rose Sweet [who] are "too gay to function" and use their queer failure as a starting point to sculpt objects to serve queer bodies, genders,

157 Richard Milette, *Hydria 13-6996 with Homo* and *Hydria 13-2469 with Fuck*, 1994.

158 Paul Matheiu, "Giving Meaning," in *Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics*, 82.

hirstories, and futures.”¹⁵⁹

Roberto Lugo has found mild acclaim in the last few years, after a groundbreaking exhibition with juvenile incarceration photographer, Richard Ross.¹⁶⁰ At that exhibition, *Juveniles-In-Justice* (2013), the proceeds from both Ross and Lugo’s works contributed to a record expungement clinic for juveniles in the criminal justice system.¹⁶¹ Lugo’s way of working is deeply decolonizing, as he uses both the materials and methods of traditional, European porcelain, using Worcester Porcelain and construction techniques learned in Hungary.¹⁶² His pots appear to be decadent, opulent objects, almost belonging to the Baroque or Rococo period, if not for their subject matter. Lugo subverts these European aesthetic and material norms by decorating his works with graffiti aesthetics, hip hop references, and continually featuring non-white subjects in spaces typically reserved for aristocratic, European faces.

Lugo calls himself a “ghetto potter” in opposition to the ceramic trope of “village potter,” using ghetto to refer to his resourcefulness.¹⁶³ His projects include social practice projects of creating ceramic, mosaic murals to commemorate victims of street violence, and exhibitions like the one with Richard Ross. But he is most known for his spoken word and video projects as well as his functional and decorative work.

Lugo's works carry complex and challenging notions of identity, as seen in *Crips*

¹⁵⁹ “RAD(ical) FUN(ctions),” *SFWeekly*, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.sfweekly.com/sanfrancisco/radical-functions/Event?oid=4286325>

¹⁶⁰ Michael Mechanic, “Wine, Cheese, and Lawyers to Help You Clean Up Your Rap Sheet,” *Mother Jones*, December 2, 2013, accessed April 16, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/media/2013/12/richard-ross-roberto-lugo-mat-tomezsko-philadelphia-art-exhibit-expungement>

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Blair Schulman, “Roberto Lugo: Not Fearing the Message,” *Ceramics: Art and Perception* 98 (2014): 48.

¹⁶³ From WatchNCECA, “Roberto Lugo, NCECA Emerging Artist,” filmed March 2015. YouTube video, 15:00. Posted March 30, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xB24yj1xqCc>.

Teapot: Me and Snoop Dogg (no date given, roughly 2013), an ornate and elaborately decorated large “tea pot” even though the form suggests more of a pitcher or coffee pot. This lavish pot, with its fluted foot, gilded handle, and opulent lid is, like much of Lugo’s work, made from a European porcelain, china paint, and lustre. The profile of the pot shows a blue bandanna pattern that covers the spout, immediately recognizable with the scarcity of pattern and paisley shape even though the same blue is used throughout the teapot in more abstracted, decorative patterns. On one side (the left if looking directly at the spout), Lugo has included a self-portrait, wearing a similar blue bandanna and framed by rich swirls of gold luster. On the reverse is the rapper Snoop Dogg, framed in a similar fashion. This pot illustrates the kinds of complex and visible identities that Cornell West demands for a ‘difference’ of representation.¹⁶⁴ By placing notable gang signs and symbols, next to his own self-portrait, next to Snoop Dogg, Lugo is combining disparate identities of non-white subjects into a single, beautifully luxe object. In doing so, Lugo questions the perceptions of non-white bodies, the kinds of symbols we associate with them, and the juxtaposition of those signs and symbols on an object with a deeply embedded colonial way of being seen. Lugo questions who we expected to see on the side of his pots, and why we were shocked when those expectations were thwarted.

The craft position allows a specific kind of engagement with issues like race and representation, especially in a gallery setting, but also in a domestic one, as these pots have a networked ability to move between spaces. Lugo’s work inserts specific identities into culture, through ceramic production. His resistance of dominant representation, and colonizing aesthetics participate in a productive mode of activism, which creates culture

164 Cornell West, "The New Politics of Cultural Difference" in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

while still critiquing the dominant hegemonic structures.

Illustrative resistance might be, well, one of the most immediately accessible forms of craftivism. This is craft that engages in resistance in its methods of making, in its surface, in its depictions of new narrative. This kind of resistance is not “active” in the sense that we typically associate with activism, but productively builds culture and material culture in a resistive mode. It is only as flexible and sustainable as the maker themselves, but these objects, in their craftivist state, have the potential to move between institutions, schools, collections, and homes, lending themselves to a sort of craftivist distribution network. The semi-autonomy of the craft object is most felt here, as it simultaneously critiques culture and participates within it, allowing for more diverse representation of marginalized voices finding affinities in craft.

4b4: Dialectical Craftivism

The dialectical use of craftivism relies on a craft object’s novelty in the public setting, as something that is inherently domestic, detailed, unique, or just “out of place,” and uses the object as a means to spur further dialogue, engage in questions, or merely interrupt the public by forcing them to reconcile the “out of place” craft object. Dialectical craftivism may be, like private craftivism, the root of most craftivist projects, but several makers interviewed, like Gugliotti, Notkin, Hansen Gard, and Reichardt, stated that the *purpose* of their craftivist works was to inspire dialogue between participants, or between the participants and themselves.

Nicole Gugliotti’s work uses the gallery space to her advantage, embracing rather than resisting museological and gallery spaces, installing organic and intricate ceramic speakers in the space. Gugliotti’s MFA thesis exhibition *awe/agency* consisted of handmade, ceramic speakers in a gallery space that produced oral stories of abortion

patients. The speakers in *awe/agency* are biomorphic and “sweet,” as she says, and meant to reflect traditional expectations of craftsmanship and beauty in the gallery.¹⁶⁵ Upon closer inspection, or relative proximity, the viewer is surrounded by recorded stories of positive experiences with abortion, exposing them to a marginalized narrative outside the dominant dichotomy and erasure of patients. The work almost engages the viewer in a dialogue, speaking to them about a subject that almost demands a response. If viewers don’t respond to the objects, certainly they respond to one another, as the space accommodates several participants at once. Using the expectations of the gallery, Gugliotti is able to facilitate dialogue about a taboo subject.

Likewise, Gugliotti’s choice of location for the *STD Cups* reflected a desire to create dialogue, as patrons of a local bar used the cups, and facilitated conversations all around. Although Gugliotti had invited her peers (those in the arts), her strongest recollection of the event centered about three “dude bros,” who entered the bar later in the night.¹⁶⁶ After agreeing to partake in the project, Gugliotti was surprised by the amount of dialogue that these men drew from the cups. She says, “Pretty cool conversations were happening. People were talking about anatomy... they were talking about pap smears... There was peer-to-peer education happening.” Initiated by the cups, typical bar conversation turned toward personal health, as the cups facilitated conversations around STI testing, reproductive health, and relationships.

Dialectical craftivism intersects with other kinds of craftivism, as both the communicative ability of the object, and the necessity of communication within activism are brought forward by artistic actions and practice. These works seek to create questions and dialogue, although more successful ones facilitate that in a specific way. Rather than

¹⁶⁵ Nicole Gugliotti, interview by author, February 3, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

seek to just raise awareness, these projects carefully consider their location and methods of audience engagement in order to facilitate impactful dialogue.

4b5: Performative Craftivism

Performativity is arguably one of the most common iterations of the craftivist method. In recent years, there has been a trend in craft exhibition of performance and process, at the hand of the maker. In her essay “Craft Performs,” Namita Gupta Wiggers addresses both the cultural connotations of craft performance and its impact in contemporary craft exhibition. Using the example of a pottery demo at a local “maker faire,” Wiggers describes the “feedback loop” formed in the public’s mind, watching a potter perform an action that they use daily, in their studio.¹⁶⁷ If a mug is purchased, as a result of watching this demo, it becomes both an object in use, and a memorializing object of the potter’s performance, a kind of “behind-the-scenes,” look at craft that the owner is reminded of every time they use that mug or bowl. While this visibility could be considered, “craftivism for craft’s sake,” I suggest that the performative impulse does more than simply “make visible” crafting practices, but challenges cultural connotations of craft. Performative craft shifts objects from their being, to their doing, emphasizing the different phases of an object, different states of embodied being for both maker and craft, forcing us to reconcile the practice of craft with its physical, historical, material, and cultural histories. A performative craft object is an object with context, not loosed into the world, but specific to the positionality of the maker and its creation.¹⁶⁸

The work of Theaster Gates and his performances around pottery draw attention to first, the marginalized position of ceramics in museological institutions, but also to the racialized divide in contemporary ceramics. Many of his works, such as his 2009

167 Namita Gupta Wiggers, “Craft Performs,” 28.

168 Ibid., 29.

performance, *Resurrecting Dave*, address the institutional whitewashing of culture, and the erasure of black craftsman, like Dave the Potter, one of the “few African American craftsmen from the past whose name has survived throughout history.”¹⁶⁹ Invoking Dave’s name (an incomplete one) with his own, and simultaneously conflating these identities with Japanese craftsmen of the Mingei tradition, Theaster draws attention to the difference between an anonymous, romanticized, folk potter (the “Unknown Craftsman”) and the work of an unknown slave. Gupta-Wiggers writes that:

Gates’s ‘co-location- calls attention to the richness of the embodied experiences of the performance of craft as history, as he draws sound, the physical presence of the body, ethnicity, and globalization (how many other unknown craftspeople are there?) into a new conversation. He challenges us to reexamine not only historical village reenactments but also the history of race (the ‘Black Question’ versus the ‘Yellow Question’) and the humanistic and cultural value that we place upon craft objects and those who make them.¹⁷⁰

Theaster’s work confronts these injustices, but also extends beyond them as his practice as a urban planner. Gates has, in recent years, become an art world celebrity of Kanye-esque proportions. His use of his own celebrity can be considered an extension of the performativity of his work, leveraging his visibility and popularity against commerce, to raise money for his various projects. While much of his work may not be considered craftivism, his positionality with craft and pottery informs several of his projects and their efficacy, leveraging his own embodied experience against the cultural and historical weight of pottery itself. *Resurrecting Dave* and his 2010 performative work, *A Good Whitewashing*, both explore the activist position of the craftsman in relation to the field of ceramics, interrupting the spaces he occupies to reveal discrepancies, contradictions, and juxtapositions within the field itself.

169 Ibid., 29.

170 Ibid., 32.

4b6: Communal Craftivism

In communal craftivism, the coming-together of disparate bodies is central, an enactment of the “shared values” of Loong Wong’s activism. While communal craftivism is often conflated with social practice, or socially engaged craft (and these connections are not to be ignored), or the bringing together of community for a social justice cause is a political act. Returning to Hannah Arendt’s definition of political as public, while problematic, we can see that the kinds of coming-togethers facilitated by craftivism are often playful, spontaneous, and encourage the kinds of communal care that the Sick Woman Theory encourages. Arendt writes that, “society expects from its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous or outstanding achievement.”¹⁷¹ Craftivist works that encourage communal gatherings between diverse individuals often result in monetary support for community members (as in *Empty Bowls*), emotional support or empathy (as in *Plants for Patients*), but can also result in positive experiences that force participants to engage with food security issues, or local history.

Ayumi Horie and Elise Pepple’s ongoing project, *Portland Brick* (2014-present) facilitates community by memorializing the histories, memories, and wishes of the India St neighborhood in Portland, ME with inlaid, brick monuments that begin with “ON THIS SPOT...”, and celebrate the mundane and less-than-famous among them. Pepple and Horie’s intention is to create an inclusive, pluralist series of monuments that makes “intangible memories of place,” tangible through stamped and installed bricks containing anecdotes like “On this spot in 1978 Jeff laid eyes on his wife for the first time,” or “On

171 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 45.

this spot in 1872 the first Jewish wedding took place in Portland, Maine.”¹⁷² This project takes the mundanity of brick, its permanence and utility, and transforms it to reflect the diversity of the community it serves, bringing together in monument the ordinary people who live and work in the neighborhood. United in these constellated, average yet significant memory-markers, the community extends beyond their temporal frame, leaving their mark for years to come. The nature of brickwork brings together memory and history into the very bones of the community, as they line streets and sidewalks. The *Portland Brick* project additionally performs tours, bringing community members together as a group to tour their neighborhood and experience it anew, as the bricks reflect events typically deemed too insignificant to memorialize. In a 2015, Portland Brick blog post, Elsie Pepple wrote, “In a meeting with The Portland Public Art Committee last week, I told them the truth: we don’t just want people to love the city more, we want people to love each other more, too. Our tactic is to try to personify the city literally, to put the stories of its people in its architecture.” The bricks disrupt their surroundings with intimacy, inserting a diverse, personal narrative into a public space that typically celebrates the heroism of (let’s face it) white men.¹⁷³

While the gathering of individuals, and the disruption of typical uses of public

172 Elise Pepple, “Drink Up,” *Portland Brick*, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://portlandbrick.org/drink-up/>.

173 A similar project in Campbell Town, Australia is committed to exploring the stories of some 200,000 convicts that were transported to Australia after 1788. The first brick was laid in 2003. Convict Brick Trail” via “Convict Brick Trail,” Northern Midlands Council. Accessed March 15, 2016, http://www.northernmidlands.tas.gov.au/page/Page.aspx?Page_Id=345. Similarly, the 1993 work *2146 Stones – Monument against Racism*, addressed racism and the erasure of Jewish people in Germany during the second world war as artist Jochen Gerz’s replace the pavers outside of Saarbrücken Palace with new stones that had the names of Jewish cemeteries on them. The work was carried out in secret and retroactively “made visible.” From Mark Callaghan, “Speak Out: Invisible Past, Invisible Future: A German’s alternative response to the Holocaust,” *Art Times* (October 2010): online, http://www.arttimesjournal.com/speakout/Nov_Dec_10_Callaghan%20/Nov_Dec_10_Callaghan.html.

space through craftivism (like a *Clay Stomp*, or a *Portland Brick*) are, in fact, political and activist actions, most “communal craftivist” projects, and their makers, seem more comfortable with the label “socially engaged,” or “social practice.” This reflects a growing trend in Western studio art and craft, in MFA programs and “social” engagement exhibitions. Re-situating craftivism *as* social practice, or even *adjacent to* it shifts our discussion to “relational practice/aesthetics,” defined by *Relational Aesthetics* curator Nicholas Bourriaud as cultural practices “that takes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interactions and its social context.” In this way, projects become “a space in social relations which, although it fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, suggests possibilities for exchanges other than those that prevail within the system.”¹⁷⁴ While contemporary ceramics, and craftivist ceramics, can often be considered relational aesthetics, the subject of this thesis is craftivism specifically, arguably a branch of relational aesthetics within the craft position with activist (on varying scales) aims.

These two methods (or concepts) are not at odds with one another, or mutually exclusive, but rather the practices of relational aesthetics open up opportunities for craftivist tactics. Amy Gogarty, in her essay, “Relational Ceramics,” argues that functional pottery may, in fact, be the perfect ground for relational aesthetics. She writes that:

While generally considered outside the exalted circle of fine art, functional ceramics create exemplary models of sociability, which by their very nature “prompt” intersubjective relations. Functional ceramics resist exhibition on plinths the “white cube of the gallery; they operate most effectively in rituals of eating, drinking, and commensal exchange.... Participation, performance, and dispersal, so characteristic of work by artists identified with relational aesthetics, are also central to functional ceramics in that they define the very concept of

174 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, (Dijon: Presses Du Reel, 2002), 11.

functionality.¹⁷⁵

Jeni Hansen Gard's works *Community Table* (2014) and *Partake Columbus* (2014) examine and utilize the "intersubjective" relations prompted by functional pottery, using methods of performance (in eating), dispersal (in sharing and giving away dish sets), and participation (in communal meals).¹⁷⁶ These works facilitate community, but also, in the repetitive and documented use of the pots, force their users to reflect on their food, its origins, production, ethical and health benefits or detriments. Hansen Gard uses both written and photo documentation to provide a sort of "testimony" from the users of her pots, on the kinds of changes they *experienced* in the use and function of handmade pottery.

Craft, as a position, is an approachable one. Relatable on nearly every level, from domestic object to hobby to luxury good to studio practice, craft has multiple and diverse entry points. Faythe Levine, author and director of "Handmade Nation: The Rise of D.I.Y. Art, Craft, and Design," writes that, upon discovering the approachability of craft:

I realized I found the perfect way to connect with people. You can bring up the word 'craft' with anyone and make a personal connection... I took advantage of this and embraced craft as my voice, my way to reach out and form relationships. Reaching out to those around us builds community; making ourselves approachable and open to new things allows friendships to develop.¹⁷⁷

4b7: Philanthropic and Charitable Craftivism

Arguably philanthropic or charitable craftivism partakes in systems that are not inherently activist and are distanced (somewhat) from the craft position. The use of this method is found in both the organization of craft-based auctions, headed by makers, in

175 Amy Gogarty, "Relational Ceramics," *Craft Journal* Vol 1:2 (Winter 2008): 54.

176 Jeni Hansen Gard, "Partake Columbus," Jeni Hansen Gard Website, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://jenihansengard.weebly.com/partake-columbus.html>.

177 Levine, "Craft: Embracing Empowerment and Equality," in *Craftivism*, 53.

order to raise funds for victims of natural disasters or other trauma, *or* in the use of craft technologies to provide clean water to developing communities. Both of these types of organizations rely on the commodification of the craft object for their capital, but the use of the funds, as either donation or investment, resists some elements of late capitalism and partakes in others. The *activism* of these craftivist project exists in the communal support for the causes, the donation of ceramic objects by makers, and, ideally, in the combatance of social inequity around basic resources like clean water. While activist intention can be found here, the distribution of funds and organizational nature of these projects, as opposed to artistic, makes it difficult to wholly classify them as craftivist. Indeed, when asked, Abby Silver (U.S. director of Potters for Peace) and Vipoo Srivilasa (Organizer of Clay for Nepal), both responded that they do not consider the organizations to be craftivist in nature.¹⁷⁸ Given the contention here, I'd like to briefly explore the craftivist potential of such projects (likening them to the craftivism of Empty Bowls) and the limitations of charitable craft.

Projects such as Ayumi Horie's *Handmade for Japan* or *Obamaware*, or Vipoo Srivilasa's *Clay for Nepal* called for donations from ceramic makers to be auctioned, the proceeds of such to benefit a charitable cause; the relief and rebuilding of Eastern Japan, the grassroots campaign efforts of Obama's 2008 presidential run, and the relief and rebuilding of Nepal. While the intentions of the organizers are certainly commendable, I have doubts that they are, indeed craftivist. These organized auctions come recommended by ceramicists when asked about craftivist projects, particularly on craft forums online.¹⁷⁹

178 Abby Silver, interview by author, February 16, 2016.

Vipoo Srivilasa, interview by author, February 24, 2016.

179 Mary C. Baumstark, "Mary CB's post in Critical Craft Forum (Facebook Group) on March 19, 2015," Critical Craft Forum Facebook Page, accessed March 10, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/310882667610/permalink/10152673358087611/>.

They share elements of successful craftivist projects, a concern for social justice, social relief, and the bringing together of spontaneous community in order to raise awareness. But these projects do not come from a craft position, but rather a charitable one, using craft as commodity for a worthy cause. The execution of these projects is non-unique to the craft perspective, as the framework of the project is dependent on commodity, regardless of its production. This being said, the popularity and, arguably, the success of these projects is rooted in craft, in recognizable and well-known makers leveraging their skill, social capital, and the potential uniqueness of the work (in the case of custom work made for Obamaware) in order to secure funds from donating consumers. Each of these projects is near synonymous with their organizers, and that name recognition positions these projects as somehow different, stemming from a maker market and conflating these projects with maker market stereotypes of authenticity, idealism, and a resistance to capitalism, whether or not these attributes exist in the project's final form.

While Corey Johnson's *Clay for Water*¹⁸⁰ utilizes many of these same tactics, and falls victim to the implications of "ceramic as commodity," affiliated organizations *Potters for Peace* and *Potters without Borders*, use craft, not as commodity, but as entry point for ceramic water filters. *Potters for Peace*, founded by potters in solidarity with Nicaraguans, has a two-fold mission. First, they offer "support, solidarity and friendship to potters in order to help them preserve their local traditions and increase their incomes. The vast majority of potters in Central America are rural women and the core work for *Potters for Peace* has always been assisting these hard-working people by providing tools,

180 *Clay for Water* acts as a fundraising (and awareness-raising, educational) body for organizations like *Potters for Peace* or *Potters without Borders*, but has little engagement with the practical operations. *Clay for Water's* website has an online store full of pots and small works by established ceramicists, the proceeds of which go to "benefit the Ceramic Water Filter production and distribution to families in need of clean water," a frustratingly vague answer. From "How to Help," *Clay for Water* Website, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.clayforwater.org/pages/how-to-help>.

equipment, supplies and advice.”¹⁸¹ This support often comes in the form of donations, but also in providing scholarships for workshops and skill-sharing between disparate potting communities, cultural exchange, kiln repairs and more. Second, Potters for Peace, since 1998, has dedicated resources to assisting local partners in setting up ceramic water filter production facilities. This support includes consultation and training for local partners and providing technicians for additional support, whose travel is often funded by Potters for Peace.

The work with water filter factories is similar to the work conducted by Potters without Borders; they are affiliated organizations. Potters without Borders, like Potters for Peace, provides education, skills, equipment and technicians to assist in the implementation of filter facilities.¹⁸² Operating under an open-source philosophy, the organization seeks to distribute widely the benefits of ceramic water filters as a local, renewable, safe solution to the global water crisis. Like Potters for Peace, they do not profit in any way from the filter facilities or sale of water filters, but instead operate as a charitable organization.

Both Potters for Peace and Potters without Borders use the craft of ceramic as an entry point to considering ceramic as tool in the developing world. Both organizations centre the “potter” as problem solver, situating craft as a solution to a global crisis. This may be idealistic and romantic, as the water filters are made in a production model, are standardized, and lack many of the craft attributes that the term “potter” illicit. This thesis is not the place to debate the merits or pitfalls of “voluntourism” or to consider the implications of a Western, industrialized nation asserting its knowledge with the intent of

181 “About Us,” Potters for Peace Website, accessed March 10, 2016, http://pottersforpeace.com/?page_id=8.

182 “About Us,” Potters Without Borders Website, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.potterswithoutborders.com/aboutus-2/>.

“saving” or “assisting” the developing world, but it must be noted that these are problematic concepts, and ought to be explored elsewhere.

In terms of their “craftivism,” these projects have craftivist attributes, in bringing together communal resources to combat a social ill, in facilitating the democratization of skill and knowledge, and in their pursuit of local, ethical, sustainable water solutions. The organizations themselves may not be craftivist wholly, but their work shares similarities with many of the projects previously listed.

4c: Critiques of Craftivist Projects

The reality of this research is plain. Despite the growth of the craft discourse on the Internet, ceramic (and more broadly, craft) projects are often documented offline, by local periodicals with non-digitized copies, or on obscure blogs and websites. These projects can highlight the different ways in which contemporary makers utilize the craftivist method for diverse aims. I suggest that ceramic craftivists *were* influenced by early fibre craftivists, and that performance and social engagement in contemporary ceramics has become most popular in the last ten years, two aspects that participate well with the craftivist method. Although the beginnings of ceramic craftivism were clear in the eighties and nineties, it has been the last 16 years that has seen the most marked emergence of the method.¹⁸³

The projects discussed below engage with various kinds of craftivism, for example, Julie Green utilizes illustrative resistance and dialectical craftivism that centres on craft's semi-autonomy. Ehren Tool's performative, dialectical, and distributed works encourage conversations about war and the military, providing participants with a cup for their engagement. Carrie Reichardt's work is nearer to public sculpture, as her mosaic

¹⁸³ See Appendix B: Ceramic Craftivist Survey for expanded examination of recent ceramic, craftivist projects.

vehicles are dialectical, illustrative, and public. The analysis of these projects is meant to convey the difficulties and contradictions of craftivism, as these makers contend with museological structures, difficult issues, and diverse publics.

Since 2000, artist Julie Green has been painting the requested “last meals” of death row inmates on found plates with cobalt-blue mineral paint, firing, and exhibiting the plates as a group in order to protest the use of capital punishment in the United States. *The Last Supper* project currently consists of over 600 plates, and lacks a permanent exhibition space.¹⁸⁴ The project is ongoing, and Green is still producing more than 50 plates on a yearly basis, but has additionally moved on to other projects. Green's practice is not primarily ceramic, although she has continued to use both the decorative motif of white and blue in her other work, and recently exhibited a more personal set of blue and white, altered dishware, entitled *An Embarrassment of Dishes* (2015), to accompany an installation-based, painting exhibition in Portland, Oregon.¹⁸⁵

In *The Last Supper*, each plate depicts the request of a death row inmate's last meal, the text of the meal requested, and the state and date of execution, but without the name or crimes of the inmates. Using the familiarity of plated food, combined with traditional cobalt blue on porcelain depicts the mundane reality that corporal punishment has become in the U.S., but also subverts this with a comfortable subject matter turned morbid with the looming promise of death over each meal. Green, currently a professor at Oregon State University, plans to continue the project until the death penalty is abolished nationwide.

184 Julie Green, *The Last Supper – Final Meals of U.S. Death Row Inmates*, 2000-present, <http://greenjulie.com/last-supper/>.

185 Julie Green, *An Embarrassment of Dishes*, 2015. Upfor Gallery, Portland Oregon. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-in-julie-green-s-portland-exhibition-the-blues-are-insistent>.

This project fits the craftivism label, albeit slightly uncomfortably. Green paints on commercially produced plates, which are then fired by a technical assistant. The craft perspective, here, is limited by Green's engagement with a craft material. Craft is, however, positional, and by invoking the history of tableware decoration, and the history of the plate as a functional form, Green engages, at the very least, in the visual language and history of craft. The works themselves, with their delicate blue lines on shiny white porcelain, are both decorative and horrific in their banality. The decorative history of blue and white patterns is subverted by the subjects who chose the food themselves, not the subject matter. Were these plates without each other, or without context entirely, they would read as jokes, as a play on plate decoration, the potential punch line of a burger resting on the image of the burger. Instead, these plates are a melancholy bunch, laden with the desires of dying prisoners, as nostalgic as mac 'n' cheese, or fried chicken, or desperate for home with requests for their mother's recipes. This set of plates imbues the perceived worst among us with such relatable humanity, communicating complex questions around capital punishment in a non-threatening and approachable manner.

When installed in a group, at eye level, the viewer is reminded of a domestic plate wall and, almost, of windows, as each slick, white surface shines back, glinting beneath the painterly and delicate blue lines of the meals. "The color blue," she says, "seemed appropriate for both its beauty and sadness." It also invokes a shared cultural history, an inherent understanding of the use of plates, of china at a dinner table. Combined with semi-realistic depictions of meals, the plates invoke familiar memories in the viewer, as we've each had at least one of these meals, and probably have opinions and preferences over the others. These plates engage the viewers dialectically, as one silently contemplates both the food preferences of these deceased prisoners, but also the harsh

reality of their months leading up to their deaths. While curating the exhibition at the Dayton Art Institute in 2015, curator Judith L. Huacuja refers to the dialectical capacity of the work, writing that the collection of plates “has a tremendous capacity to explore complex issues, move audience towards seeing new perspectives, and motivate people to create social change.”¹⁸⁶

Given the semi-autonomy of the ceramic object, as previously established, I would suggest that this work does more than merely “motivate” social change but actively partakes in it, using cultural creation as a means to engage diverse audiences in conversation. While conversation may not be the most radical form of activism, it is the most banal. And like dinner, or plates, it is the everyday that ultimately unites us.

Ehren Tool began his professional practice in 2002, which has consisted of multiple projects, partnered with several host institutions. Most of these projects contain a similar makeup. Typically performatively, though sometimes privately, Tool throws multiple cups off the hump, sometimes in the thousands, using one large, centered piece of clay to produce several functional objects. These cups are decorated with pressed stamps, made of militaristic imagery, from war medals and stripes, to GI Joe weapons, to novelties and souvenirs. They are underglazed in muddy, semi-transparent colors, and sometimes decals, photos from pop culture, or participants who have lost someone to military violence, are applied to the surfaces as well, resulting in rich, textured, multi-layered surfaces. The cups are then positioned publicly, sometimes in numbered groups like squadrons or platoons, sometimes in a grid on the floor, sometimes on wall shelves,

186 Judith L. Huacuja quoted by Meredith Moss, “‘The Last Supper’ at DAI,” *Dayton Daily News*, March 14, 2015, <http://www.mydaytondailynews.com/news/entertainment/arts-theater/the-last-supper-at-dai/nkS9D/>.

and are given away to the public. The event around the cups, either in their throwing or presentation, fosters discussion about the military industrial complex, conversations that Tool considers to be the central focus of his practice. In a recent interview, Tool said:

...the cups, they're nothing. They're nothing. It's the conversations around them, and you know, the generosity of people sharing their stories, giving me images to put on cups, they'll let me borrow their insignia to let me decorate the cups, and you know, that's the only strength, if I have any, is other people's generosity.¹⁸⁷

Having thrown cups in France and Vietnam, as well as all over the U.S., Tool's practice represents at once the accessibility and privilege of craft. The accessibility of craft is apparent, as visitors often approach him, as he tries to throw his cups performatively, and in public spaces. While the image of a potter at the wheel is a common stereotype in the field, it is rare to see one outside of a studio, and this novelty contributes to Tool's efficacy as an artist. Upon closer examination, of both Tool and the cups, it becomes evident that this is more than just craftivism for craft's sake, as Tool, looking every bit the veteran he is, gruffly and humbly engages the public in a dialogue, about cups, about the war, about history. The cups bear symbols of the military industrial complex and its impacts, and Tool encourages spectators to share their experiences. His practice also represents the privilege of craft, as Tool anecdotally recounts veterans, and other members of the public, who felt uncomfortable entering a museological or gallery space, even for a discussion.

In the 2010 exhibition *Gestures of Resistance* (curated by Shannon Stratton and Judith Leemann) at the Museum of Contemporary Craft, Tool was one of several artists "in residence," over the course of the exhibition. During his residence, Tool performed a work entitled *Occupation* wherein he constructed a bunker out of boxes of unfired clay, threw that clay into cups until the bunker was gone, then decorated and fired the cups,

187 Ehren Tool, interview by author, February 3, 2016.

distributing them to participants and audience members.¹⁸⁸ Although the firing was done off-site, all of Tool's performance was open to the public, as audience members were invited to chat with Tool as he performed his work. I will return to this specifically when addressing curatorial strategies for craftivism.

Considering the location of the Museum of Contemporary Craft, we can see the kinds of barriers that Tool contends with. The museum is situated downtown, with ready access to a park that is consistently filled with homeless and transient populations. In a recent interview, Tool said, "I kind of regretted that we weren't in the park. I'd see people come and look in the window, look at the cups, but they wouldn't come in.... I was struck, in Portland, at the barrier of the museum as a line that, still, people wouldn't cross."¹⁸⁹ These kinds of barriers are, arguably, the lines that craftivist projects attempt to transgress, a crossing that signals a departure from traditional craft practices. While much of craft's performativity takes place in the studio, craftivist projects often attempt to insert themselves into the public sphere.

While these aims are admirable, radical, and disruptive, they can be quickly co-opted by museums and other cultural institutions. In Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch's essay, "Craft Hard, Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies for Craftivism in Unruly Contexts," they write that museological engagement with works like Ehren Tool's "presents the potential for institutional appropriation, in which the institution or persons working there stand to gain something (economic, social, cultural, or intellectual) by adapting the original context for their own aims."¹⁹⁰ It also potentially limits a diverse

188 Judith Leemann and Shannon Stratton, "Introduction to *Gestures of Resistance*," Museum of Contemporary Craft, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://mocc.pnca.edu/exhibitions/1278/>.

189 Ehren Tool, interview by author, February 3, 2016.

190 Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, "Craft Hard, Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies for Craftivism in Unruly Contexts," in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (New York: Berg, 2010), 614.

public's engagement with the work, without additional efforts to include marginalized audiences.

Here, perhaps, we can consider the aesthetics of amateurishness to be successful. Tool is quick to define his work as “less professional” than his contemporaries, particularly those who work as functional potters. Tool's cups do not push the boundaries of contemporary pottery or design, nor engage with any particular technique or history in their production. They are simple cylinders, thrown off the hump, stamped from Tool's library of stamps and molds, brushed with underglazes, and dunked into clear glaze before a quick firing. These cups do not speak to the history of cups, but are rather a vehicle for the conversations that Tool wishes to have. As the cup functions as entry point, or as a reminder (later), rather than a leading concept, its form is simple, minimal, and speaks more to the volume of its production, rather than its individual uniqueness. While all the cups are different, they all have the same purpose, to engage the public in a discussion (verbal or non-verbal, presently or later) about the role of the military industrial complex and its abuses.

These objects function as both performance, and archival object of the performance. As Tool performs and engages with his audience, as well as greater museological structures, the cups ground the performance in objects, in the history of craft, and the perspective of the maker. The size of the cups is perfect for diverse engagement; they are palm sized, handle-less, and accessible as a juice cup, with inviting and detailed surfaces, ones that invite touch and examination. As free and distributed objects, the cups access audiences often barred (intentionally or not) from museological or institutional engagement, as they resist the economic constraints of collecting craft, and appeal to audiences beyond typical museum attendees, although this may be hindered

by the location or museological structures that host the performances. Given the speed that Tool produces these cups, they understandably bear marks of haste, rough bottoms, unsmoothed throw lines, quick brush strokes. These marks serve to undermine hierarchical standards of craftsmanship, to act as “artifact” for the speed of the performance, and to communicate the sub-altern position of the “maker” when communicating with audiences who may not participate in craft culture or scholarship.

While Carrie Reichardt has been calling herself an extreme craftivist for more than fifteen years, and making ceramic mosaics that protest injustice, as well as other craftworks for longer than that. She began an on-going transformation on her home and studio, The Treatment Rooms, into a “Ceramic House of Resistance,” covering the outside in ceramic mosaics that encourage protest and revolution.¹⁹¹ The potency and urgency of craftivism is displayed in her 2007 work *Tiki Love Truck*, as well as its contemporaneity as it appeared at the Victoria and Albert Exhibition *Disobedient Objects* in 2014/2015. The *Tiki Love Truck* was commissioned by Walk the Plank, a public, outdoor, arts organization in 2007 for the Manchester Art Car Parade. “The work’s purpose,” however, “changed radically when Reichardt received word that John Joe “Ash” Amador, an inmate in a Texas prison with whom Reichardt had been corresponding with for years, was scheduled to be executed.”¹⁹² After traveling to Texas with sculptor Nick Reynolds for the execution, who made a death mask of Amador (with family’s permission), Reichardt returned to England and the focus of the *Tiki Love Truck*

191 Ann-Marie Michel, “Craftivism: The Do-It-Yourself Practice of Protest Design,” *ArtNews*, July 16, 2014, <http://www.artnews.com/2014/07/16/rebellious-by-design>.

192 Nancie Mills Pipgras, “Entering Through the Gift Shop: Carrie Reichardt's 'Tiki Love Truck' in the V&A's 'Disobedient Objects,’” *Mosaic Art Now*, January 19, 2015, <http://www.mosaicartnow.com/2015/01/entering-through-the-gift-shop-carrie-reichardts-tiki-love-truck-in-the-vas-disobedient-objects/>

became a protest against the death penalty and use of solitary confinement in the U.S.. Reichardt's continued work advocates for similar issues, as well as public works that protest animal abuse, celebrate revolutionaries, and call others to action. Reichardt's practice has incorporated various media, from fibre, sculpture, performance, and finally ceramics. She returned to mosaic ceramics, initially, to use a process without toxic bi products, but continued because of the response it garnered in the public. She says that craft attracts people, she says:

Most people appreciate time, and labour, and craft. They just do. You know, if you put a poster up, or a sticker up, it's just another bit of stuff out there in the environment, but if its something that's tapestry, or knitted, or beautiful, or colourful, or a tile, people will be drawn to it, they'll be drawn to the aesthetics, it opens up a dialogue where maybe there wasn't any.¹⁹³

Reichardt was also the subject of Betsy Greer's recent use of the term “ceramic craftivism,” in *Ceramics Monthly*. Greer profiled a similar, mosaic vehicle of Reichardt's entitled *Zulu VooDoo Liberation Taxi*, a project started at The Clay Studio of Philadelphia that has since been exhibited all over England at a variety of festivals.¹⁹⁴ The work follows consistent themes of Reichardt's work, addressing incarceration injustices, this time raising awareness for Kenny “Zulu” Whitmore, a prisoner in the Angola State Penitentiary in Louisiana.

The work combines glass and ceramic shards with slipcast elements – “bones, skulls, and babies' heads” – aesthetics that speak to craftivism's roots in a punk or Riot Grrrl positionality, in addition to Reichardt's anarchist political views. The work acts as a “Trojan horse,” as craft scholar Garth Johnson mentions in Greer's article.¹⁹⁵ It draws audiences in under the guise of craft, detail, and ornament and surprises them with

193 Carrie Reichardt, interview by author, February 4, 2016.

194 Betsy Greer, “Clay Culture: Ceramic Craftivism,”online.

195 Ibid.

political urgency and injustice.

Works like Reichardt's engage in the history of public crafts, like the yarn covered tanks of fibre-based craftivists, as well as the history of public murals and mosaics. Reichardt's work engages communities by interrupting them, by drawing them in with detailed ornament, and by confronting them with the humanity of prisoners. Similar to Julie Green's *Last Supper*, both the *Zulu VooDoo Liberation Taxi* and the *Tiki Love Truck* leverage the familiarity of craft against their maker's activisms, drawing audience members to their socially engaged point of view without once engaging in traditional activist tactics. The use of gentle, quiet, and visible tactics allows audience members to move toward these social issues at their own pace, there is no march or chant, but rather an extended hand and invitation.

Given this redefinition, categorization, and critique of the craftivist method, we are, perhaps, left with more questions than answers. While the histories of stereotypical craftivism and ceramic craftivism are not parallel, but rather blurry, intertwining, and referential, these histories are rarely considered in the scope of continued ceramic and craft practice. Having established the importance and precedence of these histories in shaping the craft discourse, as well as the twenty-first century craft practice, we turn now to the theoretical, categorical, and personal motivations of craftivism. The following sections will complicate the histories of craftivism, with interviews, criticism, and analyses of the efficacies and challenges of this contemporary method.

Chapter 5: Craftivism: Efficacy and Exhibition

Craftivism could be seen as fairly insular and insignificant within both greater cultural production, and activist interventions, so why does it matter? What impact does craftivism have outside of its disciples? Or, is this thesis merely preaching to the converted, relaying information to a group of people who already believe in craft's political potential?

To contextualize craftivist ceramics within both culture and activism means articulating and examining the points at which social change is produced and enacted. As a historian and critic, this entails addressing the moments that are determined less successful or less important, and the quality of both the project and the social change produced. In doing so, this thesis provides both a critical analysis of contemporary ceramic work, and a potential framework for continued making and research, as avenues for successful intervention are illuminated and shared values and tactics are articulated. This section will look at craft's ability to find affinity with other discourses, its particular relationship with activism, and craftivism's potential to enact change in the world.

5a: Dialecticism

Having established the potential, political potency of craft, it becomes essential to address the impact, efficacy, and ability to create change in craftivism. Craftivism, a method of making and resisting from the craft position, offers several opportunities for effective change-making, future-building, and interruption in hegemonic frameworks. Craftivism's efficacy hinges on its ability to be dialectical in its deployment. In recalling Wong and Alonso's dependence on dialecticism in their activist definitions, it is possible to see that the ability to manifest communication is central to the craftivist method. Conceptually, craftivism's ability to circulate and network ideas between disparate

populations stems from the ability of objects to facilitate conversations. By placing objects into new environments, interrupting public spaces with detailed, ornamental objects, these makers promote the exchange of ideas.

Consider, for example, *Plants for Patients*, as Meg Roberts facilitates conversation and empathy over the letter-writings that accompany her plants and pots to reproductive health facilities. By reframing the conversation about abortion to centre on a pot, and a plant, Roberts displaces a dominant dichotomy of pro-choice/pro-life and instead opens up this charged space to include the concept of patient care, as participants are confronted with a familiar object that *facilitates* care in the handling of potted plants.

Roberts facilitates dialecticism between participants and a commonly debated topic, but craft objects are imbued with a sense of dialecticism in their creation. If we consider crafted objects to be prosthetic, or extensions of the body, as they are created through a process of tacit understanding, the crafted object is prosthetic in both its creation and its use, as it is handled by the body of the maker and (later) the body of the user or recipient. Although reductive and romantic, the *hand of the maker* is at play here, as the user is able to discern, mirror, and consider the ways in which an object was crafted. When an object is exchanged, typically, its prosthetic qualities are exchanged with it. This enforces a (often physical) dialectical relationship between maker and user as the maker considers the needs (emotional, mental, and physical) of the user and the user navigates the choices and agency of the original maker. Since craftivism is so often about the performativity of the maker and their craft, this dialectical relationship of prosthesis *between* maker and user is particularly potent.

Beyond the physical presence of the object, and its dialectical properties, craftivist objects perpetuate and facilitate the exchange of *ideas* and perspectives,

questioning, asserting, problematizing, and interrupting existing narratives and spaces. Craftivist projects facilitate exchange beyond their physical form, advocating for the craft position (in the case of craftivism for craft's sake), challenging stigma, providing subaltern narratives, fund raising, protesting, and much more. Consider Carrie Reichardt's work, *Tiki Love Truck*, as a craftivist work that resists commodification, replication, or repeated exchange, one that challenges existing incarceration policies in the U.S. (like the death penalty and solitary confinement). This work, inspired by Reichardt's correspondence (physically represented in John Joe "Ash" Amador's death mask) with prisoners, cultivates a dialogue across borders, considering the transnational difference and similarities in the state's treatment of prisoners. The work physically travels (as a functional truck) through public space, forcing the nearby viewers to reconcile democratic and open public spaces (the street and the museum) with spaces of incarceration, complicating its celebratory aesthetics and parade-like exhibition.

Given the semi-autonomous and often distributed nature of the craft object in craftivist projects, the exchange of ideas facilitated by a craftivist object far exceeds the conceptual capabilities of a typical craft object. While the prosthetic dialecticism may emerge in the acquiring of a craft object, or even additional narrative or contextual information in its surface, the performative, distributive, and activist tactics of craftivism are memorable and potent, often superseding the content of the object on its own. The dialecticism facilitated by craft is often oppositional to the aggressiveness, anger, or hostility often associated with activism, it's the "gentle, nurturing act of craft [that] reaches people in a non-threatening manner. It's harder to 'remove' a political statement that makes the viewer smile," writes Inga Hamilton.¹⁹⁶ The dialogues enacted by

196 Inga Hamilton, "Daily Narratives and Enduring Images: The Love Encased by Craft," in

craftivism are non-confrontational, often humorous or absurd, as the *Tank Cozy*, or compassionate and empathetic, like *Plants for Patients*, or educational and relatable, like *Empty Bowls*.

5b: Affinities

It is worth reiterating here that the craft “position,” as it were, is a largely marginalized one, particularly in particular networks and discourses of cultural production. Discussing this marginalization is in no way an effort to silence, or marginalize craft makers by positioning them, relationally, as “less than,” but merely meant to reflect dominant cultural tropes, stereotypes, stigmas, and attitudes toward craft in a variety of situations. As a largely “othered” perspective (either through industry, the art cultural canon, gender, imperialism and more), craft has an ability to interface and find affinities with other marginalized discourses. An excellent, although perhaps obvious, example is the feminist work of the sixties, seventies, and eighties, as feminine craft labour and domestic textiles communicated with and through a feminist lens to speak to the marginalization of both women and their labour. In ceramics, this is particularly relevant, as ceramics has its own history of gendered production.¹⁹⁷ A variety of makers, including some of those interviewed for this paper, such as Nicole Gugliotti, engage with feminism through ceramics, as the material lends itself to the subject matter. Chris Antemann, Shary Boyle, Jessica Harrison, and Claire Twomey all engage with the history of ceramic figurines, subverting stereotypical and hegemonic depictions of female bodies in order to question female identity and sexuality through the grotesque, opulent,

Craftivism, 27-28.

197 Moira Vincentelli, “Gender, Pottery Technology and Development Projects,” *Interpreting Ceramics* 6 (2005): online. <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue006/articles/03.htm>.

and lavish surface decoration and altered forms.¹⁹⁸ It is the craft position of the figurine maker, through gendered history and depicted, material identity, which finds affinities with feminism.

In more recent years, ceramics has found affinities with several “othered” perspectives, particularly queer narratives and the decolonizing perspectives of people of color. The queer “voice” in ceramics is certainly not new, and not limited to the previously established craftivist timeline, but rather serves to illuminate the ways in which the craft position can interface with queer identity as an effective method of cultural production. Even at its most decorative or domestic, we cannot consider pottery to be apolitical. It enforces certain expectations of domesticity, whether in the number of dishes in a set, the handles on a mug, or the size of the foot that demands care when setting it down. The *Camp Fires* exhibition at the Gardiner museum queers this domesticity, subtly, and not-so-subtly inserting a queer narrative onto the “stuff” of domestic life, a sphere rigidly controlled by the cisheteropatriarchy of the Western world.

Additionally, several studio ceramicists in the United States have used the medium to protest against the hegemony of culture and museological institutions. Theaster Gates’s performance, *A Good Whitewashing*, at the former MOCC in 2010 is an excellent example of this. Gates’ performance used unfired slip to paint and cover the collaborative work of the artists that had worked in the space before him, speaking to the hegemony of museological institutions and the erasure of craftspeople of color. Roberto Lugo works in a similar manner, although performance is only a part of his oeuvre (the same can be said of Gates), inserting the narratives of people of colour onto pots that

198 A further examination of the grotesque and female figure in figurines, particularly Jessica Harrison's work can be found here: Anthony Merino, “Exhibition Review: 'Body and Soul: New International Ceramics,’” *Interpreting Ceramics* (2015): online. <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue016/articles/07.htm>.

share forms and surface decoration with traditional European porcelain. The subtle insertion of non-European identities, hip hop references, and spray can aesthetics into the intricate surfaces of formal tableware does two things. First, the objects engage the viewer as precious, expensive, laborious, and time-consuming. They then confront the viewer's expectations by subverting cultural norms on these sorts of pots. Lugo uses the language of craft to productively insert new voices into the ceramic canon.

Craftivist works have the ability to engage tangibly with discourses through realized affinities. In this way, craftivist objects are additionally future and culture building, by inserting narratives of marginalized discourses into an embodied position between craft (Ranciere's "art") and life. Craft objects, as semi-autonomous objects, straddle the divide between aesthetics and life, engaging in both simultaneously and embodying this tension tangibly, as objects we touch and/or use. The semi-autonomous position is a politically potent one when utilized by makers interested in building, or inserting, "othered" narratives into a dominant culture. One can look to the works of Roberto Lugo and Beth Lo, both makers that resist the Western, aesthetic hegemony of porcelain by incorporating the narratives of subjects of colour into their works. Lo's works deal with themes of her second generation, Chinese-American positionality, childhood, family, language, and transnational culture, using repeated subjects of Asian children in order to represent narratives in porcelain that are typically left out of the Western canon and relegated to "Eastern Decorative Arts." Lo has also collaborated with her sister to illustrate two children's books, *Auntie Yang's Great Soybean Picnic* (2012) and *Mahjong All Day Long* (2005), which featured illustrations on plates, which were photographed for the books. Lo's work participates in a future-building of complex, Asian-American identities in the Western craft canon, challenging historical stereotypes

of the Asian potter in the west.

Often, these craftivist affinities are wrought through subversion, as is the case with Roberto Lugo, many of the works by the Quebecois Clay Movement, Jeremy Brooks, and Carrie Reichardt. The works of these artists assumes the clothes of a dominant discourse, often through the use of traditional crafting methods or aesthetic, such as Lugo's European porcelain forms, Brooks' appropriation of traditional china patterns, or Reichardt's mosaics, which appear to be standard, public, mosaic murals until examined more closely. By adopting "signs" of a dominant discourse, such as decorative, Eurocentric aesthetics, or the "public works" acceptability of mosaic, and then subverting them, these objects perform a kind of "drag," effectively subverting, queering, and challenging dominant ideologies through exaggerated, altered, or humorous performances of those ideals.¹⁹⁹

These affinities can be found throughout craft discourse and media, are to limit them to either ceramic or fibre would do a disservice to the potential of craftivism. As (often) marginalized and semi-autonomous, the craft position offers several opportunities for makers to engage with a variety of injustices and othered perspectives in an effectual manner. The affinities wrought here are as effective of the craftivist works themselves, depending on the execution, audience reception, and positionality of all involved. The use of the craftivist method is not merely a performing of craftivism, but rather an enactment, a creation of change and resistance. Craftivism does not just make, it *does*.

5c: For Craft's Sake

While the affinities found between marginalizations *beyond* craft are politically

199 Nayland Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," in *In A Different Light: Visual Cultural, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, ed. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder, and Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1995), 22.

potent, this paper also considers craft to be a proper, expected, and worthy beneficiary of its own activism and has explored it in depth. *Craftivism for craft's sake* is necessary as the craft discourse continually expands, and demands definition and re-articulation. The expanded performance of craft (beyond the studio), in craftivist projects, object distribution, and the Internet provides opportunities for makers to extol the virtues of craft, as authentic, meaningful, anti-capitalist and more. These opportunities and performances ought to be examined critically for, while craft is deserving of its own activism, the discipline would do well to avoid self-indulgence, repetition, and moralizing. Instead, we can consider *craftivism for craft's sake* to be a tool, a method, in the expansion and growth of the discourse, an opportunity to challenge preconceptions of craft, to diversify the position, to expand its audience and impact.

In my interviews with ceramicists, many of them expressed a desire to simultaneously work *within* and *beyond* the ceramic label. Often, this involves subverting or turning established ceramic norms, as Reichardt and Notkin do with the standard stereotypical mural. Reichardt says, “It’s been my philosophy throughout all of my art, to have, maybe not to shock, but to subvert, to kind of challenge. I believe you should always challenge authority, challenge everything.”²⁰⁰ Unlike the intended audience of a traditional public mural (that would, hypothetically, appeal to a broad public), often politically charged work has the potential to put off as many people as it draws in. “When you choose to bring social and political commentary into the work,” says Notkin, “you limit your audience and you limit the number of collectors who will buy your work... sometimes the wife really likes it and the husband says, 'I don't wanna wake up every

200 Carrie Reichardt, interview by author, February 5, 2016.

morning looking at a mushroom cloud.”²⁰¹ While Notkin looks specifically at what many craftivists try to avoid – commerce – his point is salient. Many craftivist projects deal within the constraints of the craft realm, including its commodification. These projects often display a readiness to partake within craft structures and simultaneously expand them with their content, exhibition strategy, distribution, or non-archival materials.

5d: Expanding Networks

Craftivism can be considered a networked method, in many ways, as it often engages with discourses outside of craft, can be distributed or transported through commerce or given away, and can reach diverse audiences through participation, documentation, and performance. Positioning objects within diverse networks, craftivism effectively moves beyond itself, extending the project’s influence, dialogue, or scope through object exchange, finance, and the Internet. These three methods of expanding reach feature prominently in several ceramic craftivist projects, and can point to the efficacy of the method, bringing to light the ways in which craftivism *reaches* and can be *reached* by various positionalities.

While illustrative resistance can embody the political potential of craft, craft objects and their ability to be networked expands the potential of craftivism, as it includes more users/participants in dialectical relationships. The expanded “lives” of objects, as they change hands and locations is at the fore here, as craftivism is a method of activism that has the ability to shift and travel with the location of particular objects.

Ian Hodder’s “Entangled: An Archaeology of Relationships between Humans and Things,” provides a thorough account of the potential network of a “thing,” between humans and things, and things and other things. His different forms of connection can be

201 Richard Notkin, interview by author, February 18, 2016.

used to explore the potential of craftivism, given the “thingness” of a craft object.²⁰² He writes that through production, exchange, use, consumption, discarding, and even post-deposition that links are continually made between things, and between humans and things. These links constitute an entanglement of things that cannot be ignored. “Things are not isolated,” he writes. “Rather they are nodes for the flows of inter-linked bundles of matter, energy and information. Second, the threads or chains in the networks are very extensive and far-flung. Thingness, like personhood, is very distributed.”²⁰³

If craftivism is to be a thread within a network of things, we can see its connection and interaction with a variety of systems, creating diverse links between things, concepts (as boundless things), and humans. Given Hodder’s conception of these entanglements, and their “openness, unruly contingency and the conjunction of temporalities,” we can see how craftivist projects, as isolated or even small happenings, “can have big effects within entanglements.”²⁰⁴ While Hodder likens these effects to a butterfly theory, I would instead say that given the level of entanglement of a single “thing,” we can consider the entanglement of a craftivist project to be exponentially more entangled, more complex. Given the connections between discourses, the interpersonal networks achieved by the project, the spread of ideas, and the expansive networks of the object itself, the impacts of a craftivist project are too numerous to elucidate fully. Through their performativity, distribution, and positionality, craftivist projects appeal to the openness, unruliness, contingencies, and temporal shifts inherent in entanglements, further enmeshing the implications of the project into a broader, more complex network

202 To clarify between Hodder’s use of “thing,” and my use of “object,” Hodder writes that “[object] connotes an objectifying approach in which material matter is analyzed, codified, and caught in disciplinary discourse” (Hodder, 8). Given the approach of this thesis, I can consider crafted things to be objectified in my analysis, and the historical, critical nature of the discourse. From Ian Hodder, *Entangled* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

203 Ibid., 48.

204 Ibid., 163.

and continually expanding their potential efficacy.

In this way, we can think of craftivism as entangled activism, resistance that can be networked through changing hands, abandonment, and even commodity. The dialectical and communicative potential of the object is amplified in its ability to travel and traverse networks. Nicole Gugliotti's *STD Cups*, which have been placed in a bar, and also sold, have the potential to educate about sexual infection and confront stigma, but their affective ability reaches only as far as the object does.²⁰⁵ In the hands of a bar patron, the cup can (and did) facilitate conversations about getting tested with a new partner, the efficacy of certain medications, and the responsible practices of safe sex, all within the space of alcohol and hookup culture. As a commodity, the cups have the same effect, although the impact may be lessened as the purchaser *chose* the object, rather than *encountered* it, suggesting a familiarity with the subject at hand.

Likewise, Ehren Tool's cups, decorated with stamps of military medals, toy weapons, and other cultural manifestations of war facilitate conversations between users about the state of the military industrial complex. Tool is quick to dismiss the cup as the centre of his artistic practice, describing them as "nothing," particularly in comparison to more technically proficient potters and their cups. Instead, he says, it's the conversations that they facilitate, between himself (a Gulf War veteran) and participants, and more commonly between participants themselves, especially veterans. Tool describes his cups as an entry point for those not often engaged by the craft industry, often telling stories about older veterans who engage with him easily, but feel uncomfortable within an institution like a craft museum. The cups are effective world wide, as the horrors of war impact us all, and the cups have been given away in France, Vietnam, and the United

205 Nicole Gugliotti, interview by author, January 31, 2016.

States.²⁰⁶

While craftivism generally resists commodification, it does, in several versions of the method, take part in the greater economy. In particular, the non-profit craftivist model and the philanthropic model engage directly with commodification and fund raising. This brings up complex questions about the nature of craftivism. Is the maker of the object craftivist, if the craft object is sold (or auctioned) for money for a good cause? Is the object? The organizer of the event?

Clay for Water, *Clay for Nepal*, and *Handmade for Japan* all engage in these sorts of fund raising efforts, using donated proceeds from the sale of ceramic objects to benefit different causes, such as water filter factory programs in Nicaragua. While these organizations strive to “do good,” by providing funds and assistance to those in need, does the inclusion of a ceramic object, the craft position, necessitate craftivism? Arguably, yes, since the organizers of these programs are makers themselves, and in their administration are using the craft position to create positive change in the world.²⁰⁷ It’s the inclusion of both the maker perspective and the craft position that make this argument possible. It is, however, also possible to conceive of these projects as no different than a myriad of other, well-intended fund raising efforts, except that the benefactor, the purchaser, ends up with a ceramic object at the end of the day. Even given the networked potential of craft objects, the craftivist impact of the object is limited, as its form, decoration, or placement in a home have little to do with the intended philanthropic event. Instead, these ceramic objects are placeholders for the purchaser’s good intentions, like the pound of coffee you buy from a church group, or the picture of a distant child you

206 Ehren Tool, interview by author, February 3, 2016.

207 For an examination of arts administration as performance, please see: Jennifer Snider, *Art Administration as Performative Practice / Organizing Art as Institutional Critique*, Masters Thesis, OCAD University (2015).

support through some do-gooding organization.

The Internet must be discussed in relation to craftivism as well as its ability to spread and distribute craftivism widely. As I said before, the Internet played an instrumental role in the rise of the Maker Movement, IndieCraft, and the resurgence of crafting after the Third Wave and the nineties. Writes Zack Bratich, “Undoubtedly, the resurgence of fabriculture has occurred alongside of digital, virtual culture but has it done so as complement, opposition, or antagonist? Perhaps, fabriculture is all three at different moments, as it has been throughout its entangled history. This enmeshing sets the stage for the next, which involves material/immaterial dimensions.”²⁰⁸ These material and immaterial dimensions constitute the elements of the craftivist project, where the material (clay, persons, place) and immaterial (the activity that produces “the informational and cultural content of the commodity”, writes Maurizio Lazzarato, and this includes the creation of tastes, opinions, and concepts) come together, respectively “craft” and “activism”.²⁰⁹ As the Internet can distribute and host craftivist projects, this makes it complementary (in my opinion) to the resurgence of making, necessary even.

The Internet provides a platform for expanding the performativity of ceramics, and this has been well taken up, as ceramicists take over social media, and as our journals, magazines, and educational resources are slowly digitized.²¹⁰ These expanded networks increase the amount of overlap between craft and other cultural discourses, and draw larger audiences to the performative impulses of ceramics, some with millions of views. I have found endless support and suggestion through craft forums on Facebook,

208 Jack Bratich, “The Digital Touch: Craft-work as immaterial labour and ontological accumulation,” *ephemera* 10:3/4 (2010): 305.

209 Lazzarato quoted in Bratich, “The Digital Touch,” 306.

210 The impact of social media on crafts marketing has been taken up by a number of craftspersons and bloggers, too numerous to name here.

collectives like SECC, and research from digitized periodicals and journals. The contemporary craftivist project typically embraces the Internet as either the primary or secondary method of engagement as participants are reached (as in *Clay for Nepal*) or the project's results are expanded (*Plants for Patients*). Even in the case of mere documentation, by the maker or external sources, the concepts and objects are immaterially spread online, widening the influence of the initial project.

Furthermore, the Internet remains necessary to the cause of widening the craft discourse as a whole. If feminism had the most impact on craft in the twentieth century, I would say that immateriality, the Internet, and digital work may be the most influential in the twenty-first. Aside from the computer *redefining* craft labour (see Malcolm McCullough's "Abstracting Craft: The Practiced Digital Hand"), it has expanded its reach and cultural signifiers. By rendering craft, and craft labour, immaterial, the Internet (or the screen, more broadly) forces a consideration of craft beyond the hand. Craft work is now symbol, most abstracted and easily co-opted. Consider the image of pink yarn in recent years, how quickly it conjures the image of a lesbian, feminist, crafter – a stereotype, to be sure, but one well supported by works like *Mom Knows Now*, *Tank Cozy*, and *Wombs on Washington*. In ceramics, our Internet signifiers are different, but no less potent. The image of several pots, lined up in a public space, reminds us of *Empty Bowls*, or projects like it. Rather than suggest a full board above a wheel in a studio, these pots, all in a line, suggest *distribution* and community, rather than a village potter's solitary labour. Several potters, such as Danica Drago of Toronto, reposition the potter into the public, using social media to bolster their visibility. The Internet is the craft fair of years gone by, where performance, demonstration, and sales of craft objects are readily available.

Exhibiting Craftivism

Given craftivism's spontaneous, public, performative, and distribute attributes, the exhibition, collection, and curation of such work presents unique challenges. While this thesis is not a curatorial one, I would like to consider two different approaches to curating craftivist work (some of it ceramic) at the (former) Museum of Contemporary Craft (hereafter MOCC) (Portland, Oregon) in 2010 and 2015. These approaches detail some of the successful responses to craftivism as a living and breathing method, and speak to its potential as a collectible, archival set of objects.

In 2010, the MOCC exhibited *Gestures of Resistance*, a group exhibition curated by Judith Leemann and Shannon R. Stratton.²¹¹ The exhibition consisted of a group of artists taking residence inside the museum walls, one after the other, building upon and altering what had come before, in addition to exhibiting, performing, or installing their own projects. Each of the artist was selected for their “focus on craft actions and [creation of] works that use craft to agitate for change.”²¹² Rather than exhibit a collection of craft objects, like *Camp Fires* (Gardiner Museum, 2014), or *Alien She* (MOCC, 2015-2016), *Gestures* was composed of a series of artist residencies, open conversation, and a study center open to the public. Each of the residencies, one after the other, reconsidered the agency of craft, and its role, as most (if not all) of the works produces resisted commodification, collection, or exhibition as they were either temporary, in process, or distributed or destroyed at the end of the residency. I'd like to briefly look at the two ceramic-based projects in the exhibition, and examine how the curatorial strategies in this

211 *Gestures of Resistance: Craft, Performance, and the Politics of Slowness* was first presented as a panel at the 2008 College Art Association conference in Dallas, Texas.

212 “Gestures of Resistance,” Museum of Contemporary Craft, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://mocc.pnca.edu/exhibitions/1278/>.

exhibition helped to shape their efficacy as projects.

Ehren Tool's work, *Occupation*, considered both the occupation of space and profession, as he used bags and boxes of porcelain clay to construct a bunker with a potter's wheel inside, as reference to both his typical subject matter and positionality as both veteran of the First Gulf war and potter. The boundaries of the bunker shifted from dense, heavy material to light, tottering, and fragile cups, which were given away at the end of the performance as a method of constructing community, albeit a distributed one. Tool was available to museum-goers throughout the performance, often engaging in conversation, debate, and instruction with them. "If you took grief for putting brown pots on low pedestals," Tool wrote in a departing note to the curators:

I can't imagine the grief you took for letting a 320#, drinking, swearing, former Jarhead make a mess in a sanctuary of craft. I heard some expressions of thankful surprise but there was also a fair amount of eye avoidance and nervous laughter. I really felt like a bull in a china shop....

It was a real learning experience overhearing the conversations that happened as people looked at the cups. At one point I was throwing and crying a little as people chatted and laughed as they picked through cups decorated with images that make knots in my chest. It is more than just my work that is angry and sad.²¹³

Given the unconventional nature of the exhibition, Tool was witness to the reception of his work, just as the museumgoers were no doubt surprised to witness him, working. The exchange between the two parties is something often left nebulous and abstract by curators, hoping to merely facilitate engagement between viewers and makers by object proxy. By introducing the performative impulse of craftivism (and craft more generally) into the exhibition space, the curators opened up potentialities for education, enlightenment, and challenge between artist and audience.

Here, the dialecticism of craft goes beyond the object changing hands. Viewers

213 Ehren Tool, letter to Shannon Stratton and Judith Leemann, undated.

are confronted by the makers of objects, and forced to immediately reconcile the invisible labour of museums, which can be awkward. Theaster Gates's project, *A Good Whitewashing* (2010), problematizes this invisible labour by coating the exhibition space in a thin layer of fine, white slip. While doing so, Gates donned the coat made by Frau Fiber during the course of the exhibition, and sang spirituals that referred back the labour of the invisible, black craftsmen, later projecting images of their work across the whitewashed surface of the exhibition space. His performance highlights the awkwardness of spectatorship, as museum staff struggles to keep up with him, check on him, or interact with him. At one point, Gates approached what appears to be a museum staff member, only to rub slip onto his face, as an extension of the exhibition.²¹⁴ He also, although discouraged from doing so, proceeded to throw a bucket of slip at a museum wall, shocking museum staff members.²¹⁵ His work challenges the collection and exhibition of objects, not only his but the other resident artists that preceded him and left work to be whitewashed. Although Gates' specific positionality suggests that "whitewashing" is solely a question of race, the use of craft materials, and his engagement with the other works present, suggest that "whitewashing" is a process of erasure, not just for black men, but for queer people, persons of color, women, and other marginalized perspectives. As the last iterative action of the exhibition, *A Good Whitewashing* left the space a near disaster, with dust, clay, broken cups, a wooden structure, and various pieces of work left behind. The curatorial strategy of *Gestures* focused on the agency of craft, rather its production, highlighting its discursive ability and

214 Contemporarycraft, "Gestures of Resistance: Theaster Gates," filmed June 17, 2010. Youtube Video, 4:33. Uploaded October 15, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWts8eV0IJg>.

215 Judith Leemann in Craft Ontario, "Keynote Address by Judith Leemann for the Crafting Sustainability Conference, March 14 & 15, 2015," filmed March 15, 2015. Vimeo Video. Uploaded July 17, 2015. <https://vimeo.com/133770955>.

the fuzziness of the *practice* of craft that makes performative action so potent.

In 2015, the MOCC hosted another exhibition, *Alien She*, a traveling exhibition curated by Astria Suparak and Ceci Moss, organized by the Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University, that explores the cultural impacts and implications of the Riot Grrrl movement. The exhibition focuses on seven artists, providing several works from each one, spanning a twenty year period, that react, incorporate, or add to Riot Grrrl ideology, tactics, and aesthetics.²¹⁶ The exhibition features standalone artworks, collections from DIY networks (such as Miranda July's video chainletters), documentation from performances and projects, and Riot Grrrl archival materials like zines and banners. Given the import of the Riot Grrrl influence in the development of contemporary craftivism, *Alien She* offers a look at how we might continue to historicize craftivism in the future, combining the collection and exhibition of objects, in addition to expanded, DIY networks of objects.

For example, the exhibition featured a collection of works from *The Counterfeit Crochet Project (Critique of a Political Economy)*, Stephanie Syjuco's ongoing project (since 2006) that provides downloadable PDF instructions for creating knockoff, textile logos from luxury brands. The "counterfeit" crocheted objects were made by a number of makers across the U.S. and U.K., and the exhibition space had provided crochet hooks, yarn, and instructions for anyone wishing to continue or try the project during the exhibition. The project foregrounds common Riot Grrrl ideologies of DIY, anti-capitalism, and subversion from a supposed "female" perspective (given most of these logos and produced works are purses). The exhibition at once historicizes the work, encasing the bags and labeling them in an institutional format, but also perpetuates it,

216 "Alien She," *Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University*, accessed March 10, 2016, [http://millergallery.cfa.cmu.edu/exhibitions/Alien She/](http://millergallery.cfa.cmu.edu/exhibitions/Alien%20She/).

allowing museumgoers to participate in the ongoing, open-ended nature of the project.

LJ Roberts's work, *We Couldn't Get In, We Couldn't Get Out* (2006-2007), was installed in a central position in the MOCC, occupying much of the floor space on the first floor, engaging and perhaps containing the nearby *Ladies Sasquatch* (2006-2010) by Allyson Mitchell. *We Couldn't Get In, We Couldn't Get Out* is a large sculpture of a chainlink fence, rimmed with barbed wire, covered in bright pink, crank-knit yarn. The work feels historical, here, in an exhibition space, surrounded by works communicate and engage with similar themes and white walls. Roberts's work follows the shift in craft to the public sphere, as made common by Riot Grrrl and their DIY contemporaries. Outside a gallery setting, one can imagine the political and aesthetic implications of this work, but these seem dulled in the museum, historicized to the point of near inefficacy. Rather than surprise, or engage a public unexpectedly, the way it might in the streets, *We Couldn't Get In, We Couldn't Get Out* reads as sculpture in the museum setting, untouchable and expected, an example of illustrative resistance in craft sculpture, rather than an interruption in the public sphere.

These two exhibitions highlight and complicate the issues faced by contemporary critics, historians, and institutions, as a body of socially engaged, or craftivist, craft work continues to grow in recent years. Given the role that both community and dialogue play in most craftivist works, institutions must work to accommodate both performance and community in a sustainable and ethical fashion. Furthermore, craftivist works often resist commodification and collection. These works are often site specific and/or non-archival, like Gates' *A Good Whitewashing* or distributive, like Tool's *Occupation*. The museological sphere must contend with the documentation, archiving, and dispersal of these works, and must continue to reach out to makers that typically work outside of the

museological sphere, or whose work seems out of place there, if it is to keep up with this growing trend in craft production. With an understanding of aspects of craftivism like dialecticism, community, and performance, institutions will be better suited to challenge and update craft exhibition procedure.

Craftivism, as an emerging area of practice in contemporary craft, will need to be reconciled with its social nature, and the limits of the institutions that host it. As a method that is largely antimarket, distributed, and performative, it demands new curatorial strategies and critical engagement.²¹⁷ Black and Burisch in “Craft Hard, Die Free,” argue that dialogue and participation are key elements of engagement, as well as potential opportunities for miscommunication and co-option. They suggest unmediated opportunities for craftivist makers to speak about their work and politics, spaces for teaching, learning, and disseminating craft skills, and using printed matter and information networks to distribute information. Ideally, they say, these works ought to be situated in organizations that are “truly committed to community-driven, structural changes.” The exhibition *Gestures of Resistance* follows most of these points, particularly with a consistent public access to makers “in residence.” An in-depth examination of Tool's and Gate's work questions the position of the museum, as Tool's work (and interview) considers who is *left out* of these supposedly inclusive organizations, but after the fact, and Gate's performance actively confronts it, albeit from the perspective of the craftsperson, rather than the audience.

In *Alien She*, the retrospective nature of the exhibition necessitated limited access to the makers featured, however, there was plentiful printed and archival material to document several of the projects, their makers, and participants. That being said, the

217 Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, “Craft Hard, Die Free,” 609.

curatorial layout and strategy of *Alien She* is much more traditional and collectible than *Gestures*, each work is professionally installed, untouchable, as an *artifact* of craftivism and Riot Grrrl craft, rather than a craftivist action. The lone participatory element of the exhibition was a small table with crochet hooks and yarn, with instructions, in front of Stephanie Syjuco's *The Counterfeit Crochet Project (Critique of a Political Economy)* (2006-ongoing), which features crocheted, knock-off designer bags from a number of participants.²¹⁸ Visiting the exhibition, there were a few small attempts at the table, but nothing sizable. Teaching oneself to crochet is no easy task, particularly in the span of a museum visit. While the MOCC did provide a single programming solutions, a Group Crochet Workshop with Bonnie Meltzer, it was only for four hours.²¹⁹ Other programming around the exhibition were lectures, curatorial walkthroughs, and a “SINGING WE MUST RAGE! A SING-ALONG,” all of which serve, I would argue the museological institution over the makers or the makers politics. This programming historicizes and contains craftivism with artifacts and lectures, rather than engaging the work and its politics as active craftivist happenings.

Although a “historicized” version of craftivism is often the only kind a museum, gallery, or institution can contain, given the temporal and performative limits of such projects, the responsibility of the museum changes with the makers motivations. In the case of Ehren Tool, his work was featured in a recent exhibition, *Unconventional Clay: Clay Engaged in Change* at the Nelson-Atkin Museum in Kansas City, Missouri.²²⁰ Tool threw all the cups ahead of time, working with students at the Kansas City Arts Institute,

218 Ceci Moss and Astria Suparek, *Curatorial Text from Alien She* (2015): 19.

219 “Alien She Programs,” Museum of Contemporary Craft, accessed March 22, 2016, <http://mocc.pnca.edu/exhibitions/7297>.

220 “Nelson-Atkins Exhibition Explores Connections between Clay, Art, Process,” The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.nelson-atkins.org/nelson-atkins-exhibition-explores-connections-between-clay-art-process/>.

and the cups were neatly installed on shelves in the museum after Tool had left town. Initially, I was disappointed, as performance and audience engagement is such a large part of what makes Tool's work craftivist. However, on a visit to a different exhibition at the Kansas City Arts Institute, a student advised me to walk around a corner in a collective studio, where I happened upon two, young men chatting and applying decals to thousands of ceramic cups. They explained that Tool had only been in town for a brief while, but would return to do a performance and give these cups to community members in May of this year. The decals they were applying, they explained, were images and photos from community members given to commemorate those lost to military violence.

While the piece, as I experienced it, was more of an example of illustrative resistance and dialectic than performative and communal, the work continues to change. The community between Tool and students assisting him, as well as the future community enacted between Tool and participants when he returns in May, translate this series of objects from illustrative to active and distributive. These kinds of shifts enhance the efficacy of the work, and while not always necessary or possible, expand the networks in which the objects participate. The flexibility in time between Tool's two visits expand the potentials of such work, allowing for dialogue between maker and participants within a museological space.

Having illustrated craftivism's attributes that contribute to change (its expanded networks, propensity for dialecticism, and affinities with other marginalized positions), as well as the challenges of exhibiting such work, I'd like to turn now to the successes and failures (or challenges) of craftivism as a method. This analysis is not meant to be quantitative, but rather seeks to explore the efficacy of craftivism as method, to explore how and why it should continue, and to complicate craftivism's implications for future

researchers.

Before discussing the “successes” and “challenges” of craftivism, I should point out that these words are neither particularly helpful nor accurate. Craftivism, or any artwork, partakes in a disruption, whether it disrupts wall space, public space, participants, or hegemonic frameworks. This disruption, no matter how temporary, fragmented, or small, can be considered an activist tactic. I’m reminded of something Richard Notkin said, that “small grains of sand can stop a great machine,”²²¹ and consider the use of the craftivist method to be a grain of sand, although its efficacy may lie in its entanglements with the world and other activist tactics. This being said, I believe that certain steps can be taken in a craftivist project to increase its reach and efficacy, and that certain challenges must be taken into account by reflexive makers.

While the aforementioned characteristics of craftivism certainly *point to* its propensity for change, we must ask ourselves about the accessibility, privilege, and efficacy of the method in general. While traditional fibre craftivism centred on the accessibility of its materials, as yarns and a crochet hook are relatively inexpensive, ceramics cannot claim to be such a populous material. While ceramics is an ancient material and practice, and while communities the world over practice it with relatively little resources, the studio ceramics field in the Western world is largely middle class. Clay requires several technical requirements, from the cost of raw materials to the energy costs of running a clay mixer, wheel, and kiln. It requires specifically outfitted spaces, with proper ventilation, water filtration, and electrical hookups. While ceramics can be done on a sliding scale of cost and access (we can’t all be global-financier-turned-potter

221 Richard Notkin, interview by author, February 18, 2016.

John Mosler²²²), the fact remains that ceramics requires time, money, and space, amenities not always easily afforded.

Furthermore, the practice or method of craftivism is not a means of employment. The majority of studio ceramicists do not live on clay alone. Craftivist projects commonly resist commodification, often taking place as performances or abandoned objects, and many makers aren't compensated for their work. In this way, craftivism can be seen as privileged, as a pleasure-pastime that may produce meaningful contemplation and personal activism. Several papers, such as Nicole Dawkins "Do-It-Yourself: The Precarious Work and Postfeminist Politics of Handmaking (in) Detroit," discuss the relative wealth necessary for the craft position and discuss the economic realities of many of those working in the field today. Even among the makers interviewed for this thesis, very few of them were full time makers and most relied on a second, if not third source of income to support their craftivist activities. Dawkins, in an ethnographic study of the maker market in Detroit, positioned the economic privilege of DIY as a part of a larger picture of the economy, race, and morals. She writes,

...when asked to explain the lack of diversity in the craft community, a few responders noted that there was a certain kind of luxury implicit in having the time, resources, and social capital needed not only to make things but to produce a particular aesthetic or marketable product... the ability to choose and distinguish between making something out of necessity and making as part of a larger aesthetic or moral calling was a matter of (white) privilege and of cultural capital.²²³

Even in the instances of craftivism with specific, financial or social outcomes, such as the case of Potters for Peace, Potters without Borders, or fundraisers like Clay for

222 Tim Mckeough, "From Financial Guru to Brooklyn Ceramist," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2015, accessed January 27, 2016.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/trading-wall-street-for-a-kiln.html>.

223 Nicole Dawkins, "The Precarious Work and Postfeminist Politics of Handmaking (in) Detroit," *Utopian Studies* 22:2 Special Issue: Craftivism (2011): 267.

Nepal or Handmade for Japan, the projects belie a level of privilege inherent in the Western ceramicist. Although this is not the place to discuss the merits of “voluntourism” or to look critically at the colonialist impacts of wealthy Westerners “assisting” developing communities, it is worth noting that the organizers of these organizations are from a place of privilege and that the benefits of these groups are qualified from an outsider perspective, and could be considered indicative of a “savior complex.” The intent of these organizations appears benevolent, and this thesis looks at the impacts of their work as positive, but it should be noted that these organizations *can be* problematic and ought to be examined critically.

Craftivism, of course, follows the genealogy of socially engaged art, coming out of late modernisms and considering Claire Bishop’s social turn as a key theoretical premise. Craftivism’s adherence to the craft position, and its particular history, distances the method slightly from socially engaged art (SEA), however, both methods share similar concerns and considerations in their use. Pablo Helguera’s “Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook,” provides an excellent, and instructive look at the practical considerations of socially engaged art.²²⁴ Applied to craftivism, Helguera’s text considers craftivism as a productive framework for exploration of a variety of themes. Again, one of the benefits of analyzing craftivism as method, rather than movement, is that this allows for a variety of conceptual causes and injustices to be addressed by the diverse positionalities of makers. Helguera’s “guidebook” encourages contemplation, planning, directed action, and coordination with the involved participants and community. A successful craftivist project, like several of the ones mentioned, advances the reflexivity of the maker and their materials, considering

224 Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011).

the impacts of their making to move beyond the personal sphere.

The craftivist position, as a maker, as the person utilizing the craftivist method, is a flexible one. Craftivism facilitates creative and meaningful engagement with the social world, but reflects the breadth and fuzziness of the ever expanding craft and activist discourses. Craftivism's ultimate successes come in the disruption of hegemonic power structures. Craftivists can protest war and the military industrial complex; this can be as physical and complex as a multinational clay stomp to protest the Cold War (Joel Pfeiffer) or as mundane and accessible as a free cup, stamped with a G.I. Joe weapon (Ehren Tool). Craftivism can combat abortion stigma in both the gallery space (Gugliotti) and the community hall and health providers (Roberts). The affective abilities of craftivism lie in both its initial execution and its entanglement with the world at large. The craft position, and activist motivations, of craftivist works are diverse and numerous, constellated and connected in method and moment. Rather than consider this to be merely contemporary, we can reflect on both the history of political craft and the potential of its future. Craftivism is a tool that can be used for a good, long while, adapted to suit the needs and positionalities of its makers and activists the world over.

Chapter 6: Craftivist Conclusions

The intent here is to illuminate both the historical emergence and the contemporary significance of craftivism as method in contemporary ceramics, in order to expand opportunity for other material discourses. The craft position is stretching and shifting, moving beyond its traditional materials and processes, and craftivism moves along with it. The theoretical groundwork provided here, looking at the craft position and its political potential, can serve other makers and writers beyond the ceramic sphere, increasing the complexity and relevance of the craftivist method. This work lends academic credence to the craftivist method beyond the works of the early 2000s, and beyond the scant writings that follow. This allows for new ways of organizing and resisting in cultural creation, expanding the discourse on the political potential of making.

Looking at both histories in this paper – an established craftivist one, and a neglected ceramic past – we can see that feminism and performance were necessary precursors to craftivism in the twentieth century, and the political shift of the Third Wave's relationship to craft can be seen as responsible for shifts in the public nature of craft, the destabilization of hierarchies, and objects that resist or confront commodification.

The ceramic works examined point to the affinities wrought between clay and other marginalized discourses, craft's position as semi-autonomous, and the abilities of contemporary makers to use craft for political aims. The categories of the craftivist method established here articulate the various ways in which craftivism enacts change in the world, through illustration and performance, commodity and distribution, community and dialogue.

This is not a perfect, or easy conclusion, but rather a complex and multifaceted

look at a method that is used in numerous and diverse ways. Strategies for using the craftivist method, or exhibiting it, must be flexible, responsive, and transparent if they are to accommodate and enact the efficacy of the method, fully. Craftivism, like many craft methods, has the potential to be co-opted, or “flattened” in its exhibition, either through conservative museological practices or distribution on the Internet. Even so, these venues offer new networks for craftivism to work within, to resist against, or to tactically co-opt themselves. As a tactic, craftivism has the benefit of flexible positionality, and the ability to engage semi-autonomously with its surroundings. The exhibition structure can be seen as just one network, of many, that a craftivist work and its maker navigate.

This thesis expands existing knowledge in both the craftivist and ceramic scholarly discourse. By drawing connections between the two discourses, this thesis expands and complicates existing craftivist theory, and necessarily broadens ceramic discourse beyond the surface of the ceramic object. This thesis looks to ceramic's contemporary position, one that is performative, public and political. In doing so, this work foregrounds ceramic's future, as more makers engage in craftivist, socially engaged, performative, and non-traditional practices, as the craft position continually shifts and expands.

This thesis depends on both the critical analysis of the author, primary research, and the voices of contemporary makers. In using a multifaceted approach to the research, this thesis respects craftivism's past and users of the method as inherently contributing to the discourse. Rather than historicize craftivism, this thesis seeks to participate with its makers and works, to examine them with the intent of providing a resource for future makers, scholars and critics.

The results of this thesis will benefit both the craftivist and the ceramic

communities. Through a more rigorous and inclusive definition, craftivism stands to gain much from the perspectives of a myriad of craft makers. Imagine the contributions that woodworkers and metalworkers, ceramicists, jewellers, quilters, and glassworkers could bring to such a vibrant community of resistance. In turn, the craftivist mandate is useful to ceramic makers exploring notions of activism through performance, social engagement, and philanthropy, lending academic credence to an emergent pattern in the field. There is an opportunity, then, beyond this thesis, to explore the ramifications of new craftivism in a variety of disciplines and methods, expanding opportunities for collective making and resisting.

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Appendix A: Interview Materials

Craftivist Clay: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Ceramics

Principal Investigator: Mary Callahan Baumstark

Faculty Supervisor: Prof. Dorie Millerson

OCAD University

Written and verbal interview text.

Hi, how are you today?

Could you state your name, artistic practice, and host institution or making situation?

Do you agree to have this conversation recorded as previously discussed in the Consent Form? Please refer to the bottom of this document if you are completing this as an email questionnaire.

1. Can we talk about a specific, craftivist work?
2. Can you describe the artistic practice used in the creation of this artwork?
3. What was your motivation or inspiration for this work?
4. Can you describe its connection to any of your previous work?
5. Can you describe any specific artistic decisions that led to this work's final form?
6. How was this work received by the public?
7. Did you intend it for a specific audience? How did you select that audience?
8. What steps did you take to communicate with that audience or the involved community?
9. How would you describe the efficacy of this work?
10. Did it accomplish what you set out to accomplish?
11. Or did it accomplish something different?
12. How did the results differ?
13. Did you appreciate the differences? Or what would you have changed?
14. How do you identify as a maker?
15. Do you identify as "craftivist?"
16. Why or why not?
17. Does the material that you work with influence your decision to identify that way?
18. How does your engagement with activism and resistance influence your identity as a maker?
19. When did you decide to incorporate social issues (activism, resistance, social practice, etc) into your work? How did you decided which social issues to engage with?
20. How does your practice participate (or not) in the history of political craft and art?
21. Is there anything else you'd like to communicate to me regarding your work?

Thank you for your time!

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, Craftivist Ceramics: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Clay. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have signed the information consent letter. I agree to have my responses recorded as a text file, or as an audio file (if the interview is conducted as a telecommunicative exchange), and to be identified and associated with my responses in subsequent publications and presentations. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without detriment to my well-being and that my collected data will be deleted upon withdrawal.

Name: ___Abby Silver_____

Signature: ___Abby Silver_____ Date:
___2/2/2016_____

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, Craftivist Ceramics: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Clay. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have signed the information consent letter. I agree to have my responses recorded as a text file, or as an audio file (if the interview is conducted as a telecommunicative exchange), and to be identified and associated with my responses in subsequent publications and presentations. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without detriment to my well being and that my collected data will be deleted upon withdrawal.

Name: ___Carrie Reichardt_____

Signature: _____ Date: _____28th Jan
2016_____
Carrie R

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, Craftivist Ceramics: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Clay. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have signed the information consent letter. I agree to have my responses recorded as a text file, or as an audio file (if the interview is conducted as a telecommunicative exchange), and to be identified and associated with my responses in subsequent publications and presentations. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without detriment to my wellbeing and that my collected data will be deleted upon withdrawal.

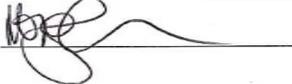
Name: W.A. EHREN TOOL

Signature: WAR TOOL Date: 1/29/16

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, Craftivist Ceramics: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Clay. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have signed the information consent letter. I agree to have my responses recorded as a text file, or as an audio file (if the interview is conducted as a telecommunicative exchange), and to be identified and associated with my responses in subsequent publications and presentations. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without detriment to my wellbeing and that my collected data will be deleted upon withdrawal.

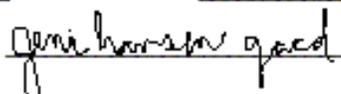
Name: NICOLE GUGLIOTTI

Signature:  Date: 1/28/16

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, Craftivist Ceramics: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Clay. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have signed the information consent letter. I agree to have my responses recorded as a text file, or as an audio file (if the interview is conducted as a telecommunicative exchange), and to be identified and associated with my responses in subsequent publications and presentations. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without detriment to my wellbeing and that my collected data will be deleted upon withdrawal.

Name: Jeni Hansen Gard

Signature:  Date: 1/29/16

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, Craftivist Ceramics: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Clay. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have signed the information consent letter. I agree to have my responses recorded as a text file, or as an audio file (if the interview is conducted as a telecommunicative exchange), and to be identified and associated with my responses in subsequent publications and presentations. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without detriment to my wellbeing and that my collected data will be deleted upon withdrawal.

Name: Richard Notkin

Signature: Richard Notkin Date: February 4, 2016

CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, Craftivist Ceramics: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Clay. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have signed the information consent letter. I agree to have my responses recorded as a text file, or as an audio file (if the interview is conducted as a telecommunicative exchange), and to be identified and associated with my responses in subsequent publications and presentations. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without detriment to my wellbeing and that my collected data will be deleted upon withdrawal.

Name: Vipoo Srivilasa

Signature:  Date: 13/2/16



M.C. Baumstark <mcbaumstark@gmail.com>

to Joel ▾

Feb 3 ☆



CONSENT

I agree to participate in this study, Craftivist Ceramics: Resistance and Activism in Contemporary Clay. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have signed the information consent letter. I agree to have my responses recorded as a text file, or as an audio file (if the interview is conducted as a telecommunicative exchange), and to be identified and associated with my responses in subsequent publications and presentations. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without detriment to my wellbeing and that my collected data will be deleted upon withdrawal.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____



joelpfeiffer44@gmail.com

to me ▾

Feb 3 ☆



Yes, I am in! Joel pfeiffer.

Sent from my iPhone



Appendix B: Ceramic Craftivist Survey

This appendix is included to give a brief and non-comprehensive look at several of the projects mentioned within the thesis. While there was not time or space to examine each project in-depth, this survey should give some idea of the emergence of craftivism within contemporary ceramics in the last four decades.

While Potters for Peace began its work with Nicaraguan potters in 1986, the 1998 devastation of Hurricane Mitch led to the organization partnering with a Guatemalan engineer to develop ceramic water filters and then teach NGOs and social entrepreneurs in the developing world how to make them. The organization also funds local potters' learning opportunities and educational exchanges.²²⁵ While the "craftivist" nature of this organization, and others like them, is debatable, and will be addressed shortly, their significance in socially engaged craft cannot be denied. The organization fosters exchange and awareness of water inequality within the studio ceramics communities of North America, and its founding organizers are peace activists and potters who originally journeyed to Nicaragua in solidarity as the United States was supporting insurgents and subsequent warfare.²²⁶ The organization considers education, awareness, and water equality to be among its foremost goals, all activist intents, and arrived at the ceramic water filter through craft, although the final product is utilitarian and does not contain a particular agenda, but rather a particular use. As a grass roots organization, Potters for Peace is reflexive and flexible with the communities it assists, and has helped to establish over 50 factories in over 40 countries worldwide.²²⁷

225 Abby Silver, "About Us," Potters for Peace, accessed March 21, 2014, http://pottersforpeace.com/?page_id=8.

226 Abby Silver, interview by author, February 16, 2016.

227 Ibid.

Potters for Peace, and projects like it, are debatably defined as craftivism. Yes, these organizations approach a problem, or injustice, from the position of craft. They also approach them from a position of administration and non-profit management, which *could* be considered an artistic (or craft) practice as well. These projects, however, forego aesthetic considerations for practicality (not to say that aesthetics do not interface with design or function), in order to produce the most effective water filters. This rejection of aesthetic considerations, while for a good reason, could disqualify several of these organizational efforts from the craftivist title. Craftivism, however, is as flexible and broad as craft and activism can be, and given that flexibly, they are, at least, worth critical consideration.

In 2003, the illustrious contemporary art award, the Turner Prize was awarded, for the first time, to a ceramic artist. Winner Grayson Perry, a mid-career artist in the U.K., is best known for both his ceramic vases and his cross-dressing and performativity, and was awarded the prize for his “uncompromising engagement with personal and social concerns.”²²⁸ Perry’s pots are often biographic and depict the (often harsh and difficult) realities of everyday life, in intricate drawings that are, at once, contemporary and traditional, referring back to traditional pottery techniques to depict nontraditional subject matter, violence, sex, and troubled landscapes.²²⁹ Both performative and illustrative, Perry’s practice challenges tropes of the ways in which potters should behave, lending a transvestite’s narrative to avant-garde ceramics, and using the surface of the pots, and the performance of the potter, for social commentary and critique.

The work of Grayson Perry can be considered craftivist in its insistence on the

228 Maeve Kennedy, “Turner Prize goes to Perry – and Claire,” *The Guardian*, December 08, 2003. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/dec/08/arts.turnerprize2003>

229 *Britannica Academic*, s. v. "Grayson Perry," accessed March 21, 2016, <http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/1000541/Grayson-Perry>.

visibility of subaltern, repressed, or marginalized narratives in both the museological sphere and in the craft object. Rather than reserve the sides of his pots for decoration, Perry uses them for story-telling, positioning the craft object as narrative, capable of producing change in cultural production. Each time a professional craftsman makes an object, and that work is received into the world at large, culture is being constructed. Perry's construction of culture from a perspective that is typically silenced, and its recognition in a major museum, proved radical for both the ceramic object and its makers.

In 2006, Kai Morrill helped found Potters Without Borders, a Canadian non-profit that functions similarly to Potters for Peace, without the specific connection to Nicaragua.²³⁰ As an organization, Potters Without Borders promotes the utilization of Ceramic Water Filters with free assistance to new and growing filter factories in the way of skills, equipment, and education.²³¹ Potters Without Borders is affiliated with Potters for Peace, and subject to the same criticisms and concerns as a craftivist project.

In October of 2008, maker and potter Ayumi Horie organized *Obamaware*, a fundraiser for Obama's 2008 presidential campaign.²³² Horie organized the contributions of 27 nationally known ceramic makers, and each maker made Obama-themed work specifically for the event. The event concluded with a three day auction that raised almost \$11,000 dollars for the Obama/Biden campaign. This project, while heavily invested in state "approved" activism, promoted grassroots, craft advocacy in the U.S. political

230 CBC News, "Potters Without Borders uses ceramics to battle dirty drinking water," *CBC News*, December 07, 2015. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/ceramic-water-filters-nova-scotia-1.3353688>

231 "About Us," Potters Without Borders, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.potterswithoutborders.com/aboutus-/>.

232 "Obamaware," Ayumi Horie Website, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://ayumihorie.com/project/obamaware/>.

system.²³³

After returning to the U.S. after a trip to Nicaragua, Corey Johnson founded *Clay for Water*, an organization that seeks to promote awareness and fundraising for Ceramic Water Filter factories and organizations like Potters for Peace and Potters Without Borders. While not directly involved in the production or technologies of the water filters, Johnson's organization sells contemporary maker's works in efforts to raise money and awareness for water inequality worldwide.²³⁴

After a disastrous earthquake and tsunami devastated the Tohoku area of Japan on March 11, 2011, Ayumi Horie, along with Ai Kanazawa, Cheung, Kathryn Pombriant Manzella, and others, organized a second, craft-based fundraiser entitled *Handmade for Japan*.²³⁵ With the combined efforts and donated works of artists, galleries, and donors, Horie was able to raise over \$75,000 in a two day art auction, and over \$100,000 overall for GlobalGiving's Earth and Tsunami Relief Fund.²³⁶

Holly Hanessian's project *Touch in Real Time*, encouraged interactions between the maker and the participants in the form of a handshake. Hanessian pressed clay between her and a volunteer's handshake, leaving behind the imprint of their touch on the malleable clay. The "touches" were then fired and exhibited along a graph detailing the physiological and chemical benefits of touch between humans. This work is an exercise in community building, encouraging intimacy between strangers.

Although covered previously, Meg Roberts began *Plants for Patients* in 2012 as her undergraduate thesis project. It has since become a full non-profit and is ongoing.

233 Ibid.

234 "About Us," Clay for Water, accessed March 21, 2016.

235 "Our Mission," Handmade for Japan, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://handmadeforjapan.org/mission/>.

236 Ibid.

In 2014, Michael J. Strand (a long time utilizer of the craftivist method, but this project is my favorite, and the most politically engaged) created cups and saucers to be distributed to each of the Senators in the United States' Senate.²³⁷ These teacups and saucers were delivered by local residents of the state, and Senators were encouraged to enjoy a warm beverage with one small caveat. The cups and saucers were mismatched, with the corresponding red or blue partner in the possession of a Senator from an opposing party. In order to complete the set, Senators would have to “cross the aisle,” and Strand encouraged them to enjoy a beverage with their political counterparts. Efficacy aside (there’s been little follow-up on this project, by either Strand or critics), this project illustrates the affective potential of craft and its ability to facilitate interactions between disparate groups.

Nicole Gugliotti’s works *Awe/Agency* and *STD Cups* were both exhibited in 2014, as a part of her MFA thesis exhibition, although both works have been exhibited in the following years. *Awe/Agency* involved the playing of positive abortion stories (positive specifically) through ceramic speakers in a gallery space in order to challenge negative stigma around abortion.²³⁸ *STD Cups* was a series of cups decorated with curable, sexually transmitted infections that were used to serve beer at a nearby bar, encouraging discussion of taboo, yet all too common, consequences of unprotected sex.²³⁹

In 2015, the grassroots community organization City Life/Vida Urbana used ground bricks, and red dust to draw a literal red line around historical Boston to protest the process of redlining, a policy that shaped discriminatory housing policies in the

237 Michael J. Strand, “Cuplomacy – U.S. Senate 2014-15,” Michael J. Strand Website, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.michaeljstrand.com/#!/cuplomacy---us-senate>.

238 Nicole Gugliotti, interview by author, January 31, 2016.

239 Ibid.

U.S.²⁴⁰ By using both the material of brick and the color red, the group sought to call attention to the racialized housing divide and gentrification in Boston's neighborhoods.

Jeni Hansen Gard's MFA thesis project, as well as previous and subsequent works, revolved around an exchanged set of dishes and meals.²⁴¹ After an initial, communal meal with the participants of *Partake Columbus*, in Columbus, OH, Hansen Gard gave each participant a dish set to use and document its use in the coming months. Participants were selected to represent seven distinct neighborhoods in Columbus. The project ended, after a month, with the collection of the documentation (participants kept the dishes), and another communal meal in a gallery-like setting.

Henry Haver Crissman's *Mobile Anagama* project was the recipient of an NCECA grant. Crissman proposed and built a mobile, anagama kiln on a flatbed trailer that could be transported and fired at a variety of locations.²⁴² The work makes the laborious, but community forming, process of firing a wood kiln accessible to communities that lack the resources to build, fire, or access such a kiln. It also makes visible the often private ceramic practice of firing a kiln.

Although the number of projects represented here is fairly low, I suggest that this represents a growing impulse in contemporary ceramics. The number of projects using the craftivist method is growing, as the contemporary political moment demands more and more response, and as the "maker movement" continues to proliferate the economy,

240 Haley Houseman, "Artists and Activists Trace Boston's Historic Red Line on the Streets," *Hyperallergic*, September 22, 2015, <http://hyperallergic.com/238667/artists-and-activists-trace-bostons-historic-red-line-on-the-streets/>.

241 Jeni Hansen Gard, "Partake Columbus."

242 Henry Haver Crissman, "The Mobile Anagama: A Wood Kiln on Wheels," *Ceramics Monthly* (September 2015): online, <http://ceramicartsdaily.org/firing-techniques/wood-kiln-firing/the-mobile-anagama-a-wood-kiln-on-wheels/>.

reaching new heights of luxury and commerce.²⁴³ The use of the craftivist method as distributed, performative, and social activism shifts the resistive craft position from “making,” to “doing.” Each of these projects responds to a contemporary anxiety, whether its protesting the treatment of prisoners, like Carrie Reichardt or Julie Green, the state, and its involvement in military conflict, health care, or democracy, like Ehren Tool, Michael J. Strand, or Ayumi Horie, or anxieties around perceptions of craft in dominant discourse, like Crissman's *Mobile Anagama* or Hansen Gard's *Partake Columbus*.

243 Mary C. Baumstark, “Popular Potters,” *CFileOnline.org*, forthcoming.