

**School of Media, Creative Arts, and Social Inquiry**

**Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst:**

**Prepping, sculptural practice and the everyday crisis of insecurity**

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**This thesis is presented for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**of**

**Curtin University**

**November 2022**

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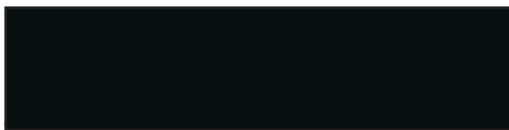
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**Abstract:**

This research project operates as a series of investigations into art making and highly individuated preparatory culture, also known as prepping. Prepping practices revolve around a series of highly varied activities that aim to better prepare the individual engaging in them to sustain and survive major disruptions to daily life. These major disruptions may be unfolding or speculative future events which, in the context of this research project are referred to as crises. This project proposes that prepping practice is a spectrum rather than a singular definable practice. In doing so, this project proposes prepping as a lens for examining how individuals may navigate speculative or unfolding crises.

Through creative practice and exegetical writing this project seeks to understand the ways in which sculptural practice can reveal this spectrum of preparatory activity to a viewer. And, through the use of tangible and imaginative material practices found in both artistic and preparatory practices, question what this spectrum of prepping may offer when considering how an individual makes sense of crises. This project proposes a methodology for making work about prepping culture through the development of three frameworks; narrative, adaptable objects, and preservation, which allow critical reflection and stress the commonalities found in the often disparate and complex practices of highly individuated preparedness.

Investigating these proposals has resulted in a body of largely textile-based sculptural works, referred to as tapestries. The project itself has resulted in a series of pragmatic art objects whose speculative use, should crises arrive, may aid in an individual attempting to navigate ambiguous times. While simultaneously presenting these pragmatic art outcomes as activated only through speculative use given their deployment in an art gallery, the project seeks to navigate the tensions inherent in the desire to be prepared, without knowing exactly what for, or when and if, that preparation will be required.

# Introduction



Figure 1: Jess Day, *Camouflage vest*, 2019. Watercolour, gouache, gesso. Photo: Jess Day.



## Introduction

This thesis examines the material practices of highly individuated disaster preparedness, or prepping, through the production of artworks. Prepping practice is a recent and growing activity whose focus is on the preservation and sustaining of life at an individual level in the face of unfolding and speculative crises. Increasingly, western neoliberal governments are encouraging their respective citizens to 'be prepared' and manage their own survival (Masco 2020). Since these neoliberal systems inherently privilege the wealthy, who can afford private health cover, land ownership, and private insurance, those with lesser means must carefully save to survive everyday life, let alone a crisis such as a natural disaster (Mills and Fleetwood 2019). Unlike its survivalist forebear, prepping practice operates within the mainstream. Participants of prepping practice largely live and work within society, contributing to community, taxation, and providing for themselves as well as their families and loved ones (Barker 2019). Prepping practice aims to sustain and preserve individual life through practical, tangible means. Prepping is a highly individuated practice, that is to say, prepping is practised in a variety of ways dependent on the individual engaging with preparedness, the values they hold, the amount of income they can put into preparedness, the geographical location of the individual, and the threats or crises likely to that geographical location. Prepping practice is a spectrum, and as such, has extremes at either end – left-wing or right-wing ideologies do exist across this spectrum (Barker 2019). However, consistent within this spectrum is that most preppers are simply concerned about their ability to sustain their life and lifestyles in the face of speculative crises when their everyday means are already stretched (Mills & Fleetwood, 2019).

This project examines prepping practice through practice-led sculptural enquiry, the outcomes of which evidence a less acknowledged part of the spectrum of preparatory behaviours. By 'less acknowledged' I refer to the modes of highly individuated preparatory engagement found in low-income prepping which deploys pragmatic and Do-It-Yourself value-adding to easily accessible objects such as found, inherited, second-



Figure 2: *Apocalyptic Objects, studio development*. 2019. Photo: Jess Day.

hand or cheap objects. As such, this research project is limited to low-incomes modes of preparedness. A further limit of this research project is that, given the highly individuated nature of prepping, the research has primarily been established through my own translation of these activities and modes of crisis sense-making. The research makes no claims to objectivity, based as it is on the lived experience of both prepping and art practice.

Building on sociologist Kezia Barker's proposal that prepping is a lens through which meaning is formed in contemporary crises by the individual, I propose three frameworks, narrative, adaptable objects, and preservation, through which highly individuated preparedness may be productively examined through creative practice. Further, this project develops two primary modes of engagement utilised in prepping practice, which have been previously identified by sociologist Kezia Barker (2019), namely, imaginative practice and tangible material practice. Both imaginative and tangible material practices of preppers engage with crisis, agency, materiality, object value, temporality, and security. This project examines prepping as a highly individuated response to an ongoing global state of crisis. By examining prepping practice through ongoing studio practice, this project identifies ways of making that derive from both imaginative and tangible aspects of prepping practice. This has resulted in the development of a methodology for making artworks that interprets crisis through highly individuated, anticipatory means that incorporates both inscribed and experiential knowledge production.

This research project began as a critical examination of prepping as a dominantly right-wing activity in comparison with survivalism, which in my childhood I was taught was a less extreme form of individual preparation. However, by researching how prepping culture emerged as a contemporary form of individual preparation, it became apparent that it was survivalism, the precursor to prepping, that had the most extreme

right-wing ideologies. This background to prepping is explored in chapter one, where I track developments in individuals responding to threat and speculative crises since the Second World War. At this time during the research project COVID-19 emerged as a global pandemic. My response to this, to the amusement of many friends and colleagues, was to have my vehicle packed with two weeks' worth of supplies for my partner and I, should we decide to leave the city center. My chosen supplies included a tent, fishing rods, water, food supplies, spare clothes, tackle boxes, axes, knives, backpacks, handbooks, and other useful gear subtly packed into the back of my Subaru Outback. I then drove around for two weeks continuing my normal routines, feeling confident in the knowledge that, should things 'get bad' we could 'get out' quickly to one of our parents' properties, located in rural Western Australia, and away from the dangers the city presents in crisis scenarios<sup>1</sup>. At the time, I did not connect this decision to my research project at all, but to my background growing up. I had been taught from a young age that being prepared was my responsibility, and that I should trust my instincts when it came to preserving my own life. Social and cultural geographer Bradley Garrett also states that "[t]he 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which preppers consider a 'mid-level' event, and many of them were well-prepared for, makes clear that scholarly attention to prepper's motivations and methods is both timely and valuable" (1).

In hindsight, this was the point in the project when I really began asking why prepping was so ridiculed in broader cultural articulations of survival. How and why prepping has been ridiculed in western culture is examined in chapter two, where I investigate how prepping culture became its own movement, and how it differs from its survivalist forebear. This research led to a huge shift in the sculptural outcomes I was making in the studio. Prior to COVID-19 and the more extensive research into prepping culture, I was making sculptural objects that operated as 'props' in a speculative post-apocalyptic fiction of my own design. Examples include

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1 By dangers here I refer to the classic 'apocalyptic' narrative in which built up urban areas descend into looting, food shortages, and violence.

*Pillar of Society* 2019 (see figure 13), *Friend or Foe* 2019 (see figure 4) and *Apocalyptic Objects* 2019 (see figure 2). These sculptural outcomes were exhibited at Perth Artist Run Initiative (ARI) Pig Melon Gallery, under the show title *Apocalyptic Agency* towards the end of 2019. When it came to install the exhibit, which was delayed several times due to COVID-19 restrictions, although I could not clearly state why, I did have reservations about my sculptural works, and felt I needed to approach the project differently in my studio works.

Paralysed by the death tolls published regarding the sweeping pandemic, and concerned a post-apocalyptic fiction was not a productive response, I turned back to the research. I began making a series of investigations into my childhood, including asking family members to share a practical skill with me that they thought would be useful in a crisis or post-crisis scenario (see figures 1 and 87). While investigating these individual interpretations of practical skills my cousin, who had purchased my grandparents' house, discovered a couple of caches I had made as a child. Caches operate as small to medium sized burial boxes containing practical survival goods and, or tools (see figures 21, 47, 52, and 58). These objects, more than any previous aspects of my childhood, made me truly understand that my background was closer to many preppers than I had initially been willing to admit. The project undertook a dramatic shift and I, rather than denying my survivalist-style upbringing in which the government was seen as highly suspicious and gun-ownership was avidly defended, became a point of departure into my contemporary highly individuated preparations. But still, I was struggling to understand how I could make sculptural work about these discoveries which appeared as disparate, fragmented modes of engaging with crises. As a result, I developed the three-part methodological framework that comprises section two of this document (see chapters 4, 5, and 6).

This three-part framework identifies three dominant ways in which prepping engages with crises and uses these commonalities to present my own sculptural investigations into prepping activities. Establishing this methodology enabled me to critically reflect on my studio investigations, identify commonalities and differences to other cultural articulations of prepping, and create a series of portable sculptural artworks.

These portable sculptural outcomes began with a series of 'field kits' which became 'tapestries'. These works are referred to as tapestries because they operate conceptually like tapestries, they depict information deemed worthy of preserving and disseminating, they are portable, and they fill large sections of wall space. Rather than depicting royalty or prominent figures of the time however, these tapestries present modes of highly-individualised preparatory activity. That is to say they are portable, depict narratives of prepping activity or engagement, operate as a form of disseminating inscribed and experiential knowledge, and evidence the desire to be prepared, without necessarily knowing what for, and if or when, that preparation may be required (see figures 20, 32, 35, 38, 49, and 62).

This project frames prepping as a lens through which meaning is formed from contemporary crises by the individual, as the prepper proposes alternative approaches to crises in which the proposal and production of alternative secure futures are returned to the individual (Baker 2019, 493). Prepping realises this proposal and production of alternative secure futures through the individual's synthesis of imaginative and tangible material practices, which are informed by both inscribed and experiential knowledge. This research project deploys both imaginative and tangible prepping practice to formulate a methodology for making artworks. These artworks evidence highly individuated attempts to propose and produce alternative secure futures in the face of possible crisis. The research asks, how can sculptural practice articulate the ways in which an individual negotiates

unfolding and speculative crises through prepping activity? And further, can the commonalities and differences of these often highly disparate modes of engaging with crises help create a creative practice methodology?

The significance of this research is located in the timely nature of crises negotiation at a broader cultural level, and the overall lack of research into prepping practices, particularly from the viewpoint of creative practitioners. As a relatively recent phenomenon, prepping practices have primarily been investigated by sociologists and cultural theorists, such as Kezia Barker (2019), Michael F. Mills (2018; 2020), Mills and Fleetwood (2019), and Joseph Masco (2014; 2019; 2021). However, attending to the practices of prepping from an academic perspective that participates in prepping and reflects on practice through text or object-based outcomes is largely lacking.<sup>2</sup>

Further, little work has been done to examine the material practices of prepping culture in an arts practice context, especially with regard to the agency found in these practices and how it may influence speculative futures. By proposing and exploring speculative futures through peremptory practice, preppers exercise agency in the face of perceived externalised threat. This research synthesises imaginative and material practices found in prepping culture through sculptural practice. The aim of this research is to create artworks in which prepping culture acts as a lens through which meaning is made at a highly individuated level in response to external threat, thus the practice of prepping, for those who participate, acts as a productive agitator of speculative futures. This research project is a venture into prepping practices which are multifaceted, varied, and complex. It operates as one voice adding to a much larger, ongoing conversation about how prepping may aid in our engagement with speculative futures, conflicts, crises, agency, and material practices.

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2 The exception being a recent paper by Michael F. Mills and Jennifer Fleetwood, published in 2020. This paper presents the outcomes of a criminology study into the stigma and deviance of prepping by taking the criminological approach of *verstehen*, in which empathy with deviants is utilised to better understand actions, stigma, choices, justifications, and motivations for behaviour (see also Ferrell 1997).

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# Chapter one



Figure 3: Jess Day, *Apocalyptic Agency*, installation detail, 2020. Plastic bottles, aluminium shelving, expanda-foam, pine, bolts, sensor light, climbing rope, acrylic paint, 20L water carriers, torches, lantern, plastic gun, plastic rope, plastic knife, dolphin torch, plastic containers, paper clay, spray paint. Photo: Jess Day.

## International conflict and individuated anticipatory practice: Introduction

This chapter tracks the roots of contemporary prepping from the Second World War, through the Cold War, to the present day. The chapter begins by defining disaster, catastrophe, and crisis, explaining why this research project deploys the term 'crisis', while providing a brief overview of the use of these terms. The Second World War had a profound influence on the development of survivalist culture, which was the forebear of contemporary prepping culture. Survivalism is explained in post-Second World War culture in the contexts of the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Australia. The advent of the Cold War had a profound impact on the later emergence of prepping culture, as did the lessons learnt particularly from American articulations of survivalism. The shift of survivalism to prepping post-Cold War is also discussed, paving the way to the next chapter which focuses on contemporary prepping culture.

### Defining disaster, catastrophe, and crisis

The scale of disruption to a community or natural area can be broken down into three primary categories, namely, disaster, catastrophe, and crisis. Disasters are different to everyday emergencies. The latter may be described as a crisis by an individual, and catastrophes are much more impactful than disasters. Crisis is the negative change in the everyday routine of a community or individual which may lead to an increasingly dangerous situation or may be the description of the reaction to a disaster or catastrophe (Eastham, Coates, and Allodi 1970, 463-464). By clearly defining these terms, patterns emerge in how each is managed within the community and by individuals. These patterns consist of both condoned survival responses and pathologised ones such as looting and hoarding. Although prepping is often presented as a pathologised form of survival by mainstream media, academic sources disagree (see Mills and Fleetwood 2019; Masco 2021; Garrett 2021a, 2021b; Barker 2019; Clinton 2017; Huddleston 2016; Sims and Grigsby 2019). When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, for example, panic buying was widespread in Australia and overseas. However, it was not preppers



Figure 4: Jess Day, *Friend or Foe?*, 2019. Climbing rope, canvas drop-sheet, acrylic paint, cotton thread, plastic netting, five palm-sized stones, roofing nails. Photo: Jess Day.

who were panic buying, as their supplies are slowly accrued by adding additional items to weekly shops.

Rather it was those who were not prepared who became panicky, and quickly sought to top-up their stocks.

The definition of disaster has been the subject matter of various academic papers (see Fritz 1961; Perry 2006; Webb et al. 2002; Fischer 1998) since Charles Fritz's definition in 1961. Disaster studies developed during what sociologist Ronald P. Perry refers to as the "classical period", a period which commenced at the end of the Second World War and ended in 1961 with scientist Charles Fritz's definition of disaster. These disaster studies continue to strongly influence the way we think about disasters, and their definition, responses, and cultural articulations via media sources (see Perry 2006). Fritz defined disaster through its impact to society, stating that "the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society, or its subdivision, is prevented" (1961, 655).

Sociologist Henry Fischer asks us to consider not the technical definition of disaster to identify its social impact, but rather ask, "what are the various circumstances under which communities and societies suddenly diverge from partially or totally adhering to the proscribed social structure and temporarily or permanently replace it with an alternative?" (1998, 93). I agree with Fischer that the common usage of the term is more than adequate as a working definition: "Why not accept that a disaster, simply put, is the mess that results from a precipitous event which itself is the disaster agent or cause of the big mess?" (2003, 94). Similar to sociological studies of disasters, prepping anticipates this potential disaster or "big mess"; however, prepping diverges from social expectations of national assistance or aid in such events, and instead largely assumes individual responsibility for immediate survival. The sociology of disaster is the study of social structure as it anticipates, responds to, and makes adjustments following a disaster event. This anticipation, response, and adjustment to a disaster is a 'condoned' response to disaster, as it critically and scientifically analyses the impact of a disaster event on a

social structure. Prepping, however, is often pathologised and “used as a benchmark against which to measure the rationality of responses” (Barker, 2019, 493). E. L. Quarantelli (2006), who is a Disaster Research Centre specialist at Ohio State University, explains the differences between disaster and catastrophe, and suggests these differences are most obvious on community, organisational, and societal levels within the affected area.

Quarantelli (2006) explains that in a catastrophe the majority of the community’s building structures are decimated, local officials are unable to perform their roles effectively, aid from nearby communities is unobtainable, and the majority of everyday community activities are no longer able to be performed in the ways they did previously. Catastrophe can be understood as a tragic event which range from extreme misfortune to the end of the world as we know it. Crisis may be used to describe catastrophe and disaster, either as identification of the precursors of impending disaster or catastrophe, or to describe the community’s or individual’s state of being after such an event. Cultural theorist Carlo Bordoni argues that crisis, as we understand it today, has been defined purely in relation to the impact of adverse events on the economic sector, and as a result, the original meaning of the word has been lost (2014, 6). Bordoni attributes the definition of crisis to its Greek roots, referring to

judgement, result of a trial, turning point, selection, decision, but also contention or quarrel, a standard, from which to derive *criterion* for judging, but also ability to discern, and *critical*, suitable to judge, crucial, decisive as well as pertaining to the art of judgement. (2014, 6, italics in the original)

Bordoni criticises the current use of the term ‘crisis’ as an “abstract entity sounding vaguely sinister” which allows removal of personal responsibility (2014, 6) – for example, government rhetoric blaming failing economic and social policies on ‘the crisis’ rather than breaking down the problems faced by those policies and taking responsibility for the required changes. Historically, crises have arguably been easier to define.



Figure 5: Pickled vegetables. 2022. Photo: Jess Day.



Bordoni points to the rampant inflation of Weimar Germany as an example as well as the doubling of market prices in Europe after the Second World War (2014, 7). Crises today, however, are “so vague and generalised because they involve so much of the planet, [and] take eons to turn around” (2014, 10). Crisis has become the rule in contemporary society, not the exception. Bordoni concludes by suggesting the best way to deal with crises in contemporary society is to learn to live *with* crises, since there is no tangible end to such ruptures in sight (2014, 10). The benefits of doing as articulated by Bordoni mirror those ideals of preppers attempting to navigate crises, namely the retention of the sense of being “vigilant and alert, and psychologically preparing us for the worst” (2014, 10). Ultimately, it is better to engage with crises rather than ignore or minimise them, as doing so allows an individual agency in *how* they choose to navigate such times. This research project refers to crises rather than catastrophe or disaster, allowing acknowledgement of the full spectrum of speculative crises from disruptions to life to precarity of life during major disasters.

Further, in terms of preparations made by individuals, prepping for crisis expands anticipatory actions to include everything from job loss to volcanic eruption. Unlike the pathologised prepper often presented by the media as someone that is obsessively anticipating the apocalypse, preppers approach crises as logical localised scenarios in which they, as individuals, cannot assume external aid or assistance from the Government or anyone else (Mills and Fleetwood, 2019). Although the terms ‘disaster’, ‘crisis’, and ‘catastrophe’ have multiple commonalities, the main difference found in research papers within the discipline of sociology is the level of governmental planning and engagement necessary (see Fritz 1961; Perry 2006; Webb et al. 2002; Fischer 1998).

Survivalism is the practice of preparing for crisis through the stockpiling of food and weapons, and the development of survival strategies (Lamy 1992, 410). Survivalism is the precursor to contemporary prepping

practice. Since the 1950s, the practice of survivalism has become increasingly popular and developed from a fringe activity into a doomsday culture (Masco 2021, 260). Recent research suggests that prepping developed partly from a desire to distance survivalist activities from survivalism, which has become understood as an extremist practice following the infamy of prominent figures like Timothy McVeigh and Ted Kaczynski (Imel-Hartford 2012, iv). Contemporary prepping differs from survivalism in important ways that have only recently been identified by academics (see Barker 2019; Imel-Hartford 2012; Masco 2021; Mills and Fleetwood 2019; Mills 2019; 2020). These differences include a more moderate approach to preparing for disaster, and a focus on short-to-medium-scale disasters.

Prepping has developed extensively since the Cold War into a complex and nuanced community of individuals whose concern for their futures, and lack of agency over such, has led them to prepare themselves and their families for a variety of possible crises. Prepping may take many forms and look different depending on the country and locale as well as the individual and the priorities of that individual. At its core, however, prepping is motivated by the same desires, namely the preservation of life and securing of stable futures, regardless of geographical location. Prepping has been explored by various academics (see Masco 2018; 2019; 2021; Mills 2019; Barker 2019); however, each paper opens with the caveat regarding the difficulties surrounding academic studies on the subject given the relatively recent emergence of prepping culture and the general secrecy many serious preppers employ about their activities. As a result, these studies usually either focus on a small group of individuals who have agreed to be surveyed, or relate commonalities established in prepping to larger cultural movements or events. This background to prepping attempts to provide insight into citizen agency in anticipation of times of conflict and crisis, providing context for the increasing number of individuals preparing for possible crisis, and why these individuals are motivated to do so<sup>3</sup>. Further, this chapter proposes

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3 The motivations for prepping will be covered extensively in chapter three. Chapter one provides historical context regarding the development and consolidation of prepping practice into its contemporary form.



that prepping is not necessarily a new practice, but simply a contemporary attempt at securing the future of individuals in the face of an increasingly insecure neoliberal world.

### The Second World War, survivalism, and ongoing crisis

It can be argued that since the Second World War, the United States of America (henceforth US), Australia, and the United Kingdom (henceforth UK) have become increasingly reliant on the conceptual notion of imminent crisis<sup>4</sup> (Masco 2021, 6). Since the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, national security projects in the US, Australia, and UK have increasingly focused on strategically preventing the element of surprise through policies of anticipation (Masco 2014, 9-10). Cultural theorist Joseph Masco highlights the ongoing nature of these anticipatory policies and he states that “the ability to shock (at both psychic and material levels) and not experience shock ... became the primary goal of the American security state after 1945” (2014, 9). These policies, which were developed from largely successful campaigns of emotional and physical citizen management during the Second World War, continue today and contribute to the motivations of preppers (Garrett 2021b, 401).

The Second World War saw Allied governments articulating security to citizens as an individual responsibility and as a duty to the greater war effort. The US, UK, and Australia all ran similar propaganda campaigns directed at their respective citizenry for two primary reasons. Firstly, the Second World War required strong emotional management from Allied governments for the continued support of troops, reduction of public panic, rousting out of spies, and for the home front workforce to supply the international effort with material goods. Secondly, the increasing nuclear testing in the United States Manhattan Project (1942-1946), the bombings of London (September 7, 1940 – May 11, 1941) and later bombing of Darwin (Feb 19, 1942) demanded high

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<sup>4</sup> This expansion of the concept of threat and the ongoing existential danger that the expansion of threat presents will be covered more extensively in the latter half of this chapter.

levels of public coordination<sup>5</sup> for the preservation of life that could only be achieved by a prepared public. As a result, the American, British, and Australian governments increasingly encouraged their citizens to stockpile goods, have a bunker to preserve life, have a co-ordinated family plan to get to and from the bunker, report suspicious behaviour or neighbours, contribute to the war effort, and develop skills that may aid others in times of crisis. Thus, security since the Second World War encompasses the “near future as well as the human nervous system ... with perceptions and temporalities of danger the guiding administrative logics of the security state” (Masco 2014, 9). Bartering of rationed goods was highly normalised given scarcity, and home gardens, or ‘Victory Gardens’, were increasingly popular and encouraged by the American, British, and Australian governments (McKearnen 1995). Activities such as establishing a Victory Garden, pickling vegetables, preserving fruit, maintaining the structural integrity of the home, and filling increasing gaps in the workforce were expected of women on their respective home fronts (McKernan 1995). These practices are found in survivalism of the 1960s to 1990s and in contemporary prepping culture (Mills 2019). Citizens were encouraged to fix items around the home in an ad hoc manner rather than purchasing new ones; for example, the American Wartime Advertising Council<sup>6</sup> ran variations of their “Use it Up, Wear it Out, Make Do, or Do Without” campaign (Jones 2009). These highly influential campaigns helped foster a ‘make do’ attitude on the home front. Similar campaigns were run in the UK and Australia until the end of the Second World War, such as Australian Prime Minister John Curtin’s ‘Austerity’ campaign of August 1942, which encouraged citizens to “work harder and avoid luxuries and waste” (Australian War Memorial, n.d.). These ‘make do’ and ‘no waste’ attitudes are core aspects of the survivalist and contemporary prepper mindsets. As social and cultural geographer Bradley Garrett writes, “in the prepper ideology, faith in adaptation has supplanted hope in mitigation” (2021b, 401). By encouraging citizens to perform these survivalist behaviours in the interests

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5 Both emotional and physical management were important, particularly given that if a nuclear bomb was dropped, the chances of survival for the average individual were devastatingly low. An emotionally managed public who were physically ‘preparing’ experienced agency and were hopefully too preoccupied to linger on the nuclear reality, and thus oppose it (Masco 2021, 127-137).

6 Founded on February 18, 1942, the Advertising Council (USA) ran famous campaigns at the behest of President Truman, such as “Loose Lips Sink Ships!” and “Women in War Jobs” (Advertising Council, n.d.).



Figure 6: Jess Day, *Cache #1*, 2021. Plastic lock box, glow-in-the-dark rope, super glue, safety pins, bandages, sterile gauze swabs, silver emergency blanket, resuscitation masks. Photo: Jess Day.

of national security, these respective governments introduced survival behaviours, which in rural areas were already common, to their wider national communities.

Further links to contemporary prepping can be found in the air raid drills of the 1940s in the US, UK, and Australia. Citizens had small 'go bags' packed for trips to the bunkers, outdoor sheds, or school assembly halls. Children were taught to identify planes and practice variations on 'duck and cover'. In Queensland, Australia, air raid drills were part of the normal school routine, with student representatives responsible for carrying air raid supplies, such as bandages and disinfectant, in shoulder bags (Queensland Government, n.d.). Other students were supplied with wooden clothes pegs to "bite down on" should the need arise (Queensland Government, n.d.). These preparations and drills were normalised, not only by the respective governments, but also socially as citizens were encouraged to mitigate any atmosphere of fear, and instead project confidence and national pride in the face of crisis (Masco 2021, 8). Those who grew up during the Second World War were familiar with many survival basics and knew methods of both emotional management and physical preparation. These survival basics would be developed further after the end of the Second World War in 1945, as within two years a new threat would be identified. The Cold War, which commenced in 1947, encouraged these collective and individual anticipatory behaviours (Masco 2021, 4). And for some, these behaviours developed into a lifestyle, in which anticipation and preparation, both physical and emotional, became increasingly routine (Masco 2021, 10).

#### The ongoing influence of the Cold War on preparedness culture

During the Cold War, governments in the US, UK, and Australia encouraged their citizens to prepare their everyday lives for potential nuclear attack. As a result, these countries all produced citizens who were actively preparing for crisis for over forty years. The influence of the Cold War preparedness directive spanned several

generations and was adopted particularly rigorously by those already living in rural areas, and areas prone to extreme weather or natural disasters.

On December 7, 1972, NASA launched the last of the Apollo missions, and Apollo 17 captured and beamed back the iconic 'Blue Marble' image of the Earth from space. This image profoundly influenced a world living through the Cold War, affecting nuclear age militarism, the ways in which knowledge was produced, and the technologies that visually articulated previous unknowns (Masco 2021, 137). Anthropologist Joseph Masco states "that the specific attributes of being able to see the entire planet as a single unit or system is a Cold War creation" (2021, 137). To perceive the world in this way shifts previously national systems into totalities whereby finance, international relations, oceans, atmosphere, and communication became globalities. Masco argues that "a planetary optic is thus a national security creation (in its scientific infrastructures, visualisation technologies, and governing ambitions) that transcends these structures to offer an alternative ground for politics and future making" (2021, 137). The Cold War dramatically shifted the perception of threat. Since nuclear fallout could travel huge distances in air currents, ground water across borders could be affected for generations. Suddenly, hard borders and political alignments no longer mattered. If a nuclear weapon was dropped, it could affect the entire world. And it did. The American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2014) website states, "any person living in the contiguous United States since 1951 has been exposed to some radioactive fallout, and all of a person's organs and tissues have received some exposure". Further, "even today radioactive fallout is present in all parts of the world in small amounts" (CDC, 2014). As national security became increasingly global in its approach and perspective, so did its industry and manufacturing systems. This shifting of national systems into totalities was a primary point of concern for survivalists and continues to be so for contemporary preppers<sup>7</sup> (Lamy 1992, 430 Mills and Fleetwood 2019, 31).

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<sup>7</sup> Recently COVID-19 exposed the extent of how these national systems have become increasingly reliant on offshore manufacturing or processing (Zeilinga and Taylor 2020). This will be discussed in more depth in the COVID-19 section of this chapter.



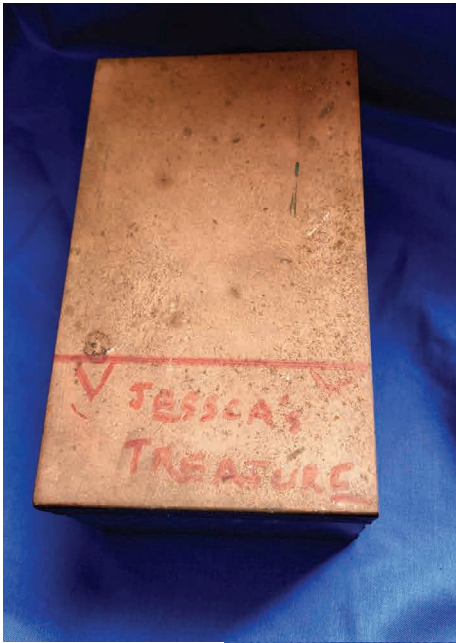


Figure 7: Jess Day, *Jessica's Treasures: Rediscovered Cache #2*, 2021. Cache was made by the artist when under the age of ten and contains broken crab claws, sea urchins, shells, small stones, and polished glass. Photo: Jess Day.

Complex processes such as chemical manufacturing often occur in a handful of locations globally, resulting in enormous pressure on those plants, and their consumers, when disruption to the supply chain occurs (Zeilinga and Taylor 2020). Cheryl Durrant, a fellow at the Australian Institute for Integrated Economic Research, explains that these complex processes are often involved in providing national systems, such as water treatment, and given their complex international supply chains, should a crisis arise, relations with the country producing these chemicals may not be sustainable (Zeilinga and Taylor 2020). As Joseph Masco writes in *The Future of Fallout*, “This ultimately raises an important set of questions about how collective security problems can, and should, be imagined” (2021, 137). The concerns surrounding shifting national systems into totalities continues today, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic supply chain issues experienced in individual nations worldwide.

During the Cold War the notion of a complex national system experiencing disruption due to supply chains, nuclear attack, communist invasion, or nuclear fallout was heavily emotionally managed by the respective governments (Masco 2021, 137). This emotional management was important to civilian morale and the justification of nuclear testing (particularly in the US), but it was also an attempt to prevent social collapse (Masco 2021, 137). In a US Federal Civil Defence Administration (FCDA) pamphlet titled *Facts about Fallout* created in 1955, civilians were warned that cities were no longer the sole targets of military attack, rather the environment itself had become a source of fear, as clouds and air, unseen particulates, and strong winds could be effects of nuclear fallout. This was a significant shift in the public perception of safety, and also fear. Previous notions of warfare as limited to designated theatres of war were being transformed into something more insidious, a perception of *potential* threat everywhere and thus, it became an everyday threat. Again, the similarities to the current global pandemic are acute, as invisible particles in the form of a virus continue to threaten ‘normal’ everyday living for citizens who face the possibility of losing income, becoming seriously ill,





Figure 8: Jess Day, *Trail and Error*, studio detail. 2021. Waterproof drop sheet, rope, cotton thread, line marking thread, spray paint. Photo: Jess Day.



and even dying. Such unfolding crises felt on such a global scale seriously impact collective cultural concepts such as threat, fear, preparedness, and preservation of life.

The desired effect of Cold War government pamphlets was the mobilisation of civil agency – in terms of fear but not terror – creating a population that was prepared, emotionally, to support military action and self-preservation in ways not previously considered (see Young, 2022, 155-163). Of crucial import to this research is the resulting shift in responsibility from that of national security institutions to the individual citizen. The Cold War, and the threat of nuclear attack, mobilised the wider populace to take responsibility for their survival, to prepare, practice, stockpile, and educate themselves on defence and tactical activity. A new generation of survivalist sub-culture was growing alongside the returned veterans of the Second World War, each informing the other, and shifting survivalism back into the everyday. As Masco surmises, “after 1945 Americans were increasingly recruited to normalise unprecedented forms of existential danger within an industrial atmosphere that was also experiencing radical environmental change.... Fallout is thus an environmental flow” (2021, 142). Fallout also operates over temporal frames; the nuclear elements may have long half-lives which effect both humans and the environment (see Young 2022, 176-177). The term ‘fallout’ also has military connotations, whereby personnel fall out from being ‘at attention’, returning to individual activity, thus falling out “involves individual actions and lived consequences, a post-sociality lived in isolation from the collective action of society or the war machine” (Masco 2021, 139).

That is to say, the unfolding global crisis of nuclear fallout not only impacted formal systems, such as government, military, international supply chains, and natural resources, but also the individual’s attention to these systems, and should the unthinkable occur, what would be left of those systems. Another direct result of potential fallout was the realisation, at a political level, that international borders were not, and could not be

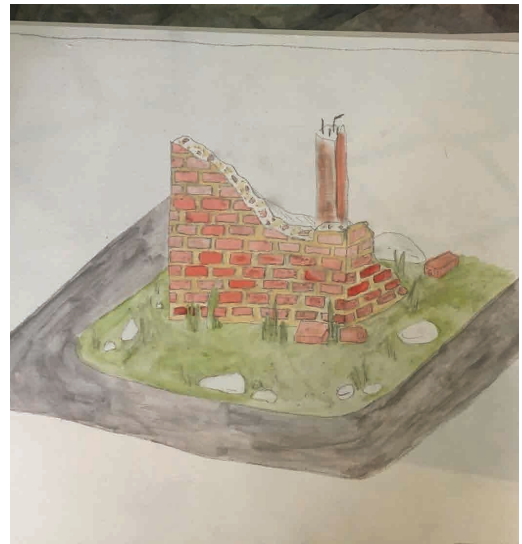
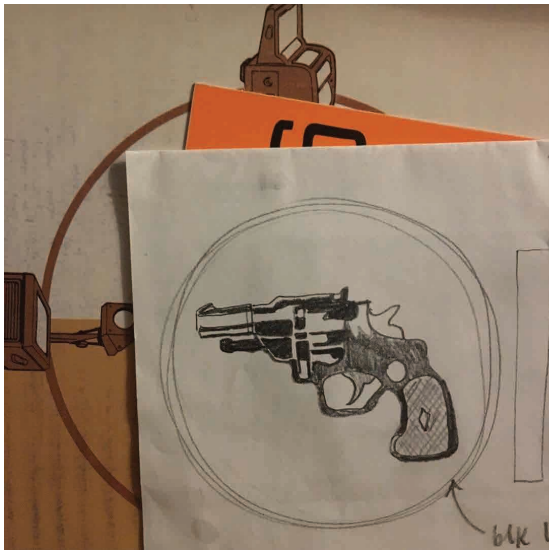
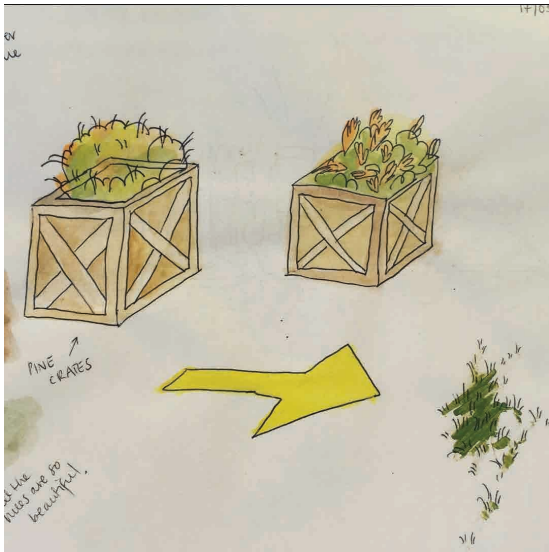


Figure 9: Jess Day, visual diary scans and studio development, 2019-2020. Images: Jess Day.

'closed' to shifts in wind direction, thus nuclear attack could become an issue for nations for whom the attack was not intended. Masco likens this to climate change, asking "how many of our toxic industrial processes fall into this similar category of the unseen but cumulatively damaging or deadly.... Fallout produces cumulative effects that only become visible in the destabilised organism or ecological system" (2021, 142). Growing public concern over nuclear technologies and increasingly active protests made it difficult for governments to emotionally manage their citizens effectively in the same ways (Masco 2021). This is perhaps due, in part, to increasingly vocal concerns by scientists worldwide whose research into nuclear technologies and their impacts presented vivid and increasingly terrifying depictions of the precarity of natural systems and the possible long-term effects to those natural systems (Masco 2021, 138). This growing understanding of fallout being a potentially invisible and airborne threat, that could spread vast distances given the right weather conditions, began a repositioning of citizens, no longer as national subjects, but subjects of the world<sup>8</sup> (Choy 2011). Understanding the possible implications of a crises event such as nuclear war is made more difficult by the ways in which such an event may unfold over generations. Masco evidences the complex nature of crises and temporality when attempting to adequately prepare for large scale crises events such as nuclear fallout stating,

Fallout comes after the event; it is the unacknowledged-until-lived crisis that is built into the infrastructure of a system, program, or process. Fallout is therefore understood primarily retrospectively but is lived in the future anterior becoming a form of history made visible in negative outcomes. (Masco 2021, 138)

It can be argued the same is true for all crises, that we, in the cascade of unfolding unknowns, and our attempts to make sense of these events, can only understand crises on such a scale retrospectively. Despite the knowledge that nuclear fallout could travel great distances and cause enormous environmental and

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<sup>8</sup> Instead of subjects of the world, academic Timothy Choy (2011) describes us as "breathers", a population at risk of airborne attack.



Figure 10: Jess Day, *Apocalyptic Agency*, detail, 2020. Pig Melon Gallery, WA. Photo: Jess Day.



physical injury and even death, nuclear fallout remained a sideline for the bomb itself within US military rhetoric and planning (Masco 2021, 141). Thus, the Cold War colonised “an ever-deeper time horizon” as nuclear technologies installed “injury and crises incrementally into the future” and brought the temporality of injury to the fore when assessing the speculative dangers of those technologies (Masco 2021, 142). As awareness of the impact of nuclear testing grew, so did the civilian and scientific protests. The Limited Test Ban Treaty was introduced in 1963, and the US and USSR both stopped atmospheric, ocean, and outer-space testing, instead turning their attention underground. Not only did this shift underground result in a new set of ecological problems around seepage and storage, but underground detonation also altered the visual effect of nuclear detonation; the iconic mushroom cloud became a seismic data set. Ultimately, however, concealment of testing did little to mitigate the perception of crises as ongoing, as philosopher and art historian Lieven De Cauter evidenced 41 years later:

In the context of climate change, species-jumping viruses, biological engineering, or the disposal of nuclear waste, for instance, the environment itself has become a technical problem constantly in need of upgrade and repair, so that we will forevermore live in a state of permanent catastrophe to be managed rather than avoided. (2004, 100)

And it is this “permanent catastrophe” or ongoing series of crises unfolding globally that concerns preppers and their survivalist forebears<sup>9</sup>. Often living on or below the poverty line, many preppers are aware that any further stresses on their finances, food supplies, or everyday life may deplete their already stretched resources (Mills and Fleetwood, 2019). Post-Cold War, the articulation of ongoing crises through neoliberal systems has resulted in the shift to a “constant mobilisation of emergency time coded as a culture of fear [which] configures politics in religious terms, hiding its entanglement with particular ideologies and diverse relations of power” (2008, 258). One of the results of this “emergency time” is the mobilising of militarisation, not just in terms of

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<sup>9</sup> Self-identifying survivalists still exist and often hold extreme right-wing ideologies (Sims & Grigsby, 2019).

foreign policy, but also as a “defining principle for social changes at home” (Giroux 2008, 258-259). The impact of neoliberalism on contemporary prepping culture is discussed further in the next chapter.

In conclusion, since the Second World War, individuals have increasingly become responsible for their own survival. This is partly due to governments requiring individuals to do so, given the scale of preparations required in the Second World War and Cold War. However, increasing pressure on natural systems, economic concerns, environmental crises, and political shifts have all been established as motives for individuals to increase their future preparedness (Barker 2019). Survivalism, which is the predecessor to contemporary prepping culture, was largely collective and isolationist (from mainstream society), and often included strong ideological belief systems (Lamy 1992). Prepping differs in important ways from survivalism and its participants are largely active members of the societies in which they are located (Barker 2019). The next chapter introduces highly individuated preparedness culture, or prepping. I discuss what prepping culture is, the motivations for prepping, and the differences between prepping and its survivalist forebear, and I survey the current academic field of prepping culture research.



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# Chapter two



Figure 11: Jess Day, *Watch and Wonder Work-Vest*, detail, 2022. *The Worldliness of the Stone* group exhibition at TCB Gallery, Melbourne. Modified cotton drill jacket, grommets, carabiners, rope, strapping, various zips, coloured cotton drill, cloth tape, waterproof waxed thread, heat reflective material, reflective cloth, plastic gems, solder, modified coat hanger, glue, chain, magnifying glass, tent pegs, found Grunt strap with metal buckle. Photo: Chantelle Mitchell.



Figure 12: Jess Day, *Predicting weather*, 2020. Scanned collage from visual diary. Image: Jess Day.

## From survivalism to prepping: Introduction

Prepping is a form of highly individuated anticipatory practice that attempts to prepare for, speculate on, and navigate possible futures. This chapter provides an overview of contemporary prepping, and context as to why individuals may be motivated to prepare. I then discuss the differences between survivalism and prepping, and provide an overview of current academic literature on contemporary prepping practices. The background to prepping practice introduces the frameworks proposed by Kezia Barker (2019) and Ben Anderson (2010) regarding prepping and anticipatory practice. This chapter provides an overview of contemporary prepping practices and the academic field that surrounds those practices, as well as why prepping is stigmatised, and how it can be reframed for productive analysis. Barker's and Anderson's frameworks inform the development of my own framework for this project, which is introduced in the following chapter.

## What is prepping?

Highly individuated preparatory practice, or prepping, is a series of activities in which individuals undertake a variety of activities to prepare themselves and their loved ones against possible ruptures, through the form of crises, to their everyday lives. Prepping may be undertaken collectively but is more often articulated through the individual ways in which one may choose to prepare. Preparations vary depending on the individual's needs, geographic location, available funds, current level of security, past experiences with crises, present challenges, and level of concern regarding the future. As such, prepping is a notoriously difficult culture to research, made even more difficult by the desire many preppers have to conceal their preps, either for fear of judgement or concern that others may 'take advantage' of their preparations in a crisis scenario.

Prepping activity contains commonalities despite its highly individuated nature. Active engagement with speculative disaster scenarios is achieved through common threads of narrative, adaptable objects, and

preservation in order to better secure the future. These engagements will be unpacked further in chapters four, five, and six. Prepping assumes that there is 'no help coming' in an emergency situation, that the individual must be responsible for their own safety and survival, and that no external agent can be depended upon.

Barker elaborates that

we may not like prepper's future visions any more than we like those of capitalism's perpetual present. But by recuperating the agency of future temporalities, by finding empowerment, pleasure, and vitality in moving closer to their metabolic vulnerability, preppers remind us that perhaps, this is a present worth surviving. (2019, 493)

The background to prepping (see chapter one) illustrates how after 9/11, prepping became a contemporary practice in both the US and UK, with the movement also growing in Australia (Garrett 2021a). However, apart from the increasing feelings of insecurity due to climate change, economic failures, terror attacks, global pandemics, and increasing natural disasters, why does prepping have such a growing following? Barker suggests it may be due to the growing desire within contemporary culture for products made by hand, a sense of authenticity, a need to represent the self and find personal meaning in the everyday (2019, 494). Mitchell (2001) agrees and adds that this growth stems from the personal investment in futures, and this type of cultural crafting is fulfilled within prepping culture.

Prepping, as a practice, requires direct engagement with materials and practices that are a part of the everyday, however this engagement goes beyond what most people would class as everyday activities. For example, getting food by going to the grocery store is an everyday activity. For some preppers, getting food means going to the vegetable garden and picking, washing, and drying produce that is then subject to further preparation such as cooking or pickling (see figure 5). This is one example of how prepping can enable direct engagement with everyday needs. Contrarily, prepping also requires imagination, speculation, and future-





Figure 13: Jess Day, *Pillar of Society*, 2020. The Lobby, WA. Hand-carved pumice-stone, acrylic paint, expanda-foam, marine plywood, broken door fragments, climbing rope, Dolphin torch, red sand, spray paint. Photo: Jess Day.



thinking that we may not otherwise engage in on a regular basis – for example, planning an escape route in case of a bushfire, including what you would pack in the car, leave behind, and where you would go (see figure 9 for an example of studio development around this research). It is in these ways that prepping culture fuses disparate activities to create an engaging and fulfilling practice for those who prep.

Prepping may or may not include, depending on the individual engaging with the culture, skill development, scenario rehearsal and planning, environmental disaster planning, collecting useful tools and objects, storing food, water, medication, and prescription aids such as glasses, reinforcing property, establishing secondary living locations, building a bunker, attending survival camps, making lists, making tools, and learning various non-verbal communication techniques, to name a few. Since much of prepping can be explained through examination and analysis of these activities, I will now provide context for prepping practice which will help define prepping further.

### Context for contemporary prepping

The contemporary world, troubled by the gap between awareness of global issues and the inability of current political systems to address them, can be productively examined through the notion of ‘fallout’ established during the Cold War (Masco 2021, 137). The current world state has been shaped by capitalism, industrialism, and militarism; Masco’s critical theory of fallout can be deployed to examine these effects as a “cumulative form of planetary engineering, a remaking of earthly domains that becomes visible only at certain scales and temporalities” (Masco 2021, 138). Masco asserts these ‘remakings’ are certainly becoming increasingly visible, globally, such as the effects of climate change including increased earthquakes and seismic activity, fires, and floods (Masco 2021, 139). Much of what preppers state they are preparing for can be directly linked to a

combination of fear in the face of these 'remakings', and more often than not, their experiences with, or living on or below, the poverty line (Mills and Fleetwood 2019).

Sinclair, Campbell, and Browne (2019) observed in their study of online prepping forums that the focus of preppers was primarily on preparation interests and skills, termed 'preps' in the forums, "such as mental health, farming, body armour, primitive fire making and lockpicking" (799). Importantly, this digresses from mainstream media focus on prepping as an activity for a specific event. As the authors state, "in other words, the reasons why one would need to use a particular prep were often left to the imagination" (Sinclair, Campbell, and Browne 2019, 799). The risks that were named in these forums ranged across a wide spectrum, from a temporary power outage to the collapse of financial institutions (Sinclair, Campbell, and Browne 2019, 799). American Cold War policy, which dissolved much of American democratic freedoms and justified the ongoing nuclear weapon development and testing, was used as a primary means to develop US international relations after 9/11 (Masco 2014, 26). Masco argues that the War on Terror adopted many of the emotional management techniques developed during the Cold War (2014, 41). Rather than using these Cold War techniques to regulate fear or create a "psychological space of sustainability located somewhere between fear and terror", the "counterterror state proliferates danger ... rehearsing vulnerability in public to amplify threat" (Masco 2014, 26). These 'amplifications of threat' may be the cause or motivation for such highly individuated preparedness.

Prepping presents alternative modes of engaging with crisis and disaster through the practice of physically, emotionally, and materially preparing to survive such an event. Sociologist Michael F. Mills defines prepping as "a pursuit undertaken by those who prepare to independently survive disasters – mass casualty events in which food and basic utilities may be unavailable, government assistance may be non-existent, and survivors might have to individually sustain their own survival" (2018, 1267). This thesis builds upon Barker's



Figure 14: Jess Day, *Cache #2*, 2021. Compass, camouflage adhesive bandage, matches, lighter, plastic containers with tampons, cotton wool balls soaked in Vaseline, knife, cardboard scraps, notebook. Photo: Jess Day.



argument that reframing the prepper as an “amplifier of conditions of the present” reveals an “emblematic and anticipatory figure who troubles the cracks in security states governing logics, exposing its social differentiation and rehearsing the inevitability of its future failures” (2019, 483). But which “conditions of the present” are amplified by prepping culture? In order to answer this question, I link Barker’s work to Masco’s critique of American domestic and foreign policy since 9/11 as an extension of Cold War policy devoted to the export of a “highly mobile sovereignty, one that uses the potential of catastrophic future events as a means of overcoming legal, ethical, and political barriers in the here and now and that is endlessly searching for new objects of concern” (Masco 2014, 19). Masco argues that current possible futures have been increasingly influenced by capitalism and by counterterrorism, as articulated via Cold War policies, affecting futures beyond the US. As Masco further explains,

the configuration of the future as an unravelling slide into greater and greater degrees of structural chaos across finance, war, and the environment prevails in mass media. The power of crisis to shock and thus mobilise is diminishing because of narrative saturation, overuse, and a lack of well-articulated positive futurities to balance stories of end-times. (2014, 566)

This state of “narrative saturation” and lack of positive futures is the primary driver of prepping culture, as the precarity that these narratives present suggests a lack of agency over one’s own future. Prepping practices refute this by preparing participants for worst case scenarios by improving physical fitness, developing skill sets across a range of activities, stockpiling goods, interrogating object function and possible use, as forms of everyday practice. Within the practice-led research these forms of preparing directly inform the sculptural outcomes. This is achieved by attempting and engaging with these activities and then mapping out the experiential knowledge I’ve accrued from doing so and combining it again with the original instruction or inscribed knowledge. The result is a series of sculptural objects which navigate the difficulties between wanting to be prepared, with not knowing what for, or if these preparations will suffice. *Watch and Wonder Work-Vest* 2022, combines cheap plastic ‘gems’ with a series of tactical equipment, such as strapping and chain-link (see

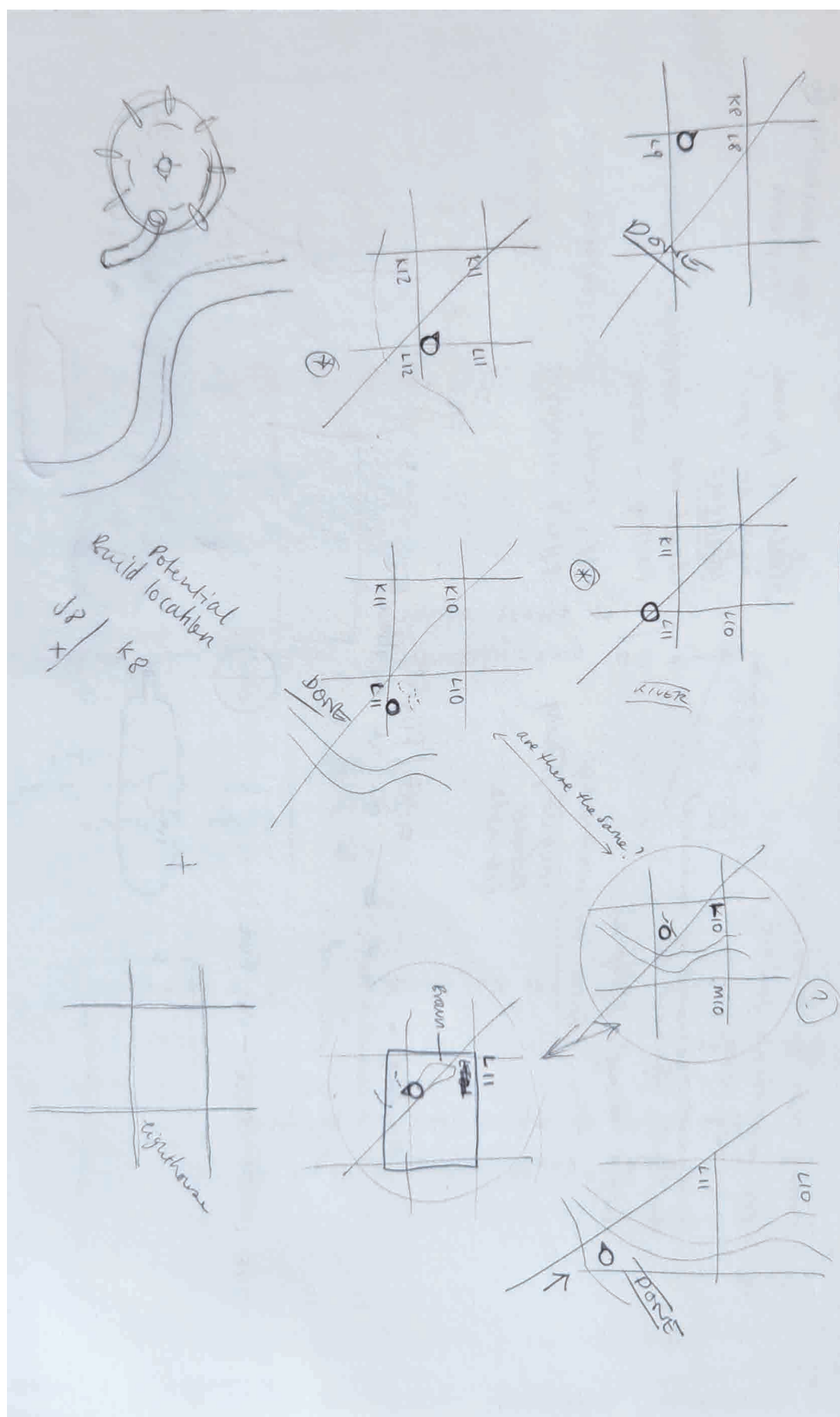


Figure 15: Jess Day, visual diary scan, 2019. ('Mud maps' to cache locations). Image: Jess Day.

figure 67). The contrast between the usefulness of these two materials and their possible function is one of my many attempts to visually present the negotiation between preparing and how functional or sufficient these preparations may appear in an actual crisis scenario.

### Motivations to prepare: Disaster studies, fear, and human behaviour in crises

Academic research on human beings in disaster scenarios has been systematic and ongoing since 1950 (Fritz and Williams 1957, 42). Prepping attempts to prepare an individual for these scenarios by engaging with skill development, scenario rehearsal, and pragmatic material practices. Disaster theorists Charles E. Fritz and Harry B. Williams wrote in their 1957 paper “The Human Being in Disasters: A Research Perspective” that our media representations of how we collectively respond to a disaster situation influence the thinking of disaster officials and experts, their planning, and their approaches (42). This is highly problematic given that the dominant representation of collective disaster reaction was, and still is to this day, focused on variations on panic, mass looting, mass violence, exploitation, famine, dispossession, and civil conflict resulting in negatively altered mental states of the surviving individuals (Fritz and Williams 1957, 42).

Although much has changed since 1957, the core ways in which we culturally articulate disasters, crises, and catastrophes have not. As Bauman explains in his 2006 book, *Liquid Fear*,

contrary to the objective evidence, it is the people who live in the greatest comfort on record, more cosseted and pampered than any other people in history, who feel more threatened, insecure and frightened, more inclined to panic, and more passionate about everything related to security and safety than people in most other societies past and present. (130)





Figure 16: Jess Day, *Personalised Friend*, 2022. Canvas drill, waterproof waxed thread, zip, grommets, strapping, chain. Photo: Jess Day.

Bauman suggests that our obsession with security drives our intolerance to disruptions to secure systems, which in turn “becomes the most prolific, self-replenishing and probably inexhaustible source of our anxiety and fear” (130). Bauman articulates the contemporary climate as one of uncertainty resulting in the “daily rehearsal of disappearance, vanishing, effacement and dying; and so, obliquely, a rehearsal of the non-finality of death, of recurrent resurrections and perpetual reincarnations ...” (2006, 6). There are numerous contemporary examples of this representation of human beings reacting to disaster in film, video games, fiction, and news articles<sup>10</sup>. In fact, since 1957, the cultural articulation of human panic in disaster situations has become prolific, normalised, and unquestioningly accepted as fact, built upon in policy and personal attitudes<sup>11</sup>, and realised structurally within communities (see Bauman 2006). The two primary findings from Fritz and Williams’s 1957 paper were as follows. First, the majority of thinking around disaster behaviours is “based upon observations of the unusual, the dramatic, and the abnormal” (1957, 42). And that “Second, given the need to provide accurate disaster information on various levels throughout society, there is a vital need to reframe the ways in which we, as people, collectively and individually, report on, prepare for, perceive, recognise, react, and process disasters or crises” (Fritz and Williams 1957, 42). The bodies of work made over the course of this research visually articulate my attempts to critique and engage with the contemporary climate of anxiety and fear by adopting aspects of prepping practice.

For ease of understanding, I have expanded on the theory provided by Barker (2019) who identifies five primary points of material practice inherent to prepping culture: temporality, security, object value, object versatility, and agency. As a result of these growing insecurities, engagements with prepping are growing globally. Prepping practice approaches fear, disaster, crisis, and insecurity directly with practical ongoing

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10 For example, The Hunger Games movie franchise, the Snowpiercer novels, The Southern Reach trilogy (books), A Quiet Place I and II (movies), Sky News journalism (particularly opinion pieces on news headlines), Wastelanders (video game), The Last of Us and Fallout video game series, the list goes on.

11 A recent example of these representations of human reaction to disaster influencing behaviour would be the panic buying of groceries during initial COVID-19 lockdowns.

attention to materiality. The material practices of prepping provide tangible, direct methods of engagement with disaster concepts, including planning, gaining knowledge, upskilling, making preparations, providing medical assistance, and retaining a healthy, productive frame of mind in crisis. Preppers may be less likely to panic in crisis situations because they have considered various crises, educated themselves on appropriate responses, and have the base supplies and skill sets to meet crisis scenarios head on (Barker 2019). In fact, some preppers are so confident in their ability to prepare that they are actually concerned they have made themselves and their families targets within their community should something happen (Barker 2019). Preppers materially engage with disasters through the objective of preparation, which may be deployed at every level of the individual's life. These points will be examined as components of the greater material practices of prepping and linked to the production of contemporary artworks through methodologies outlined in the next chapter.

#### Even more motivations to prepare: Neoliberalism and disaster management

Motivators for prepping may range from unstable income to fear of a global crisis event. These motivators are usually coupled by preppers with personal experiences that expose a weakness or failure in a system resulting in an undesirable outcome (Barker 2019). Neoliberalism privileges the free unregulated market over the individual or social, that is to say, governments work to streamline social projects that may require investment or have surplus gains into broader policy in which the individual pays for a service at a subsidy rather than receiving it for free or through reimbursement. There has been some recent debate around the term 'neoliberalism' expanding beyond its intended meaning and use, and therefore losing its meaning (see Venugopal 2015; Mudge 2008; Castree 2006). What we now call neoliberalism emerged as a set of economic concepts that arose in the 1930s and continued to develop until the 1960s (Venugopal 2014, 3). These economic concepts developed from "the Freiburg Ordoliberalism school, the Mont Pelerin Society, the work of Friedrich Hayek, and the counter-Keynesian economics of the Chicago School" (Venugopal 2014, 3).





Figure 17: Jess Day, *Apocalyptic Agency*, detail, 2020. Photo: Jess Day.

In the context of this exegesis I use the post-1980 definition of neoliberalism which refers to the phenomena of growing “market deregulation, privatisation, and welfare-state withdrawal that swept the first, second, and third worlds” (Venugopal 2014, 3).

The impacts of neoliberalism on preppers and those considering prepping is twofold. First, neoliberal governments encourage prepping culture by systematically removing ‘safety nets’ such as welfare support, providing tax cuts for the wealthy, plundering natural resources for profit, having policies that privilege land and property ownership, and privatising amenities providers (see Harvey 2007; C. Johnson 2011; Ong 2007). Second, government disaster planning and management have increasingly turned toward encouraging individuals to prepare and be responsible for their own survival, and to rely on volunteer-run agencies or non-government organisations (NGOs) to mitigate poverty and offer disaster relief, rebuilding, and homelessness support (see C. Johnson 2011). These issues are further exacerbated by the neoliberal ideology of ‘freedom of choice’, in which individuals are ‘free’ to choose their lifestyle with minimal government intervention (Giroux 2008). Contrarily, individuals are increasingly responsible for their own healthcare, wealth, living conditions, maintenance of these systems, and general security (Giroux 2008). Neoliberalism encourages an ‘everyone for themselves’ ideology, emphasising a competitive and unequitable relationship between the self and others which actively dissolves the concept of ‘society’ (Giroux 2008).

In order to discuss the ways in which neoliberalism motivates individuals to engage with prepping, this section discusses neoliberalism in relation to Hurricane Katrina’s impact on New Orleans in the US. Katrina has repeatedly been referred to in the media as “the worst natural disaster in American history” (C. Johnson 2011, xix). This is not actually the case as many natural disasters in American history have been much worse; however, Hurricane Katrina was the costliest disaster on record (C. Johnson 2011, xix). Although, as political scientist Cedric Johnson writes, “[t]his ‘worst natural disaster’ characterisation stems partially from the historical

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Figure 18: Allison Stewart, *Bug Out Bag: Disaster Dog Daisy's Bug Out Bag*, 2018. *Fortezza di Girifalco*, a featured exhibition at Cortona on the Move. Source: Figure reproduced from Stewart (n.d.).



amnesia that pervades American publics, but it persists because of the political cachet this myth carries for the current ruling class” (2011, xviii). Nevertheless, it can also be argued that this phrasing of “the worst natural disaster” evidences the turn toward economic cost becoming considered ‘worse’ and more impactful than loss of life and scale of destruction.

Supporting this notion is the plethora of evidence of human action and ideology that directly resulted in Hurricane Katrina being a more impactful and prolonged crisis than necessary. For example, there were 50 levee breaches around the city of New Orleans, which were the result of poor national and local disaster planning and maintenance (see C. Johnson 2011, xix). As C. Johnson states, “Disaster planning and evacuation failures at the local, state, and national levels reflected a consensus around neoliberal governance” (2011, xix). Giroux states that neoliberalism disparages governments as “incompetent or threatening to individual freedom, suggesting power should reside in markets or corporations rather than in governments or their citizens” (2008, 256). Evidence of this approach can be seen in the actions of the then Mayor of New Orleans, Clarence Ray Nagin Jr, who deliberately waited to announce the mandatory evacuation plan in order to pander to international hotel chains that were concerned about potential loss of profit toward the end of the tourist season (C. Johnson 2011, xxxiv). Such examples evidence “the unique terms of neoliberal sovereignty where private institutions and market rationality increasingly create the conditions for meaningful citizenship, mobility, material comfort, and security for some while excluding others” (C. Johnson 2011, xxxvii). The influence of neoliberalism is also evident in disaster management rhetoric in which the individual is ‘responsible’ for their own survival, that is, adequately prepared to survive without any assistance for “a number of days” (Australian Red Cross 2021, para. 7). My own experiences with prepping reflect Garret’s statement that, “This infolding of prepping practices into everyday life has also been concurrent with the aging of infrastructure systems, the privatisation of public services, and cuts to social ‘safety nets’ under neoliberal ideologies in much of the western world” (Garrett 2021a, 4). According to reporter Al Tompkins (2006), after witnessing and/or experiencing Hurricane Katrina, 30% of polled Americans said the crisis had “motivated

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Figure 19: Loren Kronemyer, *True Aim 1*, 2019. Part of *Preppers* exhibition for Art on the Move, 2019. *Source:* Figure reproduced from Preppers (n.d.).

them to make preparations". During the post-Katrina rebuilding phase, the deployment of NGOs and other humanitarian corporate bodies to aid in post-disaster management revealed an increasing reliance on these groups by governments. As C. Johnson states, "Contemporary disaster management reflects wider post-industrial changes in economy and culture and the prevailing approach to crisis is fundamentally concerned with controlling the flows and character of information" (2011, xxxiii-xxxiv). This is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, volunteer-led rebuilding efforts operate within national and local practices and, therefore, cannot challenge systems, only replicate them. Secondly, although volunteers are crucial to rebuilding efforts, "they are largely excluded from and, in many cases, oblivious to the power dynamics that are shaping the larger context and key decisions about resource allocation and priorities" (C. Johnson xxxiii). And finally, residents and those evacuated from affected areas typically have little to no influence and agency in the rebuilding process (C. Johnson 2011, xxxiii).

An earlier sculptural investigation into neoliberalism and individual security can be seen in figure 13. Prepping cannot solve the problems of neoliberal disaster management but being adequately prepared may prevent loss of life and expedite the recovery process for individuals and communities. Further, prepping provides a sense of agency during times of crisis, often providing an increased sense of security to those affected. In a world where the gap between poor and wealthy is increasing, social security and welfare support are decreasing, living costs are rising, and natural disasters are on the rise, prepping- and the material practices associated with prepping, may help individuals who do not fit the 'wealthy' profile that neoliberalism privileges.

#### Prepping and survivalism: Differences and similarities

Academic studies posit a distinction between prepping and survivalism, the latter being the precursor to contemporary prepping practice. This distinction positions survivalism as a "home for antisocial recluses,

political extremism, white supremacy, obsessive apocalyptic millenarianism, and outlandish conspiracy theories” (Barker 2019, 486). Interestingly, this articulation of survivalism mirrors some of the broader cultural anxieties surrounding prepping practice (see Barker 2019; Masco 2019). The cultural anxieties surrounding prepping practice, or the stigmas attached to prepping practices, are most pronounced in popular media representations of prepping practice, and other media in which prepping is represented but without direct involvement of preppers on the production team. These narratives are produced *about* prepping but without input from preppers in how their views may be articulated. As a result, these forms of prepping narrative are often hyperbolic and depict preppers as preparing exclusively for the apocalypse (see O’Connell 2020; Osnos 2017). An example of this stigmatisation of prepping practices can be found in Rick Perlstein’s *The Nation* article in February of 2013, in which Perlstein describes preppers as “crazy” and “American’s who fear change, fear difference” and “surely play a positive role in stirring the more crazy to the kind of awful acts we see around us now”. Research, however, has found that prepping is not a fringe or marginal subculture, rather prepping is a mainstream activity which engages with precautionary action to address general cultural anxiety held around permanent and ongoing crises (Huddleston 2016; Kelly 2015; Mills 2019). Despite the publication of numerous academic papers on the distinct differences between prepping and survivalism, there is still confusion about prepping practices and they continue to be stigmatised. This may be, in part, due to the fact that many prepping activities and aesthetics present as very similar to survivalist culture. Survivalism, the forebear of prepping culture, engaged with the ‘millennial myth’ – a belief that soon, perhaps tomorrow, the world would end. Professor of sociology and anthropology Philip Lamy refers to ‘the millennial myth’ in his 1992 dissertation and states that “the primary elements of the myth – apocalypse, Armageddon, salvation and millennium – are powerful and flexible religious symbols which adapt easily, although unevenly, to changing social and cultural conditions” (18). This may help explain how survivalism became adopted by various cult groups in America and became synonymous with violence and misguided concepts of community (see Lamy 1992; Masco 2021).



Figure 20: Jess Day, *Starting Fires*, detail, 2021. Tarpaulin, heat reflective material, rope, stone, notepad, tinder, redhead matches, emergency whistle, canvas drill, waterproof waxed thread, grommets, carabiners. Photo: Jess Day.

### Why is there stigma around prepping?

The need to reframe the prepper stems from recent mainstream media pathologisation of the prepper as someone driven by crazy doomsday theories, a hoarder of goods, and a potentially violent individual who cares only for themselves (see National Geographic, 2011-2014). However, the COVID-19 global pandemic, the breaking of the UK from the European Union with Brexit, the rise of Trump and QAnon and then their subsequent fall, and increasingly unpredictable seasonal shifts worldwide due to climate change, have greatly aided the reframing of prepping culture. This is primarily due to the shift in what is perceived by mainstream media and culture as condoned and pathological, or rational and irrational, modes of preparing to survive crises (Barker 2019, 484).

The research I have undertaken presents a view of preppers that is at odds with that presented by popular culture. Popular culture portrays prepping as similarly fixated on fear and imminent apocalypse as its precursor, survivalism. This popular culture frame suggests prepping is “militarised, misogynistic, Christian, and subject to quintessentially American structuring myths of the frontier” (Campbell 2019, 799). However, the research of Fleetwood and Mills (2019), Barker (2019), and Garrett (2021a) shows this portrayal is inaccurate and based on an antiquated notion of survivalism. Garrett acknowledges the comparative lack of academic research, especially given the increasing scale of prepping participants globally: “academic research around the subject is scant. What does exist is often superficial and naïve, being wholly based on analysis of popular representations” (2021a, 4). One example of this is Kelly’s 2015 paper which identifies prepping as a male dominated culture in which “feelings of male alienation translate into preparation for an unknown future” (96), which is immediately disproven once one undertakes any serious academic reading around the subject (Garrett 2021a, 4). For example, Sims’s research into prepping found that “women are just as active in the culture as men are” (2017, 272). Unlike survivalism, contemporary prepping does not



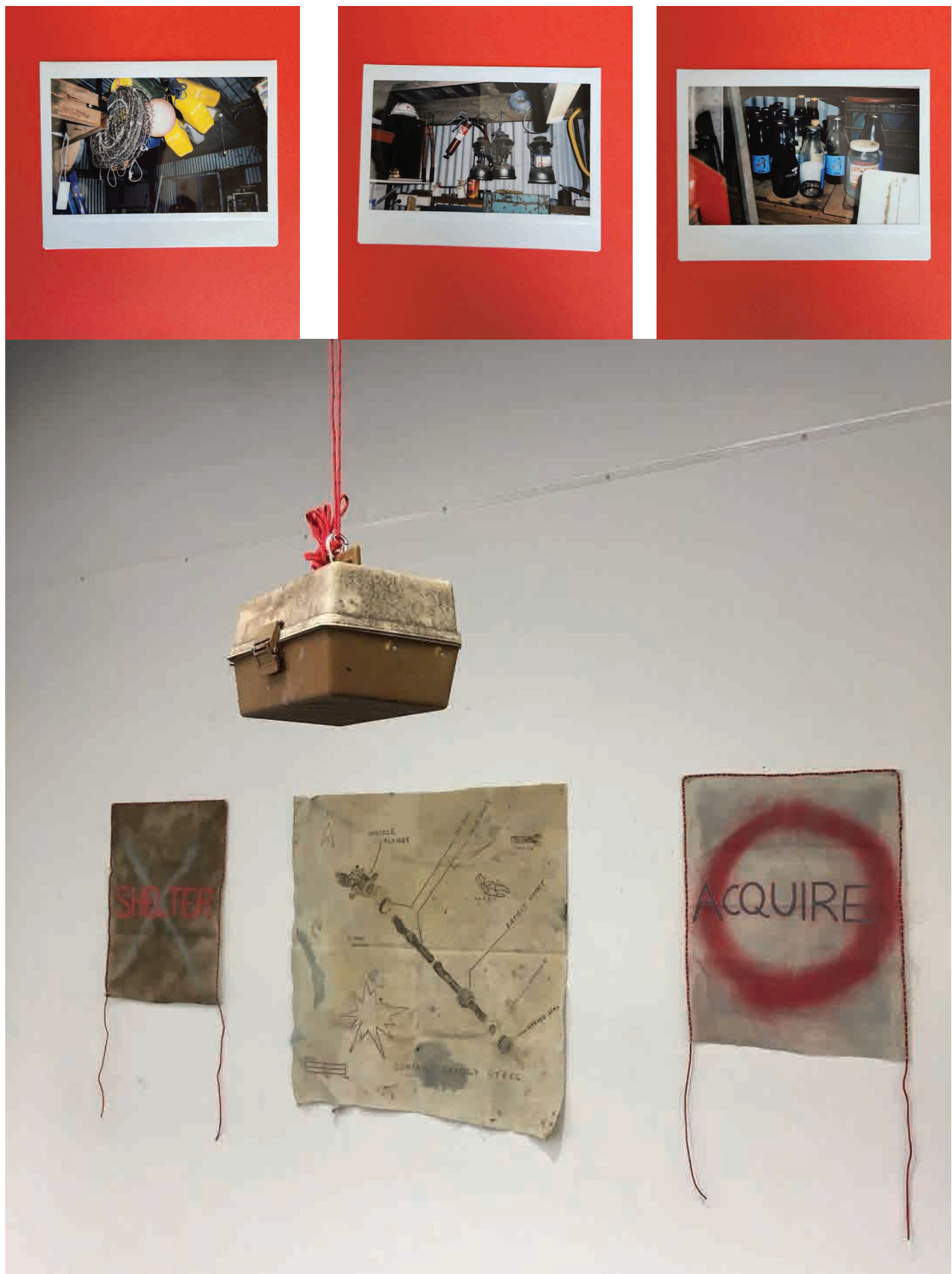


Figure 21: (top) Jess Day, Polaroids taken on a field trip, 2020. (Taken inside the workshop and storage shed where I grew up). Photo: Jess Day. (bottom) Jess Day, Test installation, 2020. (After returning from field trip). Photo: Jess Day.

base its ideologies on conspiracy or fringe notions of collapse, threat, or disaster, but rather builds around “precautionary fears of disaster... aligned with areas of relatively popular political sentiments” (Fleetwood and Mills 2019, 2). The “popular political sentiments” Fleetwood and Mills refer to are predominantly US right-wing and/or conservative figures whose ongoing advocacy of doomsday prepping to their audiences (for example, Alex Jones, Glenn Beck, or Sean Hannity, to name a few) is often accompanied by some topical news article in which crisis or developing disaster is occurring (Kelly 2015, 98). As a result, prepping is influenced by mainstream media news content, and in turn, prepping has been somewhat normalised, given that “fear laden assessments of economic policy, health care reform, and security risks to a wide receptive audience” tend to justify and encourage such behaviour (Fleetwood and Mills 2019, 24). However, there is also evidence of left-wing engagement in prepping, though this is less dominant in the popular cultural presentation of prepping (Fleetwood and Mills 2019, 2).

Fleetwood and Mills acknowledge contemporary prepping differs from survivalism in its inclusion of a broader societal demographic, and that the majority of preppers surveyed were not preparing for an apocalyptic-style event, but rather were ensuring they had “nutrition, hydration, shelter, security, hygiene, and medicines” during intermittent or prolonged infrastructural ruptures or breakdowns (Fleetwood and Mills 2019, 1). Social media blogs such as Sarah Avery’s (2017) promise a “no-Confederate flag, almost-entirely-Bible-free guide to online emergency preparedness resources for beginners”. Other blogs such as *The Survival Mom* and *The Food Storage Moms* are spaces run by women who are concerned about the long-term survival of their families should crisis arise. Crisis is articulated by these blogs as an interruption to ‘normal’ life and, as such, could range from losing a job, going into isolation, and puncturing a car tyre, to unexpected weather conditions or natural disasters (Avery 2017). Campbell explains contemporary prepping has expanded as “an increasingly mainstream phenomenon, driven not by delusional certainty, but a precautionary response to generalised anxiety people have around permanent crisis” (2019, 60). As COVID-19 has shown, global ruptures to



Figure 22: Jess Day, *Studio stockpile*, detail, 2022. Studio materials of various origins evidencing the colour palette I have been working with, the types of materials, and the mingling of 'high' and 'low' value materials. Photo: Jess Day.



established systems are difficult to contain, predict, or prepare for, as these events are complex and rarely adhere to timelines set by government response teams. By locating the reasons for prepping in very real, very possible speculative futures, or unfolding news events, the practice has gained traction its former survivalist familiar could never obtain. The second 'Doom Boom' (see Masco 2021) has already generated more than one billion USD, "with sales in preserved food products increasing 700% since 2008" (Mills 2019, 2). I agree with Garrett (2021a), Fleetwood and Mills (2019), and Huddleston (2016) that "[m]uch prepping, unlike survivalism, is not based on conspiracy but experience, and there is a distinct difference between such fringe elements of the past and the average prepper of today" (Huddleston 2016, 241, as quoted by Garrett 2021a, 3). Garrett also states that "[t]he 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which preppers consider a 'mid-level' event, and many of them were well-prepared for, makes clear that scholarly attention to prepper's motivations and methods is both timely and valuable" (1).

#### Articulating the field: Current (2022) academic research into prepping

This section of the chapter focuses on providing a survey of current (2022) academic research into prepping culture. Since the practice is relatively new and evolving under current global conditions<sup>12</sup>, I acknowledge this exegesis has limitations and cannot encompass the all of the existing research now being written regarding prepping<sup>13</sup>. Here, I define prepping through the research of others, while adding my own input where appropriate. This input is a combination of my theory-based research, my experiences engaging directly with prepping culture online, my practice-based research in the studio, and my upbringing. Since academic research into prepping is relatively new, there are conflicting definitions and terms used by academics

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12 As I write, Russian troops continue to bomb Ukraine; the COVID-19 pandemic has finally hit Western Australia, where I live, with large, active, community transmission case numbers, and continues globally; issues around network distribution continue; oil prices have risen higher than I have ever seen in my lifetime; and there are increasingly extreme weather and geological conditions (for example, the recent earthquakes in Japan killing four people). All of these instances identify just a few of the many motivators to prepare.

13 In the sense that, concerning publications, there may be papers emerging that I have failed to include given the timeline of this research. Particularly given the recent interest since 2019 in prepping research.

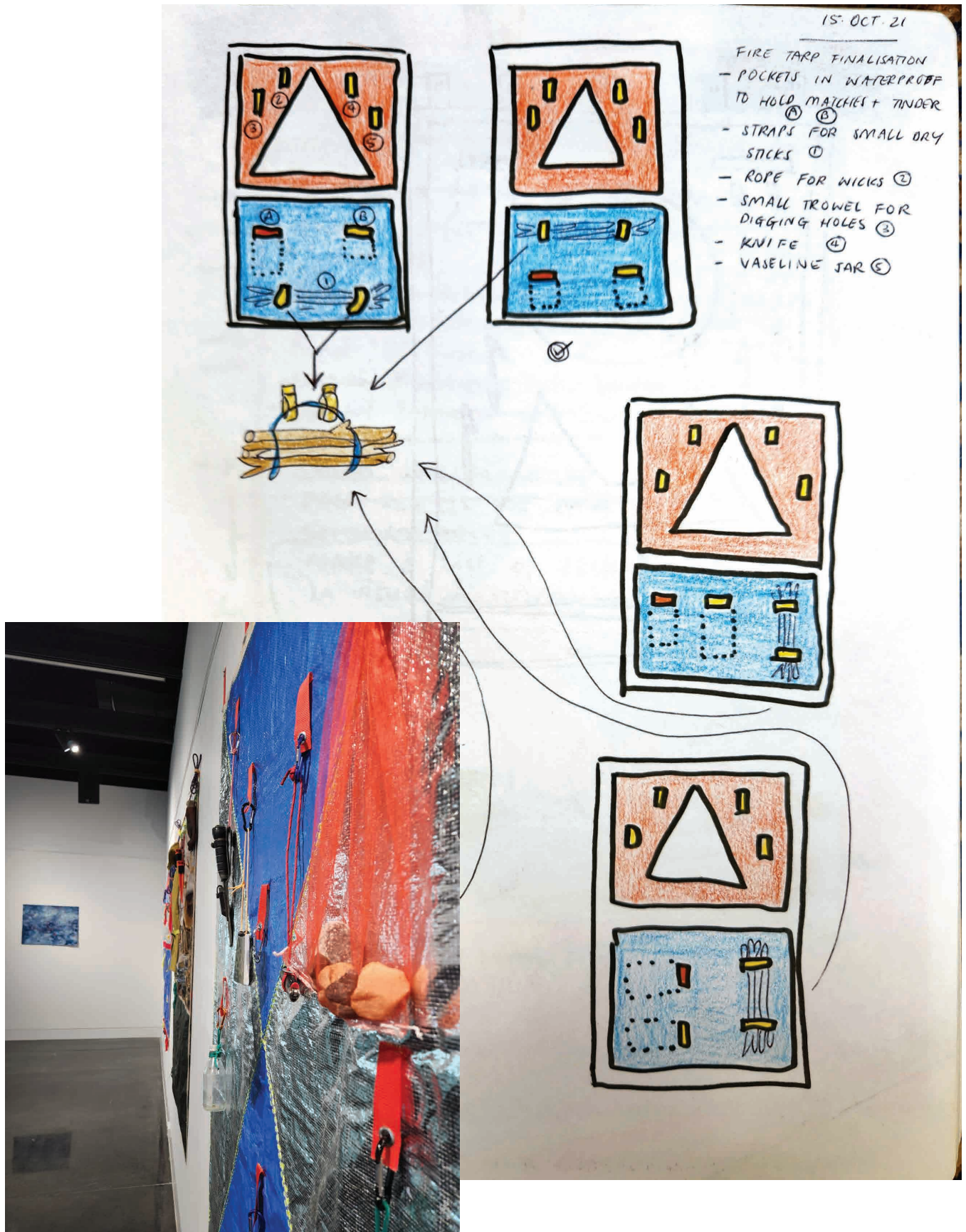


Figure 23: Jess Day, install shot, 2022. Visual diary scan, 2021. (scanned page shows the planning stages of developing the work in the install photograph). Photo and image: Jess Day.

investigating prepping practice. Imel-Hartford (2012) argues that prepping is a social movement, although there is little academic research that supports this claim. Grigsby (2019), Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones (2012), and Schwalbe (1986) support the claim that prepping is not a social movement, rather it resembles a lifestyle movement, which is best described as a “loosely bounded cultural movement” (Sims 2017, 10). Prepping may have begun as a lifestyle movement before gaining popularity to become a loosely bounded cultural movement. DelReal and Clement (2017), Sherman (2009), Hochschild (2017), and Vance (2018) discuss examples of how lifestyle movements diffuse into mainstream culture and connect to broader trends of American nationalism and individualism, as well as the reluctance to rely on government support in crisis situations. Prepping would certainly fit within those American mainstream parameters. Since its emergence as a cultural movement post-2008, American prepping culture has largely been perceived as consisting of right-wing participants (Mills and Fleetwood 2019 39). However, “today’s prepping scene largely supersedes the USA’s extreme right-wing survivalist movement” (Mills and Fleetwood 2019, 39). I concur with Grigsby, Haenfler, Schwalbe, and Sims, and therefore refer to prepping as a cultural movement within this document. As Mills writes,

Preppers are people who anticipate and actively attempt to adapt for what they see as probable or inevitable impending conditions of calamity, ranging from low-level crises to extinction-level events, where ‘food and basic utilities may be unavailable, government assistance may be non-existent, and survivors may have to individually sustain their own survival’. (Mills 2019, 1, as quoted by Garrett 2021a, 1)

Although prepping is not yet widely normalised as a cultural movement, and is still stigmatised, it is important to acknowledge that there is future potential for prepping to become widely normalised given the increasing popularity and need for prepping<sup>14</sup>. One of the speculative crises we would prepare for often in my childhood

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14 The ‘need’ I am referring to here relates to how many governments are negotiating COVID-19 with periodic lockdowns and isolation periods regarding close contacts and viral testing. Being prepared to survive without external support for seven days has become increasingly normalised since the pandemic. Having a supply of food and medicine for isolating is a form of prepping.



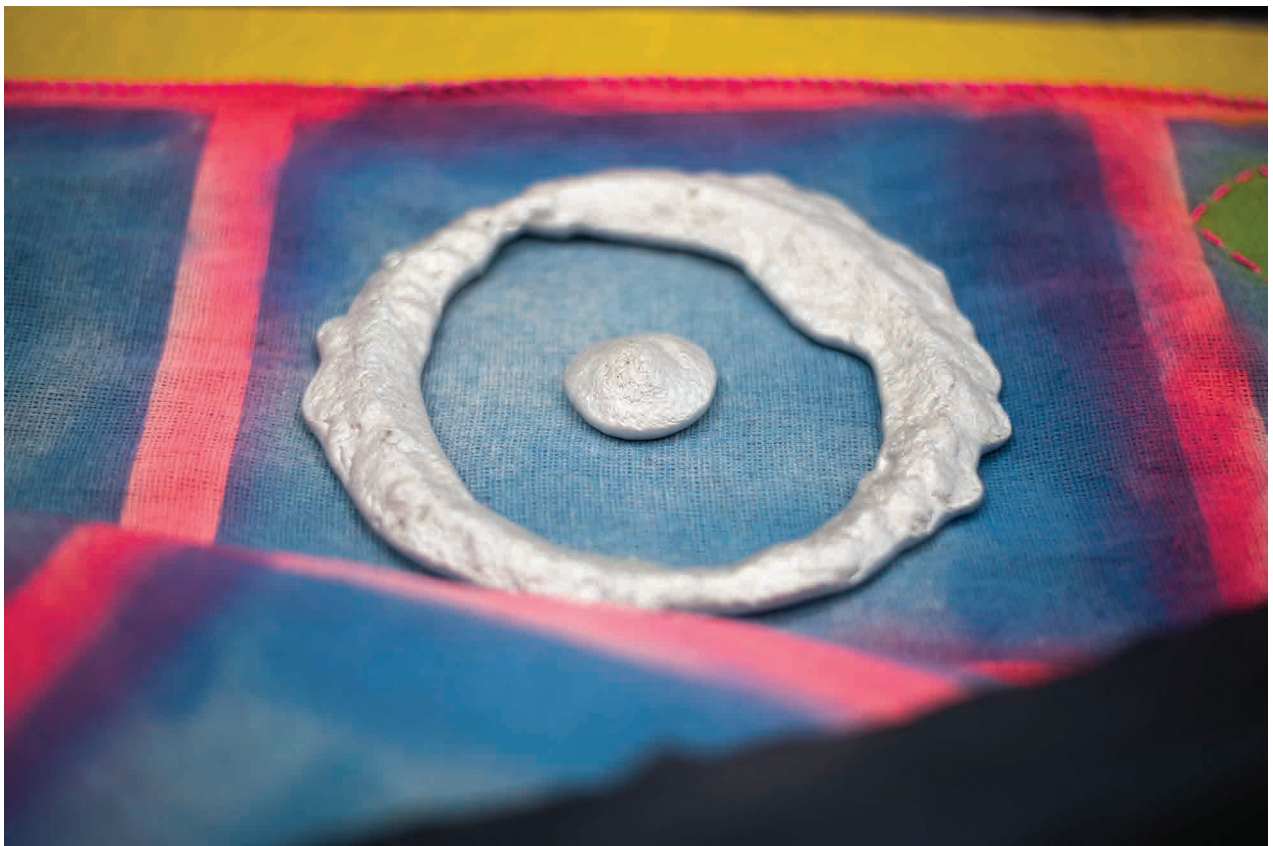


Figure 24: Jess Day, *Sleep Soundly I*, details, 2021. Sleeping bag, high-visibility marking line, spray paint, waterproof drop-sheet. Photo: Jess Day.

was bushfires. Figure 16 shows quick map drawings, or ‘mud maps’ of cache locations as an example of preparing for speculative crisis scenarios, like bushfires.

Bennet (2009) and Parkkinen (2021) suggest preppers are similar (or equivalent) to survivalists in that they are fearful of the future but try to avoid the labels attached to survivalist stereotypes. However, Sims (2017) argues that prepping goes beyond a desire to distance itself from survivalism, and instead suggests preppers are primarily focused on “responding to risk-society ideas in the generalised culture, including ideas offered by survivalism to construct a cultural toolkit for a lifestyle that they believe contrasted significantly from adopting the ideas or practices of survivalism” (268). Or to put it differently, preppers differ from survivalists in the ways in which they construct a “cultural toolkit” and why they feel the need to do so (Sims 2017, 268). Survivalists are focused on a ‘lone-wolf’ identity or organising combative militias, both with the aim of being ‘at odds’ with society (Sims 2017, 268). By contrast, preppers construct cultural toolkits allowing them to operate *within* society, while remaining true to preparatory values that are, in part, influenced by survivalism (Sims 2017, 268). As articulated previously, this research does not support the claim that prepping and survivalism are equivalent. However, I do agree there are many practice-based examples of similarity between prepping and survivalism given that the historical root of prepping is located in survivalist practice. Further, aesthetically, the two practices present very similarly, if not in the same way in many respects. Through practice-led research I have identified some of these similarities between survivalism and prepping. These include: the preparations of goods and tools which may aid an individual navigating crisis; the development of skill sets which enable an individual to live off-grid, or without the reliance on modern technologies and infrastructures; and the speculative future thinking of an individual surviving or living through speculative crises scenarios. In terms of aesthetically presenting in a similar fashion, prepping and survivalism utilise similar tools, objects, and materials, however the ends to which these are used are very different. Unlike survivalists, prepping looks to mitigate short term life disruptions to then return to society (whatever that may look like), whereas survivalism

refuses engagement with society as a whole, instead privileging a move away (often rurally) from social structures completely. One of the sculptural outcomes that explores this difference between prepping and survivalism is *Personalised Friend* 2022, which is a small satchel which may also operate as a companion to an individual negotiating crisis (see figure 16). The satchel's straps and zip-pocket resemble a face, which was intended as a reminder during isolating or stressful experiences that companionship is important in crisis scenarios. This work also acknowledges how prepping may encourage companionship with and through engagements with materiality. Although prepping may have some similar aesthetics to survivalism, and often engages with similar activities, the ideologies between the two practices, and how their participants envisage a future post-crisis varies.

Although prepping lacks established formalised leaders, the movement has various “cultural entrepreneurs”, who are popular icons regarded as experts within the prepping field (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012, 11). These ‘icons’ are primarily found on YouTube, Twitter, online blogs, and Reddit, and they often produce books and shirts, and endorse certain brands (and are often sponsored), all while informing and discussing various methods to survive crisis scenarios. The dispersion of these influencers or icons across various, largely online, channels and always highly visual platforms reflects the highly individuated nature of prepping practice, as well as the variety of beliefs, devotion to preparing, and cultural and global contexts in which this practice takes place. Sims and Grigsby (2019) agrees with Mills (2018) that personal experiences are used as ‘cautionary tales’, reasons for prepping, and the means for engaging with the prepping community at large (2017, 274). This broad spectrum of engagement can make quantifying prepping practices, motivations, and ideologies difficult for researchers, while simultaneously supporting the claim that further, ongoing research into the subject is needed.

Bunkering and bugging out are good examples of how prepping can be approached very differently in the same geographical area. Sims's (2017) research found that "preppers were more concerned with focusing on establishing self-reliance and security in their existing locations" (269). This is at odds with Zimmer (2012) who differentiates between the acts of 'bugging in' and 'bugging out'; the former is not found in Sims's survey as an 'in-use' term (2017, 270). McGrath (2017) suggests that bug-out bags are therapeutic for preppers, fulfilling the emotional needs of its members, especially the affluent members. Sims's study from the same year, 2017, found bug-out-bags fulfilled practical needs. Further, the essential nature of such a go bag system means all preppers, regardless of economic demographics, engage with making bug-out bags, see figures 18, 24, 34, and 56 (Sims 2017, 270).

Garrett (2021a), like Masco (2021), traces the roots of contemporary prepping to the Cold War, though both academics acknowledge many aspects of the practice are age-old human activities. Prior to COVID-19, the Cold War has arguably had the largest and greatest impact on contemporary prepping. The modes of 'bugging out' or 'bunkering in' found in contemporary prepping, and articulated by Campbell, Sinclair, and Browne (2019), Fleetwood and Mills (2019), are clear examples of this influence. Osnos (2017) suggests that prepping is an activity of the affluent and super wealthy. Sims's (2017) survey, however, disputes these findings:

The majority of respondents were not affluent, and a number were under or unemployed and prepping was of central importance to them in establishing a sense of security and of redefining their identities from low status due to unemployment and low income to high status because they were prepared and could be self-sufficient in times of need. (271)

Very few preppers actually have bunkers (Sims 2017; Masco 2020; 2021; Osnos 2017). Osnos (2017) quotes the head of an investment firm in his *New Yorker* article as saying, "I keep a helicopter gassed up all the time, and I have an underground bunker with an air filtration system". Going on to liken prepping to a 'safety blanket',

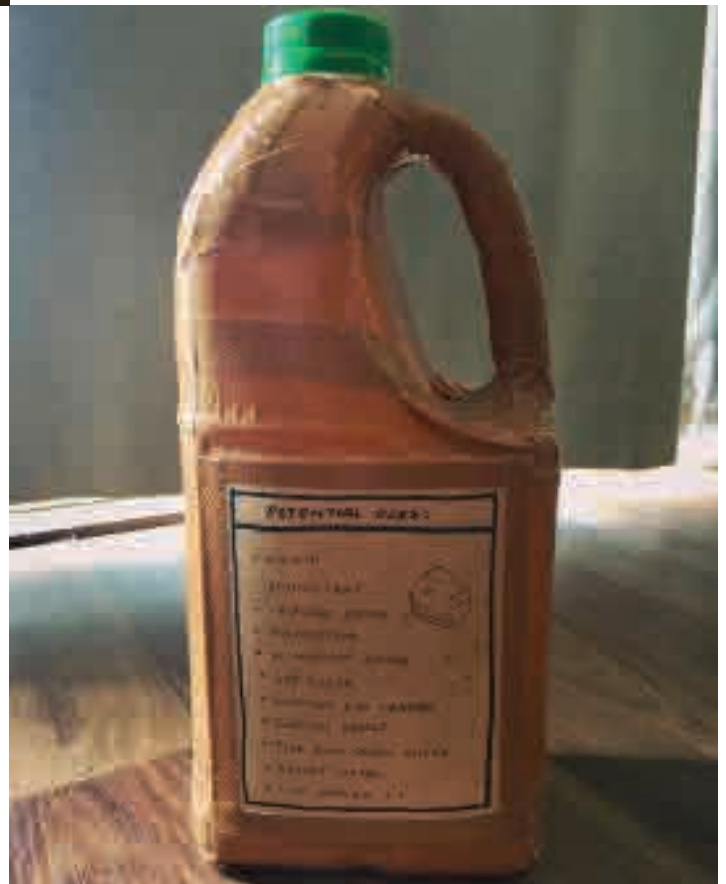


Figure 25: Studio exploration shot. 2021. 2L plastic bottle, cloth tape, cardboard, permanent marker, pencil, biro. Photo: Jess Day.



Osnos (2017) nonetheless goes on to admit “most preppers don’t actually have bunkers; hardened shelters are expensive and complicated to build”. However, there are those with the financial resources to construct bunkers. The number of preppers who have access to bunkers or have plans to construct them is difficult to ascertain. This may be due to the often secretive nature of those who self-identify as preppers (Masco 2021; Garrett 2021a; Barker 2019). Bradley Garrett’s 2021a paper, “Doomsday Preppers and the Architecture of Dread”, argues that the bunkers or bug-out structures built by preppers “refract the seemingly irresolvable problems we are failing to address as a species” (1):

The survival condo, and hundreds of analogous experiments in communal bunkered living across the world, are thus built to function as a temporal bridge affording re-emergence into a new, and potentially improved, milieu, political situation, or environment after a disaster. (1-2).

This research acknowledges the bunker building phenomenon as part of prepping; however, I have chosen to focus on the more common and accessible practices of the prepping movement in my research. In my practice-based research I found the actions of everyday preparation the most generative for discussing prepping practices with others, especially those who may harbour scepticism about the validity or benefit of prepping.

This research project aims to encourage open discussion around the failings and benefits found in prepping culture and the research is largely motivated by the increasing need to prepare in order to safely navigate the growing number of potential crises an individual may face. There are many reasons why individuals may be motivated to begin prepping. Glassner (2010), Walker (2013), Wuthnow (2010), and Bauman (2006) suggest that fear has become a pervasive influence within contemporary culture and society. Sims (2017, 271) argues that prepping is a reaction to this fear, and a coping mechanism, as the act of preparing encourages a sense of agency in the face of crisis. Sims further clarifies that “preppers are not preparing for one worst case scenario” (2017, 271). Ideologically, preppers vary wildly in their beliefs. Sims found that there was an



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Figure 26: Hideous Beast artist duo, Josh Ippel and Charlie Roderick, *Retreat*, 2018. *Source:* Figure reproduced from Hideous Beast (n.d.).



Figure 27: Jess Day, *Chicken Coop Cache, rediscovered object*, 2019. Cache made when I was under the age of 12 and forgotten; rediscovered by my cousin, Jose in 2019. Objects were found inside the old metal biscuit tin, including envelopes, eraser, small leather pouch with brass circle with 'Gee' engraved, wad of fossilised plastic, 'emergency box' with nibs and newspaper clippings, pencils, cloth desiccant silicagel, shoe horn, bull clip, buckle from a dog collar, Christmas present tags, watch, painted wooden car, screw, various pens, quills, coloured pencils. Photo: Jess Day.

increasing response to prepping linked to the political presidency of Obama, but rather than engaging with the administration or publicly opposing it, those fearful of the impacts created by the Obama administration addressed their concerns privately, through prepping and by being “focused on private realms, individualistic, clannish, neighbours, and empathy for those within the boundary with little for those outside of it” (2017, 272-273). Similarly, but for different ideological reasons, the election of Trump in 2016 saw a huge number of applications (that is, a 70% increase) from American citizens to become citizens of New Zealand, according to the BBC News (2017).

Just as Hurricane Katrina provided an example of neoliberalism motivating individuals to prepare, especially if they live in disaster prone areas or are in lower income brackets, the invasion of Ukraine, as of the 24th of February 2022, by Russia provides an unfolding and evolving example of supply chain issues. Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the European market for survival supplies and freeze-dried food rose by 20% in four weeks (Thomasson and Soderpalm 2022). Reports from Dutch outdoor sales company Dumpstore Amsterdam state that customers were purchasing supplies for their own preps as well as for donation to those effected in Ukraine (Thomasson and Soderpalm 2022).

Since Ukraine is a global producer and exporter of oils and grains, a decline in these products has been predicted due to the war (Thomasson and Soderpalm 2022). As a result, German wholesalers like Metro have set purchase limits on flours and oils (Thomasson and Soderpalm 2022). The German BGA Trade Association has also warned of network distribution issues over the coming months given the lack of Ukrainian truck drivers and the rising cost of fuel prices (Thomasson and Soderpalm 2022).

In addition, Ukraine is the primary supplier of non-GMO soybeans to Europe, according to Italian European People’s Party member Herbert Dorfmann (Wax 2022). These non-GMO soybeans are a vital source of animal stock feed, the majority of which is produced in Ukraine (Wax 2022). The European Union has warned that if

Ukrainian farmers cannot plant their crops this summer, the grain and oil shortage may continue into a mid-to-long term issue for farmers (Wax 2022).

Given these reports, stockpiling of oils and grains has been predicted across Europe; however, at the time of writing (April 4, 2022), incidents of hoarding or stockpiling have not yet been reported. Despite the European Union repeatedly stating that network distribution systems had been bolstered and were “hugely resilient and powerful” after the COVID-19 pandemic first broke out in 2019, the fact remains that should farmers be unable to plant their crops, issues around animal feed in agriculture will arise (Wax 2022). The invasion of Ukraine by Russia along with the ongoing European Union sanctions, as well as disruptions to network distribution and supply chains, have validated European preppers. The popular social media site Reddit has a sub thread group or subreddit labelled ‘preppers’. According to this subreddit, which was accessed on April 4, 2022, the participants encourage “continuing to prepare as normal”. These reports on network distribution and supply stock levels evidence how crises, like the current invasion of Ukraine, have ongoing impacts felt by others largely removed from the immediate fighting. As a result, media coverage of crises may encourage citizens to prepare and engage in preparatory activities. Preppers are often on the lookout for potential crises, such as the Ukrainian war, that may affect them and their families. At the most extreme, this looks like performative right-wing politics; however, based on recent surveys, prepping actually entails the purchase of a few additional items every grocery store visit (Sims and Grigsby 2019; Masco 2020).

#### Introducing new frames: Narrative, adaptable objects, and preservation

This section introduces two different ways of framing contemporary modes of prepping. These methods of framing are found in the research projects of academic Ben Anderson (2010), and an alternative frame is provided by Kezia Barker (2019). Anderson and Barker both approach prepping by establishing theoretical

frames through which the often-varied practices of preppers can be better understood. This research builds upon recent academic groundwork in prepping culture and, as such, I have chosen to develop my own framework that is specific to discussing prepping in relation to art making. This section outlines recently established academic theories surrounding prepping and introduces some terms I have developed to discuss prepping through a practice-led research approach.

Cultural and political geographer Ben Anderson (2010) argues that anticipatory practices should be examined through three primary analytics: styles, practices, and logics. Anderson explains these frames in the following way: “*styles*, consisting of statements that disclose and relate to the form of the future; *practices*, consisting of acts that make specific futures present; and *logics*, consisting of interventions in the here and now on the basis of futures” (2010, 793, italics in the original). Anderson applies these frames to prepping as a form of lens, through which anticipatory actions regarding possible futures may be viewed, to enable the analysis of what are widely regarded as highly dispersed and disparate anticipatory practices. *Styles*, for example, would include research into possible disruptions to life, communication with other preppers, storytelling regarding experiences with disaster or crisis, and the development of future scenarios to prepare for. *Practices* would refer to all preparatory action undertaken in anticipation of disruption, such as stockpiling goods, accruing skills and tools, developing skill sets, as well as undertaking physical and mental training, and scenario-based rehearsals such as bugging out. *Logics*, in this context, refers to the implementation of both styles and practices in relation to the unfolding present in which the individual is operating.

Barker (2019) provides a framework for navigating prepping through what she refers to as a “constellation of imaginative-material practices” which concern *value*, *temporality*, and *crisis* (483). Barker uses these frameworks to discuss the need to reframe prepping culture from its current, highly stigmatised state. Since





Figure 28: Learning new skills in the university sculpture department foundry, 2021. Photos: Jess Day.



anticipatory practice is an essential part of western neoliberal capitalism, prepping may be one of the few activities in which the average citizen may be able to recoup some agency over futures, crises, and the extent to which they engage with these anticipatory practices (Barker 2019). For Barker, *values* refer to the ways preppers invest value in material flexibility, potentiality, and mastery, which according to Barker reveals “a deeply held anxiety of networked dependency in late modernity’s hyper-connected society, alongside more widespread concerns over the capacity of weakened infrastructure to secure the reproduction of modern life” (2019, 489). *Temporality* addresses the ways preppers “tinker with an alternative materiality and temporal frame that exists outside a neoliberal way of life” (Barker, 2019, 488. See also Wakefield 2017). Barker explains that the stigmatisation of prepping practice, or the labelling of ‘deviance’, often occurs through the temporal frame, for example, stockpiling of goods.

Kezia Barker addresses the pathologising of preppers articulated through popular television programmes such as National Geographic Channel’s *Doomsday Preppers*. Heavily criticised by members of the prepping community, *Doomsday Preppers* presents the viewer with individuals engaging with prepping in the US. Many American preppers feel the representation of prepping is inaccurate or extreme, and as such, does not accurately represent prepping, but rather presents prepping as a ‘mad’ hobby whereby one must hoard, disassociate from mainstream culture, express extremist views, or performatively act to survive. Previously articulated primarily as a deviant or highly stigmatised behaviour linked to conspiracy theorists, right-wing ideology, hoarders, crazy hermits, or gun nuts, preppers became a focus of interest for how they navigated a world laden with crises and thrived. Prepping had been identified by Barker (2019), Fleetwood and Mills (2019) as an area in which academic research was lacking; nevertheless, the interest in and demand for research was evident.

However, the way preppers engage with temporality results in what Baraitser (2017) refers to as “stilling”, that is, even if preppers don’t completely disrupt the production of goods, they do present alternative modes of exchange and utility for those goods (Barker 2019, 491). These alternative modes of production can be productive avenues of exchange, service provision, community, personal agency, skill, and security that are less reliant on external neoliberal capitalist systems (Barker 2019, 491). *Crisis* provides a means to reconsider how preppers engage with anxiety, fear, and threat presented through disruptive events. Although preppers are often presented as over-reaching in their capacity and agency in relation to possible crises, the reality is more often the outright refusal to construct “normal crises as exceptional” (Barker 2019, 492). This refusal not only challenges notions of who experiences crisis, and who names a crisis as such, but further, it “foreshadows a future-present where catastrophe and crisis have become the baseline of our everyday and the objects around which capital, identity, community, and politics are produced” (Barker 2019, 492).

I draw on aspects of both Anderson’s and Barker’s methods of framing prepping in my own framework development. However, the three-part framework I have developed has tangible material practices at its core, allowing a testing of the theoretical research through making, and thus re-presenting aspects of theory with experiential knowledge to create sculptural outcomes. I do so not just to create a crisis-specific, functional practice-led methodology, but also to generate new knowledge regarding the extent to which preparatory activity engages with past, present, and future concepts of security and crisis materially. To do so, I develop a three-part framework that will be utilised throughout the rest of this exegesis to discuss my engagements with prepping. This decision initially came from issues surrounding the use of the word ‘practice’ which quickly became confusing when discussing practice-led research and prepping practice. I also felt it was an opportunity to begin discussing my own experiences with prepping culture, and given the highly individuated nature of the practice, and highlight that this research is an attempt to engage with prepping practice from an art making perspective. As a result, I have developed the following frameworks, *narrative*, *adaptable objects*,



Figure 29: Detail of Maurice Dunlevy's *Stay Alive: A Handbook on Survival*, third edition, 1981. 2022. Photo: Jess Day.

and *preservation* to allow for the analysis of prepping's materiality, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

These frameworks allow me to examine prepping culture through practice-led research by focusing on the materiality and practices of preppers. Each time I work in the studio these frameworks encourage me to question the ways in which materials and crisis preparation are in conversation with one another. For example, in my second year of my research, I was investigating the use of vessels that were easily obtainable, like plastic bottles, as a means of articulating the mass of a prepping stockpile while also suggesting the value of water in crisis scenarios. Although I did not pursue this line of inquiry in the final work, the acts of collecting, cleaning, wrapping (to prevent damage caused by light exposure over time), and suspending these objects allowed me to develop later works that, for instance, considered the possibility for objects en masse when visually discussing prepping culture. The narrative of objects en masse suggests an ongoing process of collection and preparation, while the actions of preparing these objects (particularly the wrapping of various cloth tapes) visually indicate a variety of possible contents, uses, and value. Finally, the pliability of the materials evident in their ubiquitous nature and also their physical materiality (plastic can be moulded, melted, and reformed, while cloth tape can be repurposed, added to, or removed) suggested that simple, familiar objects of low cost could, en masse, potentially be useful materials to mitigate crises. However, through deploying the frameworks, I realised this work was too cumbersome to suit the highly portable nature of the other works I was making. Instead, I began to investigate containers with a stronger link to prepping culture. The result is the 20L food storage bucket lights (see figure 44). The bucket lights suggested mass through the amount of food that could be preserved in each, while also serving a secondary purpose as a source of portable light (see resolved version 2.0 in figure 57). Further examples of how these frameworks are used in the studio will be provided in the coming chapters.





Figure 30: Detail of waterproof waxed thread stitching. 2022. Photo: Jess Day.

## Context to my survivalist background and interest in prepping

I think it may be helpful to provide some of my personal background prior to discussing the project methodologies in the following chapter. I grew up in a small town in a rural setting in Western Australia, and my family was largely 'off-grid'<sup>15</sup> and self-reliant with regard to producing our own food and water supplies, and this upbringing has greatly informed this project. I find it important to acknowledge that I did not regard myself as a prepper when beginning this project; however, my understanding of object value, object multiplicity, speculative futures, temporalities, and security were very similar to prepping views. This was partly due to the political climate and values held by my parents and grandparents in the 1970s when they decided to purchase that property<sup>16</sup>. I grew up surrounded by bushland in Western Australia's South West region. My best friends were my grandparents and our dogs, and my ambitions mostly comprised of deep investigations into the bush, creating survival huts, lookout platforms, reading, monitoring the weather, growing food, and learning to hunt (in various forms). These ambitions were wholeheartedly supported by my grandparents and parents as 'useful' skills. My grandfather, a true patriarch, and someone who was deeply suspicious of all governments and their intentions toward their populace, had an unwavering ideology regarding the world, namely that we are all responsible for our survival. To ensure this survival, we must learn skills, we must have supplies, and ultimately, we must be prepared.

Although when I began this project, I would not have described myself as such, I now regard myself a kind of prepper. This realisation is informed by my childhood which was remarkably similar to those of many self-described preppers, the changing economic and global stresses observed while undertaking this project, and, of course, my ongoing engagements with preparatory activities. When I moved to the city I took the values I

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15 We had electricity, but our gas had to be purchased in bottles 20 minutes away in town. Today the property is still not connected to the water grid. Water is collected throughout the year in dams and rainwater tanks, and the majority of the heat generated in residences is generated through wood fires. Until very recently, hot water was also generated by wood fires, and no hot showers could be had without first getting a fire going and waiting an hour or so.

16 See chapter two for discussion on this background



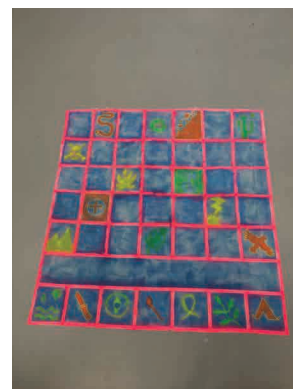
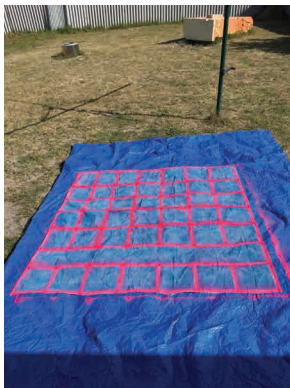
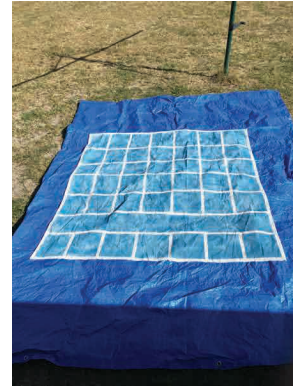


Figure 31: Studio working and testing behind *Sleeping Soundly I: S.A.S symbology*, 2021. Photos: Jess Day.

had been taught with me. Research has shown the majority of surveyed preppers have similar upbringings to mine. As Sims states, “preppers learn the values of prepping from their families” (2017, 36). In many ways, undertaking this research has made me understand that prepping is more of a spectrum rather than one easily understood set of behaviours, and this discovery greatly influenced my realisation that I am, indeed, a kind of prepper.

The intention of this research is to ask how prepping may be a lens through which crisis events may be approached, and how sculptural practice may articulate the ‘cultural toolkit’ prepping activity constructs (Sims 2017, 268). When I began this project, I was grieving the loss of my grandfather and my cousin who died two days apart. Both were hugely influential in how I defined myself, so I felt I needed to understand how I grew up from a more objective viewpoint in order to make sense of this loss and prepare myself to survive beyond it. At that time, I didn’t understand why I needed to make work about prepping, ad hocism, and making-do, but nonetheless felt it was crucial to my practice. Within a year, the COVID-19 global pandemic had broken out and suddenly the research was crucial in a much larger context. The result of this endeavour has been a series of artworks, a creative writing piece, visual diaries, and an exegetical document. However, the significance of this research is in formulating the working methodology developed through adapting the material practices of prepping to artistic practice. This methodology is a synthesis of prepping practices, object relations, research, and artistic practice: collecting objects others may regard as having low value, stockpiling objects with multiple potential uses, note taking, observations, object adaptation, skill development, speculative scenarios and fictions, and the mapping of these interactions. In the studio, my practice-led research led me to the three frameworks: narratives, adaptable objects, and preservation. Prior to commencing this research, I had thought that art making would be a productive means to explore prepping culture. Art making and prepping practices have a lot in common. Both demand a refining of skills, learning new skills, working with materials in different scenarios over periods of time, problem solving, negotiation. Both are often narrative driven, and require some

level of like-minded community engagement. Further, both work to trouble established status quos, dominant narratives, ideas of the future, and preconceptions about for whom these futures and narratives are intended. Or, as Barker says,

by merging the endemic and personal crises of daily life with imaginations of extensive catastrophe, preppers challenge the individualisation of security by pointing to its structural and pernicious components. This reveals the coupled failure of our material and moral infrastructure, the bridging of material and ontological insecurity. (2019, 493; see also Mills 2019)

In the following chapter I will discuss how I have navigated these ideas through studio practice, producing a wide range of works over four years, and how I began formalising the final sculptural outcomes of this research. These sculptural outcomes are the direct result of developing the narrative, adaptable objects, and preservation frameworks. These frameworks allowed me to remain in conversation with the theory I was reading, while being able to focus on the work I was making. By this I mean that while working in the studio I could always recall these three simple frames, and question how I was making, why I was making that way, and if the work was visually evidencing these important aspects of prepping.

To conclude, prepping is a diverse cultural practice in which individuals prepare for the future by reflecting on the past and actively working to improve their present levels of preparedness. The motivations for this practice are varied and multiple, and, like the practice itself, are more often comprised of a series of instigators to action rather than a sole motivator. In the following chapter I will further discuss the method of thinking and making in frames, with particular focus on my studio practice, artistic influences, aesthetics, and related theories.

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# Chapter three

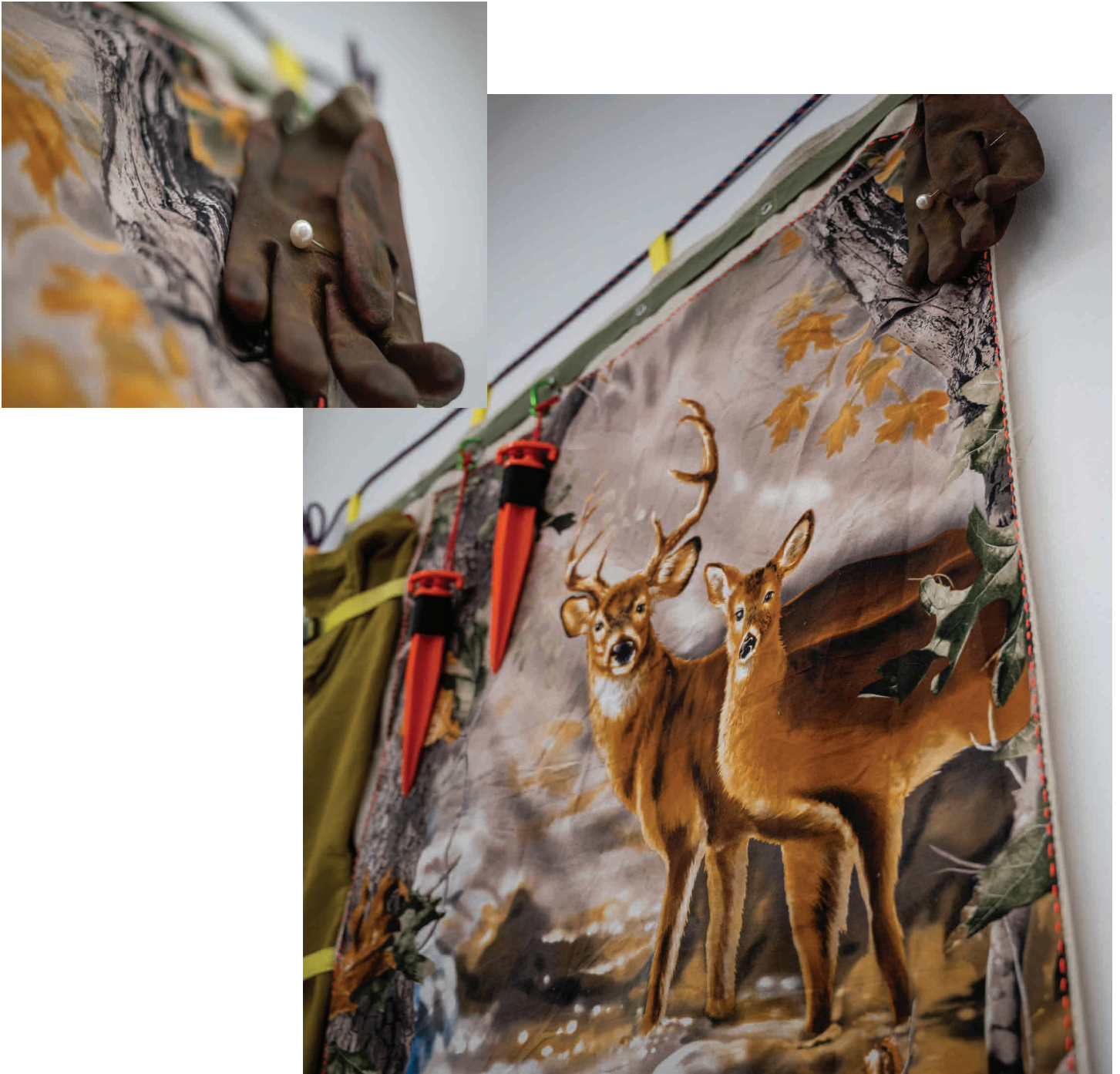


Figure 32: Jess Day, *Hunting, Gathering, Foraging*, details, 2021. Canvas drop-sheet, cotton drill, waterproof waxed thread, RealTree fabric, tarpaulin, grommets, carabiners, hand-sharpened orange plastic heavy duty tent-pegs, rifle casings, found red rubber glove, hat pin with fake pearl, 50 kg Bushman's sack, Velcro. Photo: Jess Day.

## Artistic practice and preparatory practice: Introduction

This chapter discusses the three frameworks briefly introduced in the previous chapter, while providing context for these frameworks through academic research, preparatory activity, and studio translations. The three frameworks I have developed to frame prepping practice within this research context are *narratives*, *adaptable objects*, and *preservation*. I begin by discussing other artists working with preparatory culture and crises before introducing the three frameworks that help to guide this project's practice-led research methodology. Each framework is subsequently discussed in depth in the following three chapters. This project deploys a practice-led research methodology which is coupled with three frameworks determined through experiences with and research into prepping culture. In the studio, I consider how the material composition of collections of objects and tools possible uses may articulate commonalities found across the spectrum of possible prepping activities.

Many objects I use in the studio have had a past life, or has been discarded by someone, and as such, they each have their own idiosyncrasies that must be navigated in order to be used effectively. The reason I use these second-hand and discarded objects is twofold. In part it stems from my childhood, where I was taught that nothing should be wasted, and objects could serve multiple purposes, which was much more valuable than simply buying something new. This attitude resonates strongly with low-income preparatory activity, which is the second reason I use these discarded or second-hand objects. A quick google search will bring up suggestions such as '15 ways to reuse a plastic bottle for survival'. However, reusing objects often requires extended problem-solving as these objects often require some modification to meet their new purpose, or to be repaired effectively.





Figure 33: Jess Day, *Apocalyptic Agency*, detail. 2020. Canvas drop-sheet, found glass bottles, rope, found light globe with small mussels, acrylic paint, found plastic, raffia, found Bic lighter, six small palm-sized stones, canvas scavenged from an old tent, tent pegs, metal flywire, black netting. Photo: Jess Day.

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Figure 34: Alison Stewart, *Bug Out Bag: The SNR 3 Person Deluxe Backpack Kit*, 2019. Source: Figure reproduced from Stewart (n.d.).-

This extended problem-solving is engaging, not just with reference to the object itself, but with everything around it. I often find I have to repair, patch, or attach one object to another in order to achieve what I was trying to do. This tends to result in an object's original size or dimensions shifting somewhat, which can be very constructive or, alternatively, present new challenges. Restricting oneself to found objects is also a productive means of making, valuing, and understanding the potential function of objects. This is not a new concept within the art world; books such as *'Do it'* (2001) or *'Making do'* (2015) explore this idea at length (see figure 61). However, before starting this research project I had no idea how intrinsic found objects and their adaptation were to prepping practices. As I build upon the work, I find I often lose all sense of time; the present becomes an endless stream of agency as I work (see figure 30). This level of engagement and play with an object is no longer common practice outside certain sectors, and Barker believes it is one of many factors leading to increasing interest in prepping culture (2019, 489).

### Prepping's material practice and contemporary art

The material practices of prepping have commonalities with recent turns in contemporary art practice and aesthetics, but so far, these commonalities are largely unidentified or explored in academic writing. Arts and museology researcher Alison Clarke discusses the contemporary theories of material agency and practice in her 2014 paper for the American Museum Anthropology Association, explaining "the hierarchies that separated art and utility have given way... to more humanistic understandings of the value of things" (17). Clarke goes on to say, "such approaches adhere to the notion of objects as silent 'bearers of meaning' in which human action and history are embedded, and their agency is only invoked through the act of interpretation" (17-18). Prepping actively encourages an interpretation of objects through the focus on durability, adaptability, use-value, longevity, purposefulness, and often links these attributes to memories of previous objects. For example, perhaps someone you knew had a knife like that, and they told you when purchasing one to check the quality

of the handle. A similar level of interpretation occurs when thinking about the future use of objects you bring into your preparations. For example, will this tent really withstand a major storm? Each preparatory object is examined for flaws and for its flexibility, strength, and versatility. The less you have to carry, the less weight and object maintenance you have, but you still need to be prepared. There is an almost constant analysis of objects and materials – what their benefits are and where their weaknesses are – in order to be prepared to quickly mend or modify them in future scenarios.

The material practices of preppers are embedded into the everyday lives of these individuals through the primary theory that preparation equates to increased survival. The more prepared the individual is, the more likely they are to survive, and in turn increase the chances of survival of others around them. Preppers are the first people to admit the impossibility of being prepared for ‘everything’; however, instead of becoming immobilised by this fact, preppers find this motivating (Barker, 2019, 492). As a result, preppers tend to be avid researchers of practical modes of preservation. These include preservation of food, water, shelter, life, health, and productive mental health. Survival expert Mors Kochanski surmises this approach perfectly in his teaching, stating that “the more you know, the less you have to carry” (Bull Moose Patrol, 2015).

Within contemporary art practice there has been recent examples of artists engaging with a wide range of ideas and materials associated with prepping. Artist Allison Stewart (2018) produced a series of photographic works exploring different bug-out bags and their contents, investigating what preppers *do*. *Preppers*, a 2020 exhibition at Fremantle Arts Centre (FAC) included artists Loren Kronemyer, Guy Loudon, Dan McCabe, Thomas Yeomans, and Tiyan Baker 2020-2021 (see figure 19). Kronemyer explores what it may look like, as an artist, to directly engage *with* prepping actions. Loudon and McCabe re-present wealthier *aesthetics* of prepping. Yeomans encourages us to ask which lives are more precarious within preparatory culture.



Figure 35: Jess Day, *Setting up camp*. 2021. Cool Change Gallery, WA. Tarpaulin, canvas drop-sheet, yellow high-tension tent pegs, cotton-drill, rope, torch, stainless steel bowl, small brush, camouflage work gloves, carabiners, strapping. Photo: Cool Change Gallery.

And Baker looks at prepping as a cultural practice born from necessity in contrast to cultural articulations of prepping as a hobby or pastime. *Preppers* (2020) was an important exhibition in understanding what I wanted to address in my own work. Attending the exhibition and the artists talks I felt largely dissatisfied with the ways in which the exhibiting artists were visually discussing prepping. With the exception of Baker, whose work directly linked to individuals engaging with preparatory activity, I felt the other artists relied too heavily on technologies to communicate prepping activity. To me, this indicated making work *about* prepping but not engaging *with* prepping activity directly. Although Kronemyer was directly engaging with preparatory activity, the work relied on access to highly expensive and elite gear, like hunting bows (see figure 19). I found myself critiquing who these preparations were for and did not see myself represented in any of these artworks. This reflection encouraged me to make all my work by hand, incorporate low-cost materials and goods. Further I needed to establish a method to represent the often low-income aspect of the prepping spectrum, rather than as an elite activity, or a suspicious and conspiracy-laden enterprise. I decided to focus on how prepping activity could be an insulation against further disruption to everyday life for those already living in precarious conditions, such as areas prone to natural disaster or low-income earners.

Prepping has become an everyday part of my life which allows me to mitigate fears I have about the future, while constructively building a better life for myself and my loved ones in the present. My artistic practice allows me to analyse these preparatory activities in a critical way. Doing so has revealed a host of contradictions, systems for preparing, and activities that I previously did not consider. Prepping culture has a strong focus on engaging with materials and objects that is not dissimilar, in my experience, to making artwork. Although the two practices, art making and prepping, are very different, by making artwork that troubles cultural articulations of survival, I bring the various contradictions and critical thinking about preparatory activity to the viewer through the production of artworks. One example of sculptural outcomes that evidence various preparatory activities is a series I refer to as 'tapestry works' which may or may not help preserve a life. The objects chosen



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Figure 36: (Top) Screenshot from CrazyRussianHacker, *DIY Easy Net!*, YouTube, 2017. (Bottom) Jess Day, *Throw Net* work in progress, 2021. Paracord, carabiners. Photo: Jess Day.

to accompany each tapestry may or may not have a use-value, depending on the scenario and the individual experiencing crisis. Ultimately, these works evidence the desire to be prepared, but without necessarily knowing what for, or if, or when, that eventuality may arise. This practice-led research project is a genuine attempt to prepare, and share the successes, failures, humorous moments, scary moments, and systems of survival that can aid an individual in navigating a world where crisis is unfolding constantly<sup>17</sup>.

### The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on this research project

COVID-19 occurred toward the end of the first year of this research project. The unfolding of a global pandemic radically shifted this research project, which began as a speculative, fictive apocalypse project in which a prepared individual would performatively navigate post-apocalyptic landscapes. This objective quickly changed after the pandemic began. I found it impossible to make work about a speculative 'end of the world' when it seemed, for many, their worlds were ending. Loved ones died, hospitals turned away patients, and the headlines contained new figures listing the number of people that had died from the coronavirus every day. The advent of COVID-19 radically shifted the focus of this research project to instead consider the various ways in which highly individuated preparatory activity could be examined through the production of artworks.

Experiencing lockdowns made me understand the value preppers place on 'being ready'. My own supplies did get depleted over the course of the lockdowns, but my house fared much better than many of my friends who complained about running out of pasta or toilet paper. Our medical cabinet kept us from having to purchase massively overpriced supplies during the lockdowns, and the herbs I was growing helped make leftovers a bit more inviting. Although these are all very small things, they made a very big difference at the time. The experiences with lockdowns encouraged me to further engage with preparatory activities, such as attempting

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<sup>17</sup> Be it for an individual in their own life, or through accessing news media, or through narratives from loved ones experiencing crises.



Figure 37: Jess Day, *Apocalyptic Agency: Protect yourself*, 2019. Pig Melon Gallery. Plastic toy gun, rope, knife, strapping, rifle casings, found crushed can, various scrap metal, stones, badge, shotgun shells, found ammunition pack lid, found red rubber glove, hat pin with pearl, screws, metal mesh, acrylic paint, cotton thread, glue. Photo: Jess Day.



to build a forge in my backyard, making a water filter, making a net by hand, carving eating utensils, making snare traps, and throwing knives. The pandemic also brought a significant number of papers about prepping to the fore, and many more were written since the beginning of the pandemic (for example, see Barker 2019; Mills and Fleetwood 2019; Mills 2020; 2021; Masco 2014; 2019; 2020; 2021; Garrett 2021a; 2021b). As these papers were published, the academic conversations around prepping also began to change.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, a report was published that explained the Water Corporation's fear about sustaining water treatment beyond a certain timeframe due to possible supply chain disruptions (Productivity Commission, Vulnerable Supply Chains, Study Report, 2019). It was revealed that a huge percentage of our water treatment chemicals come from overseas, and that the pandemic restricted these chemicals from entering the country. If left for long enough, this situation would mean the government would no longer be able to supply consumers with clean, fresh running water. Furthermore, a report by a government-sanctioned advisory body, Black Swan, had been produced the previous year identifying and outlining these issues, but for whatever reasons they had not yet been addressed. This revelation of network insecurity when it came to public use and distribution extended to other goods and services, such as groceries, medical attention, medical supplies, power grids, and household security (such as repairs, rental costs, and mortgage repayments). The exposure of these weaknesses worked in prepping's favour, as prepping culture allowed its participants to largely avoid the distress and confusion generated around the immediate lockdown situation<sup>18</sup>. This also influenced non-preppers to consider and even embrace the practice (Smith and Thomas 2021).

### The three frameworks: An overview

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18 Prepping, in some ways, resembles the video game genre of 'cosy games', which exploded in popularity during the pandemic. Primarily, prepping and cosy games both require a prolonged commitment over time, and often involve list making in order to prioritise the micro-managing required to complete the required set of tasks each day brings. List making is another way of experiencing agency, particularly when overwhelmed by tasks, or confused by the order in which to prioritise them. Further, both cosy games and prepping activities provide the individual with a sense of control and agency, which can be difficult to exercise in a meaningful way in crisis scenarios.



Since the latter half of this exegesis focuses on each framework in depth, this section will provide an overview of how these frameworks came to be, how they guide the research, and why they are useful tools for examining prepping culture from a practice-led research perspective. The frameworks were developed as a means to solve a problem I kept having in the studio. I was concerned that my sculptural works were not communicating the preparatory activities and theory I was engaging with. Alternatively, the prepping activities themselves felt like studio activities. I felt very confused and had no formal or critical parameters for success or failure in my outcomes. Yet I knew when something was working, and when it wasn't. The answer to this problem unfolded through a series of attentive notetaking and flicking between activities of prepping and activities in the studio. I began to understand that what I was doing in the studio was producing works that posited prepping activities as interesting, worthy of attention, contrary, complex, and highly individuated.

Engaging with prepping activity brought forth a barrage of information and skill development intrinsic to prepping to my attention and subsequently to the art-objects being produced in the studio. Further research allowed me to read about the means of analysing prepping practice from other fields of study. Barker and Anderson had both developed frameworks for examining prepping culture, but these were not appropriate for a practice-led research project. Instead, I developed my own frameworks. *Narrative* addresses the speculative future-casting, back-casting, and storytelling aspects of prepping culture. This includes the production and deployment of knowledge, both experiential and intrinsic. *Adaptable objects* engages with both an object's ability to be adapted, and what that may mean, and an individual's ability to adapt an object, and how that may be enacted. *Preservation* can be understood as the act(s) taken to shield an object or material from degradation or spoilage, or to keep something living alive and intact. In terms of this project, preservation operates as the third and final component of my practice-based methodological framework. Together, these three frameworks have guided this research project and its outcomes.

#### Preparatory activity and studio activity



Figure 39: Jess Day, *Hunting, Gathering, Foraging*, 2021. Cool Change Gallery, WA. Tarpaulin, RealTree fabric, tent pegs, rope, hand-sharpened high-durability tent pegs, rifle casings, 50kg bushman bag, Velcro, strapping, buckles, grommets, carabiners, found red glove, hatpin with fake pearl. Photo: Cool Change Gallery.

Images have been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 40: Detail of an infographic from *Stay Alive: A Handbook for Survival*, published in 1978 by the Australian Government. 2022. Photo: Jess Day.



Figure 41: Jess Day, *Trail and Error*, installation view, 2021. Cool Change Gallery, WA. Cotton drop-sheet, rope, spray paint, hand-stitched high-visibility line, cast aluminium trail markers. Photo: Cool Change Gallery.

These approaches are similar to my existing studio methodology prior this project; nevertheless, the differences in approach have allowed me to refine and develop my own methods of working. Failure is an interesting concept in prepping. To fail in a crisis scenario may result in grievously injuring or killing oneself or another. Despite this, prepping largely embraces failure as a part of the process of learning. This may be due to the variety of skills preppers engage with, as each individual continues to learn and develop a muscle or idea, tool or task, resource, or outcome that they have sometimes never attempted before. These failures are embraced as a means to identify what can go wrong, and how and where it can go wrong, or how to prevent or limit that failure from happening again in the future. The drive to develop and enhance an individual's skills stems from the knowledge of large scale making and distribution networks, and how easily these networks can be disrupted. Preppers consider what would happen if the supply chain were to shut down for a few days, a few weeks, months, or even indefinitely. Rather than solely stockpile manufactured products, preppers choose to pursue knowledge of the item's origin, manufacture, adaptation, various uses, longevity, repair, and break down. This is a physical and engaged materiality that is not dissimilar to my own studio practice. The nature of this engagement is temporal, active, and ascertains object value through the multiplicity of use, ease of replication, ease of maintenance, potential adaptation, ease of carriage/transport, and essentiality of function (see figures 41, 48 and 50 for examples).

### Crises and making art

Simon O'Sullivan writes in his 2006 book, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, about ruptures in our world thought and experience. As O'Sullivan explains,

the rupturing encounter also contains a moment of affirmation, the affirmation of a new world, in fact a way of seeing and thinking this world differently. Rupture and affirmation are then two moments of the same encounter, two moments that only seem opposed if considered in the abstract, outside of actual

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Figure 42: Detail of marker types from *Stay Alive: A Handbook for Survival*, published in 1978 by the Australian Government. 2022. Photo: Jess Day.



experience. Art in breaking one world and creating another, brings these two moments into conjunction.

(2006, 1)

The promise of near-future disaster, yet the lack of agency to prevent it, can be perceived as a rupture in an individual's world. However, O'Sullivan's quote could also apply to prepping. For it is rupture and affirmation, in my opinion, that drives prepping culture, which is an ongoing series of ruptures and negotiations with a series of ongoing activities, and problem-solving solutions. Every time a prepper 'finishes' the task they set out to do, there is already a list with 10 more similar tasks written on it, and/or there is that improvement the prepper has been meaning to make, or that adjustment to do to that piece of equipment (Barker, 2019). The threat of disruption to these systems is not perceived as something to react to, but rather something to prepare for, something to prevent. This attitude enables preppers to cope with the concept of disaster in productive ways that generate agency (Barker, 2019). The methodological approach this project takes in order to engage with prepping is multifaceted and reflexive. As a result, it can be difficult to clearly discern studio developments at times. In order to combat this, I began developing diagrams to track my decision-making process and order of thinking. These diagrams take a simple line drawing with text format and allow me to track my thinking over the course of the studio session. I found they became more complex and disorderly as I went on, and I would often have to return to tidy them up or return to the frameworks I developed to make sense of them.

Security, as defined by the individual, may take many different visual forms or aesthetics. At a governmental level, state security generally looks like a mosaic of services, networks to provide those services, and military presence. But what does security look like for preppers? Preppers tend to focus initially on the primary needs for basic survival, namely, food, water, shelter, and protection. Secondly, prepping focuses on developing these resources to a point where low maintenance, easy fixes, and adaptability become built into preparations.

An object's use-value is increased dramatically if it can also be adapted to meet other needs. Preppers discuss this in relation to common, cheap, everyday items one might find in the house. For example, a cotton wool ball is great in a first aid kit, but doubles as a fire-starter in a pinch. A chapstick can help with burns and chafing, but also can become a candle. This 'strange' knowledge is discovered by preppers through doing. This form of doing may be in outdoor survival settings, such as camping, or in a training exercise, or it may be from simply making a mistake performing a totally separate task, or lacking a crucial item to complete a job and simply 'making do'. Making do is discussed in art theory as an innovator for creative production. Artist Richard Wentworth's series *Making Do, Getting By* (1974–ongoing) explores the use of objects and materials beyond their original purpose. The photographic series documents objects in 'odd places' that Wentworth encountered while performing his usual routines. The resulting book documenting this series is described by Lisson Gallery (2015) as follows: "it documents an excess – a creativity beyond functionality, something transformative that lurks below the surface intention in acts of ordering and repair".

I mention Wentworth's series because I believe prepping also has "creativity beyond functionality" in the ways that preppers pursue skills development and projects for speculative futures. These projects start with focus on pure functionality, but often end up being much more than simply functional, and instead reflect a sense of comfort or self-evidenced through the ways an individual has adapted an object. Researching Wentworth's series enabled the understanding that object adaptation is another way of representing the highly individual nature of prepping. Similarly, the works I have made inside this project are functional while also evidencing a highly personalised interpretation of what it means to prepare for possible crises. Considering Wentworth's documentation of everyday ingenuity by strangers simply living their lives made me question, to what degree do we all prep already? What does it take to step over that line and 'become' a prepper?

Images have been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 43: Richard Wentworth, *Making Do, Getting By*, 2016. 2022. *Source*: figures reproduced from Lisson Gallery (n.d.).

The prepping community has much to say on this matter, especially about ‘wealthy preppers’ and ‘armchair preppers’. The former is often ridiculed for their overreliance on tools and tech, while the latter are considered to be tourists or unrealistic in their preparations. Performing its own form of othering, prepping does not have the same definition or criteria for everyone within the community. As such, some preppers are disdainful of others for their idea of ‘preparedness’, suggesting it is impractical or insufficient. I feel this distinction between people’s level of preparedness is unhelpful overall, and yet I have found myself doing that exact same thing when looking at other people’s preps. Prepping at its core, is a very individualistic practice, and as such, no prepping will ever ‘look’ the same. Some preppers will have more in common with others, which may be due to geographical location, morals, personal values, beliefs, or priorities. Geographical location often determines the orientation towards certain types of natural disasters- bush fires in forested areas; flood in flood prone areas; and economic collapse in the United States which proved possible after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Often someone will suggest an alternative for one object or product with another, but given this happens online, it can be difficult to find a similar alternative if you do not share the same geographical location. There are some shared values in prepping but largely these remain fairly disparate. These differences are most pronounced in relation to already controversial topics, such as gun control, women’s rights, who has the right to take a life, vegetarianism or veganism, who to help and who to ‘leave out in the cold’, what you would do in a life-or-death situation.

Working with prepping practice has been challenging as a creative practitioner because the practice is so diverse and so individualised. I established frameworks which derive from research into prepping culture, my own experiences prepping, memories of growing up in a rural and highly pragmatic low-income household, and common threads uncovered through practice-led research. These three frameworks, narrative, adaptable objects, and preservation, are examined in depth in the following three chapters.



Figure 44: Jess Day, *Sleep Soundly I: S.A.S handbook symbology* installation view, 2021. Cool Change Gallery, WA. Sleeping bag, pallet, 60L air-tight plastic storage buckets, LED lights, cloth tape, hand-stitched high-visibility line, spray paint. Photo: Cool Change Gallery.



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# Chapter four: Narrative



Figure 45: Jess Day, *Trail and Error*, detail, 2021. Cast aluminium, spray paint, rope, cotton thread, waterproof dropsheet, acrylic paint. Photo: Courtesy of Cool Change Gallery.

## Narrative: Introduction

This chapter investigates the role of narrative in the practices of prepping culture and how narrative in prepping may be expressed through material means. I frame narrative in prepping as a diverse series of expressions about preparatory activity oscillating between motivational and cautionary tales. Prepping, like its survivalist forebear, is a “narrative-laden enterprise, that can be understood as a storied-field of action” (Mills and Fleetwood 2019 39). In prepping culture, narrative and storytelling inspire, caution, educate, motivate, sustain, and guide action both in the present and for the future (Mills and Fleetwood 2019 40). These narratives are generated through two primary means: storytelling about prepping activities and storytelling through prepping activities. Further, in prepping practice, these narratives are also an important form of social interaction, as they allow the dissemination and acquisition of knowledge through direct engagement with other interested individuals.

This chapter covers both forms of narrative production and discusses how preppers disseminate these narratives, and how, through practice-led research, I negotiate and construct prepping narratives. In doing so, I combine two forms of narrative production: inscribed knowledge and experiential knowledge. In terms of this research project, inscribed knowledge refers to research into preparatory activities, which includes written, drawn, video, and photographic sources, manuals, handbooks, and wilderness expert advice. Experiential knowledge, in terms of this research, refers to my own experiences attempting preparatory activities, including my reflections, drawings, ideas, documentation, and aesthetic observations. These combined forms of narrative production enable a translation of this information into tapestry works which materially present these experiences and research to the viewer.



Figure 46: Jess Day, *Trail and Error*, install shot. 2021. Waterproof dropsheet, spray paint, rope, cast aluminium, high visibility thread, acrylic paint, cotton thread. Photo: Courtesy of Cool Change Gallery.

Firstly, I distinguish between narrative *about* prepping practice, and narrative *through* prepping practice. To do this, I borrow the distinction made between inscribed and experiential knowledge production from Estelle Barrett's 2007 article "Experiential Learning in Practice as Research: Context, Method, Knowledge". I then examine narrative functions in prepping culture, including far and back speculative casting, survival and failure, motivation and cautionary tales, speculation, and security. In order to do so, I employ cultural theorists Michael F. Mills and Jennifer Fleetwood's (2019) understanding of prepping culture in relation to *verstehen* (see also Dilthey 1924; 1981; 1989; Swidler, 1986). As Ferrell explains,

*Verstehen* denotes a process of subjective interpretation on the part of the social researcher, a degree of sympathetic understanding between researcher and subjects of study, whereby the researcher comes in part to share in the situated meanings and experiences of those under scrutiny. (1997, 10)

Narratives about, and created through, prepping practice influence the narrative constructions I produce in my artwork. The narrative constructions I produce aim to contextualise storytelling situations in prepping culture by embedding multiple narrative possibilities into each work. Further, these narrative constructions, which take the form of sculptural works, attempt to materially present the motivational and cautionary aspects of prepping narratives. By troubling the notion of a 'straightforward' narrative, the work aims to represent the desire and conflict inherent in prepping practice narratives. The materials used are vital to the communication of the narrative and are considered in the studio as functional narrative components to the experience of viewing the work.

This chapter focuses on a series of sculptural works I refer to as 'tapestries'. These works were the resolution of a previous series of works I referred to as 'field kits' (see figures 10, 17, 33, and 37). I refer to these works as tapestries, not because of how they are made, but because of their conceptual links to tapestry. These works are highly portable and narrative laden in their content. Like traditional tapestry, they are designed to



be highly portable and contain information deemed important, and worthy of preservation. The compositions are based on infographics about surviving outside the comfort of the home, such as lighting fires and purifying water. The objects connected to each tapestry relate to these activities and stem from my own engagements and narratives generated around speculative crises. These objects encourage narrative associations through their relation to each activity, and encourage the viewer to question their use value and own engagements with preparatory activity.

Narrative and storytelling play important roles in prepping culture, allowing preparatory participants to exchange pertinent information, validate experiences, and communicate experiences and findings to others. These narratives are not simply descriptive or ornamental but are an essential component of the experiential engagement with prepping (Mills and Fleetwood 2019, 36). Further, narrative analysis – particularly when applied to fringe, stigmatised, or deviant culture, which prepping may be part of, and is often articulated as such – may aid in understanding how narrative shapes immediacies, motivations, and perpetuation of that culture (Mills and Fleetwood 2019, 36). Prepping generates narratives in two distinct ways; firstly, directly *through* practicing acts of preparing, and secondly, by disseminating stories *about* preparing. Naturally, these two modes of producing narrative overlap and inform each other. For clarity, I have broken these two forms of narrative engagement into two subheadings and discuss them using examples from my own practice-led research.

#### Narrative about preparation and inscribed knowledge

The stories we tell ourselves and others about our actions inform our behaviours, motivations, decisions, and how we perceive ourselves and others. Narratives about prepping can be generated by those participating in preparatory culture, or those observing preparatory culture. Narratives about prepping can be broken down



Figure 47: Polaroid taken on a field trip to Denmark, WA (inside our shed). 2021. Photo: Jess Day.

into two main categories: condoned preparatory narratives and stigmatised preparatory narratives (Barker 2019). Condoned preparatory narratives include narratives made by preppers, narratives made through engaging with prepping activity, government disaster advice, weather warnings, and emergency management group messages such as bushfire alerts, flood watch groups, and cyclone warnings. Stigmatised preparatory narratives include movies, television programs about preparatory activity such as National Geographic's *Doomsday Preppers* series (2012-2014), hoarding narratives, and representations of prepping as exclusively for the wealthy, privileged, able bodied, and those with right-wing political ideologies (see chapter three). In this research project I have found these stigmatised narratives to be unproductive, restrictive, and too broad for meaningfully engaging with prepping practices. Indeed, I find perpetuating these notions by focusing on representations of prepping by the wealthy or presenting preppers as conspiracy driven and focused on apocalypse to be reductive and dangerous. By reductive, I mean that the focus on conspiracy and apocalypse spotlights the more stigmatised aspects of prepping culture and merely re-presents them. By dangerous, I mean that presenting prepping as an elite, wealthy, or fear-laden enterprise may actively discourage participation in highly individuated preparatory activity, which given our current global crises is, I believe, irresponsible.

I contend that prepping practices, unlike other methods of individuated disaster response and preparedness, such as resilience discourse, allow meaningful agentive engagement by an individual that can trouble or agitate established systems of disaster response normalised in neoliberal society (Grove, 2014, 6). As a result, my approach to prepping practice narratives and sculpture is rooted in experiential practice I have performed in my research, my own survivalist upbringing, and manuals and guides about disaster preparedness. Through research I have found the number of condoned preparatory narratives that exist outside the prepping community to be lacking. Since COVID-19, these condoned narratives have increased; however, academic research into individual crisis and disaster mitigation and creative practice remains scarce. This





Figure 48: Hand-carved utensils. 2021. Photo: Jess Day.

research attempts to contribute to academic discourse on prepping by focusing on narratives produced by people who practice prepping activity. In prepping culture, narratives about preparing are a crucial means of social engagement and for disseminating information. Whether in person or online, storytelling is a way of disseminating knowledge, particularly in the form of the cautionary tale. Given the number of online forums which foster prepping communities, this storytelling cascades, sometimes resulting in knowledge, which is region specific and, if applied in different environmental conditions, could even be harmful to oneself or others. Given the proliferation of preparation advice and stories in online communities where the audience is global, a concern might be that in “this process of displacement and circulation, knowledge becomes less and less tied to real conditions” (E. Barrett 2007, 4302).

Cultural and arts theorist Estelle Barrett states that displacement and circulation often result in the privileging of inscribed knowledge over that of experience (2007,4302). However, in prepping practice, inscribed knowledge is only of use if the practitioner can actualise the information through experience. As a result, preppers tend to privilege experience over inscribed knowledge, often proffering solutions they have tried at home over those suggested in manuals, how-to guides, and other texts – these resources are seen more as providing information to build on or rework to better meet the individual’s needs (see Mills and Fleetwood 2019). In this way, preppers also contribute to inscribed knowledge production through the dissemination of mud maps, narratives about preparatory activity, hand-drawn diagrams, how-to videos, and instructional materials from their own experience for others to utilise (see Masco 2020). The way prepping communities contribute to inscribed knowledge has informed the ways in which I choose to present narratives in my sculptural work. These contributions can be quick, drawn, cobbled together, and assembled from a variety of sources and materials. My own narrative constructions mirror this. They are cobbled together. They assemble a range of objects and materials which invite narrative associations. They are drawn from a variety of sources, and are made by hand. Examples of this assembling of objects and materials to invite narrative associations can be



found in the tapestries made over the course of this research project. In *Setting up camp 2021*, drawings and infographics in manuals and guides inform the composition and the shapes of coloured cotton drill and tarpaulin (see figure 35). Each tapestry has a title which encourages a focus on a preparatory activity and includes a set of objects related to that activity. The inclusion of these objects further suggests narrative by proposing actions related to the title of the work. The composition and the objects included are fairly ubiquitous and rely on both the title of the work and the viewer to construct and interpret the narrative proposed by the work. In the studio, narrative about prepping is informed by various manuals and guides on how to prepare, as well as by personal anecdotes from my engagement with preparatory activities since childhood. This construction and interpretation by the viewer aim to mimic the experience of decoding trail markers and symbols often used in prepping activities, while also providing an opportunity to actively engage in narrative construction about individuated preparedness.

When I first exhibited this work at Cool Change Gallery in Perth, Western Australia, I was delighted to hear gallery visitors debating the usefulness of certain items, justifying their inclusion, or outright denying their use value. Other visitors to the space recalled their own experiences getting lost in the bush, deciding what to pack into first aid kits, which brands were more reliable, which disasters they had encountered, and which disasters they feared the most. As a result of this feedback, I decided to continue pursuing experiential interpretations of inscribed knowledge from my own studio and practice-led research over that of external narratives about prepping.

### Narrative through preparation and experiential knowledge

While narratives about prepping may motivate, validate, advise, caution, and justify prepping behaviours, prepping also generates these narratives by engaging in preparatory activities. These narratives influence



Figure 49: Jess Day, *Purifying Water*, detail, 2021. Cool Change Gallery, WA. Canvas drop-sheet, tarpaulin, heat reflective material, high-visibility line, glass bottles, Bic lighter, tinder, raffia, Redhead matches, flywire, mesh, carabiners, red netting, six palm-sized stones, knife, torch, strapping, grommets, buckle. Photo: Cool Change Gallery.





Figure 50: Jess Day, *Backyard Forge*, 2021. Pizza oven stones, heat beads, tinder from carving, aluminium cans broken down, barbeque heat jacket, broken pot plant terracotta, modified stainless steel pot, locking jaw pliers. Photo: Jess Day.

the ways in which objects and materials are acquired, produced, used (or not used), valued, or discarded.

Performing preparatory action generates reflective narratives; examples include stories of success, failure, adaptation, frustration, inspiration, or modification. These narratives influence how future actions are performed, modified, or adapted to meet the needs of the individual. These reflective narratives are often forms of problem solving to address conditions or materials that may differ for the individual undertaking the activity for various reasons. An example of this can be found in the early version of the tapestry works (see figures 10, 17, 33, and 37).

*Protect yourself* (figure 37) is one of a series of 'field kits' which later developed into the tapestry works and included objects I had found and used on field trips to perform prepping activities. These field kits included objects which were difficult to determine as 'useful' or 'valuable' in a prepping scenario. *Protect yourself* was made after a field trip to the South West of Western Australia in 2019 where I practiced a series of self-defence activities outlined in the *Stay Alive* handbook (Australian government 1981). I undertook this field trip to re-examine my survivalist upbringing and to rehearse preparatory activities in a non-urban environment. I found the activities exciting and challenging, and I often had to make ad hoc tools and be ready to adapt some steps of the activities that I couldn't perform in full due to my geographic location<sup>19</sup>. *Protect yourself* reflects my engagement with these activities through the inclusion of modified objects, such as sharpened toothbrush handles and steel offcuts. The number of modified objects was intended to evoke the 'try, try, and try again' mantra often referenced in prepping tutorials. Reflecting on this work, and on the field trip experience, I found the outcome didn't represent aspects of the experience that were the most interesting to me. The negotiation between the handbook, myself, my environment, and the tools at my disposal felt lacking in this work. There was no evidence of the hierarchically ordered instructions that I was interpreting from the handbook. The

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<sup>19</sup> For example, some activities referred to operating in weather conditions that did not apply to my location in the South West, like snow and desert based activities.



objects, simply glued or crudely attached to the canvas, were static and fixed in place. Further, the chosen objects made it hard to determine what I was doing at each site. As performing the field work was essential to understanding how I could effectively interpret prepping activities and narratives, I was driven to re-make the work as mobile, flexible, and much more durable in the next series.

These reflections directly influenced how I approached the final tapestry series (see figures 59 and 61). I began to understand the need to include both inscribed and experiential knowledge production, and the narratives produced by combining these forms of knowledge production. Composition became determined by infographics; colour by the type of activity undertaken, such as camouflage or, conversely, fluorescent colours so that one can be easily found; and objects by experience. Prior to this, preparatory activity was largely something I took for granted, just a part of my life. Performing the field work and expanding the skills I had enabled me to see preparatory activities in a different way, and in doing so, identify ways to convey these experiences through materials in the studio. As a result I have chosen to allow both inscribed and experiential knowledge to inform the sculptural outcomes of this research project.

### Negotiating narrative in the studio

The tapestries attempt to combine both narratives about prepping and narratives generated through prepping. The tapestries combine infographics, a form of inscribed knowledge, which informs the composition of the works, with objects related to the activity or action each tapestry is proposing. The inclusion of these objects makes reference to experiential knowledge production, such as the inclusion of spent ammunition casings in *Hunting, Gathering, Foraging* (see figure 39), which explicitly suggests hunting. By contrast, other objects are more suggestive and require the viewer to make their own associations or links, such as the inclusion of



the sharpened plastic orange extreme weather tent pegs in *Hunting, Gathering, Foraging* which were used as components of a deadfall trap<sup>20</sup> (see figure 53).

By working with materials found in prepping practices to visually express narratives of preparedness, the artworks evidence a negotiation of cultural meaning enmeshed with the adjacency of experiences (see Ferrell, Hayward, and Young 2015, 3). Or, to put it differently, the materials chosen to express narrative in these artworks are deployed purposefully; these materials are already 'loaded' with cultural meaning, and these meanings are attended to through the combination of proximal prepping experiences. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) writes that our behaviour is influenced by expectations which consist of framing the context of action. Materials and objects deployed in prepping are often sourced from ex-military, camping, and fishing outlets, specialised tool shops, storage outlets, or hardware providers. As a result, these materials and objects are already loaded with cultural associations of 'doing', such as packing, storing, unpacking, containing, preserving, protecting, securing, defending, observing, sheltering, hunting, surviving, to list a few. The artwork outcomes of this research project take advantage of these embedded meanings by emphasising these associations in the titling of the works, and by grouping like-objects together, encouraging the viewer to connect these objects with their associated uses. For example, the tapestries (see figure 51) are made with various types of tarpaulin, which is a highly versatile, low-value material known to protect people and objects from the elements, as well as being a flexible, resilient, hardy material.

These materials present a narrative which combines my own experience with the advice of 'experts' in prepping culture<sup>21</sup>. Each tapestry focuses on the performance of a certain survival action or activity, such as

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20 Deadfall traps are often used for capturing small animals in survival scenarios. They operate by 'propping' up a heavy object, such as a stone, with an easily knocked over object, like a stick. Bait is placed under the rock between the stick and where the animal can access the bait. The idea is that, attracted by the bait, the animal unwittingly knocks over the stick, crushing or trapping itself.

21 Experts, in this sense, refer not only to individuals who are prominent in the prepping community, but also to texts, handbooks, and how-to videos specific to each subject matter.



Figure 51: Installation view of *Art in Ambiguous Times*. 2022. Exhibition co-curated by Professor Kit Messham-Muir and Associate Professor Susanna Castleden for Destinations and Directions Symposium 2022 at Curtin University. Photo: Jess Day.

'hunting, gathering and foraging' (see figure 39). In order to visually present the narrative of performing these actions to the viewer, I based the composition of the tapestries on the infographics related to each activity (see figures 29 and 51). The tarpaulin and cotton drill that form the body of the tapestries operates as a portable site for the utilitarian objects attached to each tapestry. These objects, which can be unclipped from each tapestry should they need to be deployed, are linked to each tapestries preparatory activity. The objects are connected directly to the tapestry, rather than having them in a cache or next to the textile work. This was a deliberate decision to frame these objects, some of which may present as ambiguous in their utility otherwise, as utilitarian and pragmatic. The tapestries are a mode of bringing preparatory activities into the gallery space to encourage viewers to question use values, their own preparations or views on prepping activity, and their experiences with preparatory activity.

#### Speculative fiction and failure to survive

By contrast, the sculptural work *Apocalyptic Objects* that I made in 2019 approaches narrative through using materials that evoke the notion of collapse or failure to adequately prepare for crises. These works, which were produced prior to the advent of COVID-19, attempted to visually realise a speculative apocalypse, before the attention of the project shifted to highly individuated preparation for possible crises. *Apocalyptic Objects* was a suite of sculptures that embedded plastic cast replicas of survival objects, such as a walkie talkie or whistle, in terracotta clay with a mould-like patina (see figure 2). The replicas are of children's toy sets that advertised the possibility of enacting survival scenarios, such as 'rescue', 'hunting', and 'war' games, and accordingly, these replicas already contained the suggestion of speculative scenarios. Since these replicas cannot function as survival tools by the nature of their manufacture, the inclusion of these objects in the sculptures suggests an ineptitude or failure to contribute to survival within the speculative apocalypse being proposed. Furthermore, dried or fired clay is historically used in many cultures to create pottery which primarily functioned as pragmatic



Figure 52: Polaroids taken on a field trip to Denmark, WA (throwing knives and axe heads). 2021. Photo: (top) Jess Day, (bottom) Jose Scifoni.

objects to hold and store water and food (Cooper 1988). However, in *Apocalyptic Objects*, clay is deployed to suggest the further removal of function from these already replicated survival objects by partially encasing the replicas and preventing their use even as objects of play.

The actions of preppers – that is, the real or physical interactions between an individual and the objects and materials required for such action – are not only pragmatic, but also signify a series of convictions about the future (see Meskell 2005); for instance, the ways preppers attempt to ‘ward’ off or guard against death or disaster through the accumulation of certain objects and materials with acquired and practised skill sets. *Apocalyptic Actions* was a visual exploration of a speculative scenario in which these wards no longer function as intended, as if they had failed to prevent death or disaster.

#### Narrative, motivation, and agency

The ways that preppers weave narratives around their experiences often provides space for reflection and refinement, as well as emotional satisfaction, which in turn propels these narratives to fuel further action (Mills and Fleetwood 2019, 34). The pursuit of a particular goal, and how an individual navigates that journey – the trials and tribulations, for example, of learning how to start a fire in the rain, and the eventual success in doing so – may be told as an inspirational tale in which the pursuit of a goal ‘pays off’ for the participant. Learning a new skill that may aid a prepper in a survival situation is one example of this. I learnt how to carve wooden eating utensils as part of my research. The outcomes are rough and clumsy objects that would be awkward to use compared to their industrially manufactured counterparts. However, these objects have a series of narratives woven around them in the process of learning how to craft them. In my practice, these spoons are visual evidence of the culmination of weeks of hand-tooling, speaking with wood turners, researching online, watching YouTube how-to videos, and taking notes. As such, these objects fuel my desire to refine the skill I



am developing in wood carving, which in turn further drives my interest in accruing more 'useful' skills. Such motivation for useful skills drives the desire to engage with preparatory activity further and allows for a feeling of agency and accomplishment in the face of speculative disaster. In addition, for those who haven't engaged with prepping activity before, this mentality may provide a useful insight into why people would want to prepare, and what motivates them to do so. As Mills and Fleetwood state, "a rounded appreciation of prepping's various gratifying 'moments' often requires an understanding of their importance to numerous processes of narrative construction" (2019, 34).

### Disseminating knowledge: Cautionary tales

In prepping, these narratives are a vital means of disseminating knowledge evident in the growing number of highly popular YouTube channels, blogs, published books, free PDF resources, and social media posts which share 'prepping tips' accrued by the authors. This intertwining of experience and material is often synthesised into narrative through the telling or retelling to others. As Barker states, "these online and offline spaces are not hermetically sealed" and the "online and offline sociability, identity-building, and community participation ... was frequently cited in interviews [with preppers] as a driver for participation" (2019, 490; see also Kabel and Chmidling 2014). These narratives are also informed by and shared in forums (both in person and online) that have overlapping interests, such as camping, knife, hunting, military, food preservation, bushcraft, weed identification, edible mushrooms, and re-enactment interest groups (Barker 2019, 490). In short, by sharing stories about prepping, participants may validate their decision to prepare, educate themselves and others on survival, and motivate further preparatory action. *Trail and Error* (2021) evidences the negotiation between an individual, a set of instructions, and a scenario by presenting a simple word or phrase on a weatherproof A3 pennant (see figures 41, 45 and 46).

A play on words referencing *trial* and error, *Trail and Error* (2021) was made as a series of narrative prompts which could hypothetically, through the incorporation of functional waterproof materials, be deployed outside the gallery space. The text in these works was chosen from a list of words and phrases I have been collecting over the course of the research project. The only parameters I set myself in choosing this text was that the word or phrase had to be frequently used in prepping narratives and could be interpreted as related to surviving crisis. Prepping culture uses action-based words in describing highly individuated preparedness, and simple words like 'run' could take on intense narrative connotations inside a prepping context. I liked how these words could appear as instructive, suggestive, speculative, and narrative all at once in a preparatory context. I was also interested in how text, especially when placed alongside the more abstract scout and trail marking symbols I was making in cast aluminium, could operate when situated in the gallery.

Referencing scout, walking group, and survival camps, *Trail and Error* works as a decoding of trail flags or markers in a versatile poster-sized flag. The symbols behind each piece of text are amalgamations of various forms of outdoor short code, left by one individual for another who knows what that particular symbol means and how to interpret it. These short codes are intended for scout, walking group, and survival camp attendees to communicate with one another through quick markings in case the group separates, such as 'gone home'. As art objects, these works provide narrative prompts to the viewer and evoke speculation on when, where, and why these short codes may be deployed. In this way, when deployed inside a gallery space, they also aim to broadly suggest sites beyond the white walls of the gallery, and through the use of waterproof larger scale markers, suggesting to viewers that these works could be quickly redeployed in other, outdoor locations. Preparatory narratives are an amalgam of associations, memories, oral history, problem solving, tradition, and speculation about the preservation of human life. Evoking sites 'outside' of the gallery space through outdoor materials and short codes encourages viewers to engage with narrative speculation 'outside' the bounds of usual assumptions about preparatory activity.



Figure 53: (top) Jess Day, *carving utensils*, studio detail, 2021. Wood off cuts. Photo: Jess Day. (bottom) Jess Day, *Anchors*, 2020. Heavy duty plastic orange tent pegs, hand carved points, black paracord grip. Photo: Jess Day.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 54: Karl Monies, Arcana Containers, 2019-2020. Etage Projects, Copenhagen. Source: Figure reproduced from Etage Projects (2019-2020).

## Speculation and security

Prepping activity encourages speculation in order to secure the individual's future security (Barker, 2019, 493).

Given prepping is a highly individuated practice, these modes of establishing security may appear differently depending on the individual and their geographical location. In order to explain this further, I will discuss the work of Haegue Yang then one of my own sculptural outcomes, both of which navigate the individual's attempts at increasing security in the face of speculative crisis.

Korean born, and Berlin and Seoul based, artist Haegue Yang's 2019 Bass Museum of Art exhibition, *In the Cone of Uncertainty*, examines the precarity of South Florida residents in facing the region's increasingly extreme tropical storms and weather conditions (see figure 59). In an interview with *Art in America*, Yang states she was "struck by the phrase 'cone of uncertainty'", a term which, according to the article's author Christopher Phillips (2020), is "meteorological... and has become a part of the everyday vocabulary of the region, which refers to the predictably unpredictable path of a fast-moving tropical storm". Yang's large-scale, self-described 'wallpaper' work pictured in figure 68 is site-specific and combines weather infographics with aerial shots of local Miami communities, distorting aspects of the images to create a rippled, flattened, somewhat uncomfortable, and unified image (Phillips 2020). *In the Cone of Uncertainty* embraces speculative disaster and pulls it into the present, superimposing aspects of a tropical storm over mapped sections of the South Florida community. In doing so, Yang invites discussion around speculative crisis and modes of survival. At the artist talk for this exhibition at the Bass Museum of Art, Yang was interviewed along with local TV weatherman, John Morales. When Morales asked the crowd if they had made any preparations, such as stockpiling canned food, "the hands of about half those present shot up" (Phillips 2020). Yang's small delicately and laboriously crocheted canned goods stacked on simple plinths in front of the wall graphics reference this



Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

need to be prepared, and the time that this preparation requires. When asked about climate gentrification,<sup>22</sup> Yang discussed her speculation that “unanticipated new forms of local community might arise from the shared experience of climate disaster” (Phillips 2020). Rather than stigmatising the stockpiling of canned goods, or the pre-emptive preparatory behaviours of those living in low-lying coastal areas, Yang’s work provides a site to reimagine what crisis might look like, how an individual might respond, how secure their current situation is, and how they may further secure their future.

*Sleep Soundly I: S.A.S handbook symbology* (2021) was the first in a series of works I made that directly linked the bodily experience of individual security with preparatory practice (see figure 56). Similar to Yang’s *In the Cone of Uncertainty*, the work was made with the intention of encouraging discourse around speculative crisis and personal security. The sleeping bag was chosen to represent a single body and was lined with hand-stitched symbols from the *S.A.S. Survival Handbook*. I was interested in the simplicity of these symbols and how ubiquitous they could appear outside the survival handbook context. Working methodically to attach the hand-stitched lining to the interior of the sleeping bag, it became important to keep the bag’s exterior unchanged. The work could then contain a ‘hidden’ (when zipped up) preparatory set of symbolic images that referenced survival actions. Hence, this work also references individuals who participate in prepping activity but keep their participation hidden from others for fear of judgement. The sleeping bag appeared unaltered until unzipped, or until you examined it closely. In this way, the work also engages with concepts of urban camouflage.

According to American John Caine, the creator of Vinjatek, a tactical and survival gear review website founded in 2017, urban camouflage isn’t about patterns that allow you to ‘blend’ into the urban environment, but to present yourself as though you belong there. This can be achieved by concealing gear, appearing

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22 Climate gentrification refers to the movement by wealthy individuals from coastal living to nearby areas at higher ground in a pre-emptive attempt to avoid the speculated effects of catastrophic meteorological changes in low-lying areas of coastal communities as climate shifts become increasingly severe and unpredictable.



Figure 56: Jess Day. *Sleep Soundly II: Seed Bag*. 2022. Modified sleeping bag, canvas drop-sheet, spray paint, waterproof waxed thread. Photo: Jess Day.



Figure 57: Jess Day, *Bucket Lights: Version II*, studio progress shot, 2022. 60L air-tight storage buckets, waterproof LED lights, paracord. Photo: Jess Day.

unmemorable, and mirroring the cultural environment you are in (Vinjatek, 2022). *Sleep Soundly I: S.A.S handbook symbology* suggests, through the title of the work, and through the use of *SAS Survival Handbook* symbols, that prepping may help alleviate the uncertainty individuals experience when thinking about the impacts of speculative crisis, and thus, provide a sense of security. Further, my own experiences since childhood with preparatory behaviours encouraged me to use the sleeping bag as a material. I have always found the form of the sleeping bag to be very comforting, the closeness of the fabric and the 'cocooning' of being inside the sleeping bag felt like a barrier between myself and the often-freezing desert nights. As sculptural objects, the *Sleeping Soundly* series evidences a sense of security an individual may experience is embodied through the use of the individual sleeping bag, whose purpose is to literally protect the individual from extreme temperatures.

This chapter has discussed narrative in prepping culture, and the ways it may be translated to sculptural objects to promote discussion around highly individuated preparedness. In terms of the frameworks for this research, narrative is thought to perform an 'acquiring and forming' function. By acquiring, I mean the collecting and accruing stories about and through the performing of preparatory activity. By forming, I mean that narrative is used within the frames of this research project to help develop ideas for sculptural practice outcomes. Narrative feeds into the adaptable objects framework by motivating action and disseminating knowledge, which enables reflection and may prompt improvements, modifications, or adaptations to an individual's preparation. Further, given narratives in prepping often include images, hand drawn or otherwise, narrative has also included infographics that break down 'how to' do specialised or specific activities that may be utilised in adapting objects. Narrative, within this research, acts to build the cultural toolkit of highly individuated preparedness, which aids in the preservation (see final chapter) of the individual's values, the object's use value, the motivation to prepare, and the navigation of speculative crises.





Figure 58: Polaroids taken on a field trip to Denmark, WA (learning new skills from skilled family members: Left shows family members performing their chosen skill. Right shows my attempts at replicating that skill). 2020. Photo: Jess Day.

Image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Figure 59: Haegue Yang, *In the Cone of Uncertainty*, detail, 2019. Bass Museum of Art, Florida. *Source:* Figure reproduced from Bass Museum of Art (2019).

# Chapter five:

## Adaptable objects



Figure 60: Jess Day, *Trail and Error*, detail, 2021. Cast aluminium, nails. Photo: Courtesy of Cool Change Gallery.

'Adaptable objects' is the second of the three-part framework that has guided my methodological approach to making artworks which lens prepping activity as a means for the individual to negotiate unfolding or ongoing crises. Within the context of this research, the term 'adaptable objects' refers to both the materiality of objects used in preparatory activity, and the ways in which preparatory activity enables an adaptable approach to making and problem solving. In order to unpack the adaptable objects framework further, I build on Bakke and Bean's writing about sensemaking<sup>23</sup>, and the applications of sensemaking when coupled with materiality and crisis (see Granholm 2018). Sensemaking is the act of making sense of an event that is unknown, or in which many unknown factors exist (Granholm 2018). Scholars have shown that materiality is an important aspect of sensemaking, particularly in crisis scenarios (Granholm 2018; Bakke and Bean 2006). An example can be found in Bakke and Bean's 2006 study in which technologies available in sensemaking scenarios may act to aid or hinder individuals ability to engage in collective sensemaking through the material interactions with those technologies (62-64). The use of computers in crisis can greatly aid some aspects, according to Bakke and Bean, such as data acquirement and sharing across longer distances, while simultaneously being problematic in the way the technology relies on a stable power source and the need for users to understand how to engage with the technological interface (2006, 64). Nevertheless, there is a lack of research regarding the use of practice, in this case artistic practice, as the unit of analysis for 'making sense' during unknown events (Granholm 2018; Orlikowski 2010; Whittington 2006).

This chapter examines how sensemaking and materiality help inform the relationship between an individual and materials and objects during crises, or when speculating on crises. The chapter starts with a short overview of sensemaking and materiality in crises. I then explain the adaptable objects framework further

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23 Bakke and Bean build upon Karl E. Weick's 1993 groundwork on sensemaking, however Weick's focus is not on materiality and sensemaking, but characterises sensemaking as purely cognitive, despite his occasional acknowledgment of materiality in the processes of making sense during crises.

and link it to the narrative framework discussed in the previous chapter. I go on to contextualise materiality and sensemaking with the framework of adaptable objects and explain how this framework helps form a methodology which aids in the construction of artworks that engage with highly individuated preparedness. To do so, I focus on my own material investigations and compare them to the practice of other artists within the field.

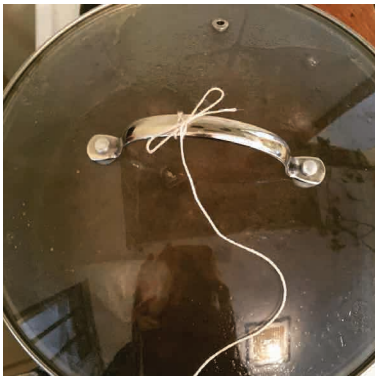
*“There’s a 1:1 purpose with everything you’re doing with your hands. One of the other things that keeps bringing me back to this lifestyle or skill set or mode of learning is I don’t need these skills, I just like having them. But, as above so below, knowing this way of thinking transfers into other elements of my life that makes me better at surviving, just living in society. It makes me think better.”*

*– Artist and curator Nikelas ‘Smokey’ Johnson, October 10, 2019.*

### Sensemaking and materiality in crises

As a theoretical perspective, sensemaking can be described as the act of making sense when something unexpected, new, ambiguous, or unpredictable occurs (Weick 1995). Since, as Daniel Miller writes, “the issue of materiality remains foundational to most people’s stance to the world”, materiality is an important consideration in how we make sense during uncertain events (2005, 2). Despite the insistence from scholars that materiality matters in how sense is made (see Bakke and Bean 2006; Whiteman and Cooper 2011; Mesgari and Okoli 2018), little research has been done on how individuals make sense through materials and objects during unexpected events (Granholm 2018, 28). As sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) states, “much of our behaviour is cued by expectations which are determined by the frames that constitute the context of action” (Goffman 1975, as quoted by Miller 2005, 4). When these expectations shift, it can be difficult to determine appropriate courses of action and prioritise caution and safety in dangerous situations (Granholm





Making a soup to freeze, but the spice bag split. In order to save the soup, I extracted the spice bag, stitched up the hole with cotton and created a 'tea bag' system.

Making stew to freeze, but did not have a meat tenderizer, so I used a hammer instead.



Repurposing a very old frayed plastic rope by coiling it into a jug and stitching the coils together.

Re-waterproofing second hand boots with Dubin, and using a can opener and pocket knife to attend to the stitched sole.



Figure 61: Various photographs evidencing repurposing, adapting objects, and making do. 2020-2022. Photos: Jess Day.

2018, 30). An individual's ability to make sense and determine action involves "learning how to read a scene through juxtaposition and interpretation of verbal reports and visual images, and in various forms of text, in real time, into provisional assessments of an emerging situation" (Suchman et al., 1997, 678). Making sense is a complex myriad of activity which combines past experience, present information, and speculating on possible near future outcomes. Making sense, especially during possible or unfolding crises, is particularly difficult, and as a result, many individuals take to collective sensemaking in order to assist in interpreting events as they unfold.

Collective sensemaking may take place online, such as on social media or in forums, or done in person (Granholm 2018). Making sense can be said to consist of five different points. Crisis studies professors Jonas Landgren and Fredrik Bergstrand in their 2016 paper regarding sensemaking and crisis situation rooms describe these points as *assembling*, *monitoring*, *exploring*, *converging*, and *consolidating*. Crises situation rooms, or emergency operations centers, are fixed points in a community, nation, and/or state in which emergency services, ambulance, police, and community volunteers may gather information, debrief, and re-distribute knowledge as crises unfold in a community. Situation rooms may be deployed as a crisis develops in locally known locations, or established community hubs, such as a local recreational centre or library, or may be an independent room which is set aside for crisis management. Situation rooms are fixed locations once established so that all members of the community know where they can find assistance in navigating a crisis, and get up to date, on the ground information regarding the crisis as it develops or dissipates. As such, situation rooms are a sanctioned form of crisis navigation, established by authoritative bodies within a community, in which collective sensemaking of unfolding crises occurs. The original context for the five points can be found in Landgren and Bergstrand's 2016 paper, "Work Practice in Situation Rooms: An Ethnographic Study of Emergency Work in Governmental Organisations", in which the authors describe these points in the following terms. 'Assembling' refers to mobilising and activating the skills required for staff. Monitoring is





Figure 62: Jess Day, *Preserved stockpiles*, studio development, 2022. Heat reflective material, grommets, straping, sandwich bags, split rings, polaroid photographs, canvas dropsheet, waxed thread. Photo: Jess Day.



information referred to as 'gathering'. Exploring equates to understanding the information gathered. Briefings or regular reports to a group are referred to as 'converging'. And finally, 'consolidating', which is described as an attempt to merge diverse viewpoints on events as they unfold. Landgren and Bergstrand's five points of collective sensemaking provide an engaging set of frames through which crisis sensemaking by the individual may be examined. Prior to reading Landgren and Bergstrand's paper, I was having difficulty clearly articulating the links between highly individuated preparedness actions during an unfolding crisis, and that of authoritative groups such as police or rescue services. By applying and re-contextualising, the five points outlined by Landgren and Bergstrand overlaps between individual and authoritative collective sensemaking became clearer. Furthermore, the re-contextualising of these five points allowed a critical reflection on the ways in which I, as an individual and researcher, was making sense of prepping activity in the studio, and how I was visually communicating my activities to the viewer.

I will now apply the five points outlined by Landgren and Bergstrand to highly individuated preparatory activity in order to see how sensemaking and crisis interact from my own preparatory art-based perspective. Within the context of this research project, *assembling* refers to the collection and acquisition of objects and materials, as well as skills and knowledge, that may assist during a crisis situation. *Monitoring* refers to the everyday reading of news articles and weather forecasts, as well as the maintenance of preparations, and setting of tasks in the studio. *Exploring* refers to studio tests and trials, experimentation with materials and objects, scouting of outdoor sites, mapping of possible sites, and testing of ongoing installation and presentation decisions. *Converging* refers to the combining of the three previous points, assembling, monitoring, and exploring to identify similarities and differences (in relation to crisis research, other prepping activity, and to previous works I've made in this research project) with a focus on exciting, unexpected overlaps, similar to situation room management and personalised preparations. And finally, *consolidating*, which in the context of my practice refers to the iterations of 'prepping' I construct as artworks, both resolved series and series of works which

were not pursued. Even when a series of works was not pursued, the series was still examined through the consolidation phase as a way to identify why I was moving away from that series, and how the making of that series informed the research project as a whole. I found 'folding in' these works which were not pursued important, as it evidenced how failure in prepping activity can also lead to discovery or productive problem solving which may inform future modes of preparation. These five points can be said to make up sensemaking (Granholm 2018, 30).

Prepping, in my experience, is not unlike the concept of a situation room, in the sense that both serve as a framework for negotiating crisis scenarios and preparing to deal with possible crises. With this in mind, I have extended these five points beyond sensemaking in situation rooms to a consideration of my own preparatory activity. By extending these five points to my own research into sensemaking, crises, and highly individuated preparatory activity, I have established a productive means to analyse the objects and materials used in prepping, and the activities I have undertaken while engaging with those objects and materials. After discussing adaptable objects as a framework, this chapter will apply the points of analysis to my studio work, focusing on studio development and testing outcomes undertaken as part of the adaptable objects framework.

### Adaptable objects as a framework

The adaptable objects framework refers specifically to developing and testing work in the studio in terms of both materials and objects, and in terms of how, and the extent to which highly individuated preparatory activity enables an adaptable approach to making and problem solving. Developing and testing refers to a wide range of activity that occurs within the adaptable objects framework. As such, it is helpful to clarify how this framework operates tangibly. As previously discussed in both chapters three and four, preparatory activity combines inscribed and experiential knowledge, but tends to privilege experiential knowledge. This



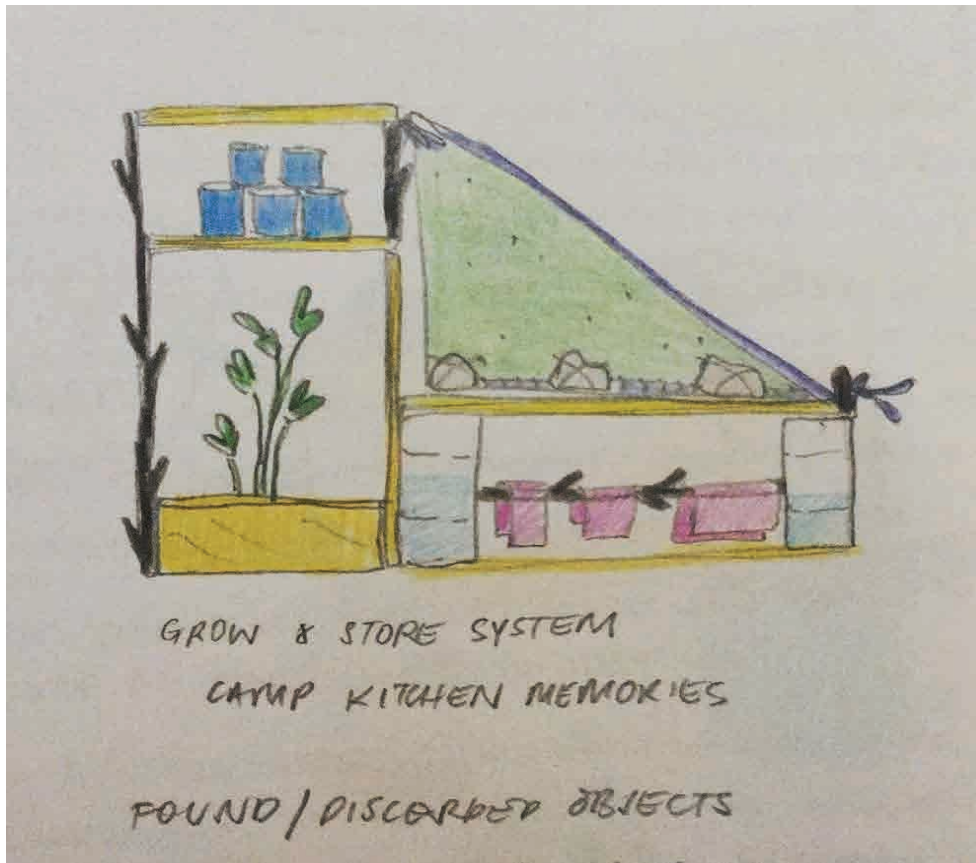


Figure 63: Jess Day, visual diary scans, 2020. Coloured pencil, graphite, biro. Image: Jess Day.

is perhaps due to the emphasis prepping culture places on the individual being 'capable' and being able to be independent from external systems when necessary. Without developing and testing, in my experience, much of my experiential knowledge would not have come to the fore. For example, I was interested in the proliferation of the hand carving of utensils on social media during the various global lockdowns. Fascinated by the similarities to bushcraft, and my previous object modification evidenced in the early iteration of the tapestry series (see figure 10), I pursued the carving of my own utensils (see figure 48). These attempts, albeit crude in their execution, taught me a lot about carving wood, handling the tools, precision (and the lack thereof), and shifted my perspective on utensils I had previously taken for granted. Although these tests were not pursued in the final body of work, engaging with the tools and materials assisted in thinking through the objects and materials I did pursue, and why these were so important to the project.

Applying the previously identified five sensemaking points of analysis to these hand-carved tools may further illuminate the importance of development and testing, specifically in terms of the adaptable object's importance and value in preparatory culture. First, I *assembled* the materials I required by tracking down a wood carving provider and a wood supplier. Both businesses gave me a raft of useful advice for a 'green' or new-to-practice wood carver. Starting in the studio, I *monitored* my activity with particular focus on proper tool handling and the depth of each carve. After my first scoop was carved, I set to *explore* the other utensils I could craft from the sizes of wood offcuts I had assembled. This exploration included attempting to carve a variety of different types of wood, as well as trying various carving techniques. *Converging*, by combining the three previous points, allowed me to understand how the previous object modification evident in figure 48 had informed the tool handling and mark making I was producing. Further, converging brought the question of sculptural outcomes to the fore. Was this the kind of object I wanted to make for the final work? What was gained from carving my own utensils rather than simply buying them? The answers to these questions came in the *consolidating* phase. While consolidating, I found that the experience of wood carving had, in fact, made me feel more 'capable'

overall, despite my criticism of the calibre of the outcomes. Further, without this experience, I would not be able to appreciate the commercial utensils I used in the same way. Nor would I comprehend the difficulties of making my own utensils when and if that possibility occurred. Understanding the difficulties of crafting basic tools and objects, such as hand carving utensils, underlines the importance of skill development in prepping activity, and also the value of attempting a variety of different skills prior to a crisis. I found these moments of understanding compelling. To understand the difficulty of crafting such a simple object added additional value to my other prepping activities, as this experience highlighted how easy it was to take basic tools for granted, and how difficult it could be to reproduce them if the need did arise. Consolidating was a reflective experience that enabled a critical thinking about how wood carving was an agentic experience, while also enabling the realisation that this testing and developing of possible sculptural outcomes did not, in fact, have to result in a completed sculpture. Instead, I allowed the knowledge gained during this experience to inform future studio activities through the addition of new knowledge, new skills, and therefore, new ways to problem solve or adapt objects.

#### Adaptable objects and narrative: Linking the frameworks

As established in the previous chapter, narratives in prepping culture take inscribed knowledge, combine it with experiential knowledge, and represent them as an assemblage of memory, experience, information, infographics, and discourse. Adaptable objects as a framework links with the narrative framework in several ways. Firstly, objects adapted by the individual fuel the narratives an individual builds around their efforts at preparing for crises as adapted objects evidence testing and development, and operate as a reminder of how preparatory activity encourages problem solving and object adaptations. Secondly, the narrative framework can instigate a series of development and testing of skills and materials, as the narratives an individual weaves around their object engagement may encourage or inspire action with a previously untouched material or skill.



Figure 64: Studio testing to evidence repurposing, adapting and reusing found objects, 2020. Photo: Jess Day.

Thirdly, the experiential knowledge gained by engaging with the object adaptation may bolster an individual's overall engagement with crisis preparation, and thus the narratives that individual may construct and disseminate about perceiving and responding to crises.

#### Adaptable objects in action: Studio and practice applications

Prepping, as established in chapter two and three, is a productive lens through which individual negotiations of crises and crisis sensemaking may be understood. My own investigations into prepping activity have focused on reusing materials, adapting commonplace objects, or easily acquired materials, and cheap materials. When using these materials and objects in the studio in order to sculpturally articulate aspects of my engagements with prepping activity, I have focused on retaining off-grid or low technology methods of making, such as hand stitching. The sculptural outcomes privilege flexibility and mobility, that is to say, I have created sculptural outcomes which may be easily packed down and relocated should the need or desire arise. I felt this was important, given that prepping focuses on mitigating the individual's difficulty coping with crises, should they unfold, and may require 'bugging out' or relocating temporarily due to the nature of the crisis event.

In order to privilege mobility and flexibility within the project, several modes of object adaptation were required. The first iteration of tapestry works *Apocalyptic Agency* (2019, see figures 10, 17, 33 and 37) were made with objects stitched to the backing canvas and with weighty climbing rope. When re-examining these works through the five sensemaking points adapted from Landgren and Bergstrand I realised I needed to rethink these works. The *Apocalyptic Agency* works needed to be much lighter, clearer in the way they talked about types of prepping activity, and the objects should be able to be removed from the backing, should the need or desire arise.



As a result of this reflection, it became clear I needed to adapt both the way in which I was making the next series of tapestries and how I was including objects related to each preparatory activity (see figures 20, 32, 35, 38, 49, and 62). With this reflection in mind, I started the adapted five sensemaking points from scratch. I assembled new materials and objects which were lightweight and durable. I monitored how the materials were interacting on the tapestry surfaces so the works could be packed down easily. In the exploring phase, I tested installing the works alone, ensuring I could carry all the work myself, and that the objects included were easy to remove from the tapestries should I choose to use them. Converging ensured all four tapestries performed the previous three points. When consolidating this new series, I was surprised to notice how many modes of material and object adaptation I had engaged with. For example, in order for the objects to be removed and re-attached to the tapestries with ease, I learnt how to use a grommet punch kit, and form metal rings through a newly acquired material, heavy-duty strapping.

#### Experimental and inscribed knowledge: Adaptable objects

Working in the studio, I found prepping to be equally dependent on highly personalised problem solving that is largely ad hoc, localised, and geographically specific. This realisation was instigated by following instructions for building a low-melt forge at home (see figure 50). Originating from the US, the instructions contained a lot of geographically specific materials and was reliant on certain soil types I did not have access to. After a range of experiments, I ended up using the University forge to melt aluminium safely. Initially, this felt like a failure on my part. In hindsight, however, this experience was crucial to understanding how prepping is adapted by individuals in different locations and with different materials. In addition, this experience allowed me to understand that prepping is reliant on the individual accepting contradictions as positive and purposeful agitators to practice. Evidence of this shift to a positive and purposeful agitator to practice was the knowledge gained by working with metal experts in the foundry at Curtin. If my home forge had worked right away, I

would not have learnt many other useful metal working skills. This valuable skill extraction may also take place through material experimentation. According to Kezia Barker, the prepper's "valorisation of alternative object potentiality and centring of valuable skill extraction ... exposes an anxiety of material dependency" (2019, 493). Indeed, although prepping revolves around the concept of being capable and of independent from as many external systems as possible, ironically prepping simultaneously invites a level of commodification and is highly dependent on materials and tools. In my experience, prepping simultaneously encourages the individual to navigate these contradictions through research, experience, and practice.

In the studio I began investigating the relationship between inscription and experiential learning with regard to adaptability. How preppers navigate these contradictions is not determined by a set of 'rules' on how to prepare to mitigate disaster, but rather is found in the situated demands of practice. Examples of the divide between instruction and reality can be found in my experiences of trying to learn various material processes in order to produce the creative outcomes of my research. For example, after reading about ways to melt down and recast aluminium, which appeared very simple on the page, I attempted to do so myself, only to discover a raft of difficulties. Encountering problems with finding the melting point and generating heat, I had to turn back to other forms of inscribed knowledge to identify the problem(s) I was encountering. In attempting to remedy the problem by reading further guides, I became overwhelmed by information that contradicted not only the first guide I had followed, but also the subsequent ones I was reading to correct the first source. There appeared to be an impossible number of methods to achieve my goal of melting aluminium and yet the problem remained unsolved. Carefully following the instructions did not solve the real problem I was having – namely how to generate enough heat. Further, my various attempts to adapt my home-forge with heat bricks, silica, and increasing burning times to generate heat, were all unsuccessful. It became evident that the clear, 'easy' line drawings and instructions did not translate to the realities of my geographic location and skill set.



Figure 65: Jess Day, *It's attracted to the light!*, detail, 2021. 20L water carrier, cement fragments, expanda foam, spray paint, acrylic paint, torch, climbing rope. Photo: Jess Day.

Preppers may have access to vast amounts of explicit information, and yet, when alone and attempting these techniques, one inevitably encounters moments where adaptation is necessary and without the aid of others (be it online or otherwise) such challenges may be difficult to overcome. In a survival situation, the problem of translating between abstract knowledge and implementing that knowledge physically may mean the difference between life and death. Prepping encourages an individual to mitigate these issues by rehearsing or practising these skills prior to the event of an actual crisis. However, rehearsals or scenarios can never truly prepare one completely for the experience of crisis, since the experience of crisis is a cascade of unknowns that require 'on the spot' sensemaking by the individual experiencing them. I acknowledge this in my sculptural outcomes by combining objects that gesture toward a specific use and purposefulness but removing any specific context for use. My sculptures suggest a kind of function which, given how I have installed them in the gallery space, refuses any specific kind of crisis, and therefore their possible use remains speculative. By presenting the work in this way, I not only evidence the desire to be prepared, but also the conflict stemming from not necessarily knowing what the preparations are for, and when or if that eventuality may arise.

As emphasised by academics and theorists (see Barker 2019; Masco 2021; Mills and Fleetwood 2019; Imel-Hartford 2012), experiential knowledge and adapting objects are a vital part of prepping. How experiential knowledge has influenced this project can be seen in the development of my tapestry series. The tapestry series, the first iteration referred to as 'field kits', revolved around collecting discarded materials that may have use-value and customising them in some way. Some objects were given handles, others were sharpened, some were joined together. One of the failings of this early process, however, was that I was customising these objects for an imagined use, and not an actual purpose. These objects were then glued and stitched to sections of canvas drop sheet, which was bordered with climbing rope. These early works attempted to visually articulate the specificity of prepping practice by presenting an array of objects whose customisation and use was evident, but purpose of customisation was unclear. In doing so, I hoped to convey a sense of personal use

that was only suggested through the title of each work, and the highly individuated nature of prepping culture. Although I felt these works did convey these ideas, reflecting on these works made me realise the need for including clearly purposeful and familiar objects to indicate specific uses to the viewer beyond the titling of the work.

Working with this idea in the studio required a return to the overall methodology developed over the course of this project. I started acquiring a range of new objects and materials and examining their materiality and possible functions as well as their adaptable qualities. Some objects required more intervention than others in order to meet my purposes. The orange heavy duty tent pegs I bought were dull, and difficult for me to drive into any hard earth. To adapt these objects, I sharpened the ends of these pegs with a knife and sandpaper. Doing so revealed a secondary possible use for these tent pegs as aids in trapping small animals in a survival situation. This example evidences how spending time with materials and adapting their use can lead to new discoveries in possible use. Artist and arts theorist Barbara Bolt describes this experience in art making in her paper "Material Thinking and the Agency of Matter": "Rather, we come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling. Thus, the new can be seen to emerge in the involvement with materials, methods, tools, and ideas of practice" (Bolt 2007, 30). In addition, my experience of spending time with, and adapting, the materials led directly to the acquisition of new skills.

Specifically, the studio experiences informed my decision to create large-scale hand-stitched works which required long-term engagement and the development of a skill set I did not yet have, primarily hand stitching. Through the processes of stitching, collecting, practicing, and developing these skills, it became apparent that my interest was located in how sculpture could communicate the ways that preppers acquire, generate, and share knowledge in the face of multiple speculative crises. Further, it became evident that, in communicating





Figure 66: Jess Day, *Hope for the Best, Prepare for the Worst*, install shot. 2021. Photo: Courtesy of Cool Change Gallery.

these ideas, I remained focused on tangible preparatory activities I had actually attempted. In doing so, I could genuinely explore the difficulties and inherent contradictions of highly individuated preparatory culture. Through these engagements I faced many failures and a few successes after multiple attempts, and as these investigations continued to propel the project, the importance of investigating object adaptation when engaging with prepping led to the establishment of the adaptable objects framework.

### Investigating adaptability: Studio outcomes and artist research

Artist Karl Monies' *Arcana Containers* project (2019-2020) combines climbing rope and handmade ceramic vessels (see figure 54). In an interview for *Wallpaper* magazine, Monies asks, "why can't art be made with a function, or why can't a utilitarian object be imbued with a philosophical, conceptual, or existential meaning, related, or unrelated to its functional purpose?" (Macalister-Smith 2021). The project stemmed from a need the artist had when relocating to a new city with his partner. After losing his painting studio, Monies could only access a ceramics studio. Monies felt the best course of action was to adapt, by learning new skills in ceramics and investigating the utilitarian possibilities of vessels. Monies describes the inclusion of climbing rope as "a symbolic, literal lifeline" (Macalister-Smith 2021). This reference to rope as a lifeline, both symbolically and literally, is another example of allowing a material to retain its functionality, or possible use if unwound from the ceramic vessel, while providing a reflection of highly individuated preparedness through the inclusion of the artists interpretation of the rope's symbolism.

Although *Arcana Containers* provides a utilitarian set of objects for speculative magical rituals, the inception of the work and the questions the work attempts to answer are not dissimilar to my own studio investigations (see Macalister-Smith 2021). Monies's acknowledgement of the possible use and value of these artworks helped me push my own studio investigations further. As Monies states, "people are going to want objects that are

lasting and age with grace. Neither we nor the planet have the time or capacity for buying the same things again and again” (Macalister-Smith 2021). Inspired by Monies’ investigation of vessels, I tested the possibility of incorporating bucket lights in the installation of my work. Bucket lights are an adaptation of simple 20L storage bucket is modified to operate as a weatherproof, all-conditions light source (see figure 57). I found the simplicity and functionality of the design could simultaneously be a means to incorporate the long-term food storage containers used in most prepping practices. Food and light are considered part of the basic tenets of survival, and the direct material connection through the bucket allowed me to cluster and group these buckets en masse. Curiously, the term ‘bucketing’ in finance can refer to both positive financial actions (in the sense of separating accounts to save one’s income) and negative ones (in futures market trading where a market-maker and broker make money at the expense of public markets) (Moles and Terry 1997, 60). These positive and negative connotations around ‘buckets’ in finance are mirrored in perceptions of preppers as ‘hoarding’ food versus being prepared to survive on one’s own food supplies in a crisis scenario.

In my studio testing of bucket light making, I once again found the inscribed knowledge to be limited in application given my geographical location. The instructions online were clearly aimed at European and American preppers, and voltages, suppliers, light fittings, and even the suggested tools varied wildly to what was available in my local area. As a result, adapting these instructions was required. My first set of bucket lights were functional, but could not be deployed outdoors, largely defeating my original portable, flexible, and multifunctional reasons for making the lights. The second iteration of bucket lights was much more successful, allowing for waterproof lighting and even object storing, while being able to be suspended or used as a support (see figure 57).



Figure 67: Jess Day, *Watch and Wonder WorkVest*, detail, 2022. Chain, magnifying glass, cloth tape, strapping, grommets, zips, reflective material, rope, tent peg, reclaimed jacket. Photo: Courtesy of Chantelle Mitchell and TCB Gallery.

Having objects that can perform multiple functions is highly advantageous in prepping, since it reduces carry weight, overall reliance on the number of objects, and therefore maintenance of these objects. Simultaneously, prepping actively participates in the online community by sharing these prized multifunctional objects, and thus commodifying them (Acker and Carter 2018, 210). Australian company Lion Knives (2022) provides a good example of this commodification in their 'lanyard beads for knives and tools' webpage. Lion Knives (2022) describes their lanyard beads as "[a]n essential item for the EDC community" (see figure 55). EDC refers to Every Day Carry and is a term often used in the prepping community, particularly in 'pocket dump' posts, where the contents of a pocket for that day are turned out and photographed, for the purpose of sharing with likeminded individuals on social media sites such as Instagram (Acker and Carter 2018, 210).

Serving no other purpose than an aesthetically pleasing addition to a knife or tool, lanyard beads<sup>24</sup> evidence how prepping participates in larger systems of commodification despite the desire to minimise consumption, rely on minimal tools, and be capable of operating independently of larger global distribution systems (Acker and Carter 2018, 210). Nevertheless, I suggest these lanyard beads may be adapted to a crisis situation as a means of mitigating shock through the deployment of a familiar object which may bring comfort, particularly when attached to a utilitarian object. Lanyard beads may operate similarly to 'Wilson' from the 2000 film *Castaway*, in which the protagonist, played by Tom Hanks, forms a 'friendship' or bond with a found volleyball on a deserted island, which provides him with a sense of companionship and comfort. With this in mind, I made my own sculptural version of a comfort object for crisis scenarios, but retained the adaptable functions discussed previously. *Personalised Friend* (2022) attempts to preserve some aspects of function while mirroring the pictorial aspect of lanyard beads and encouraging the notion of companionship in crisis (see

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24 Lanyard beads are also found in popular multiplayer online survival games like Rainbow Six and Apex Legends. They function as a means to evidence the player's progress or the challenges a player has completed, and to show these achievements to other players.



figure 16). The next chapter introduces the preservation framework and will further discuss the concept of comfort in prepping, EDC, and survival commodification.

This chapter has introduced the adaptable objects framework and discussed the application of this framework to an artistic practice methodology. Further, this chapter has explained how sensemaking – or the act of making sense of an event which is unknown, or in which many unknown factors exist – can aid in working with crisis scenarios (Granholt 2018). Since materiality is an important aspect of sensemaking, particularly in crisis scenarios, and adaptable objects are highly valued in speculative crisis scenarios, this project has worked adaptability into the making parameters for sculptural outcomes (Granholt 2018; Bakke and Bean 2006). This chapter attempts to address the lack of research regarding the use of practice, in this case artistic practice, as the unit of analysis for ‘making sense’ during unknown events (Granholt 2018; Orlikowski 2010; Whittington 2006). Through the personalisation, adaptation, and modification of objects, preppers may ‘make sense’ of speculative or unfolding crisis scenarios through practical action with survival objects. This relationship between prepper and object to sense-make during speculative or unfolding crises will be discussed further in the following chapter.

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# Chapter six: Preservation

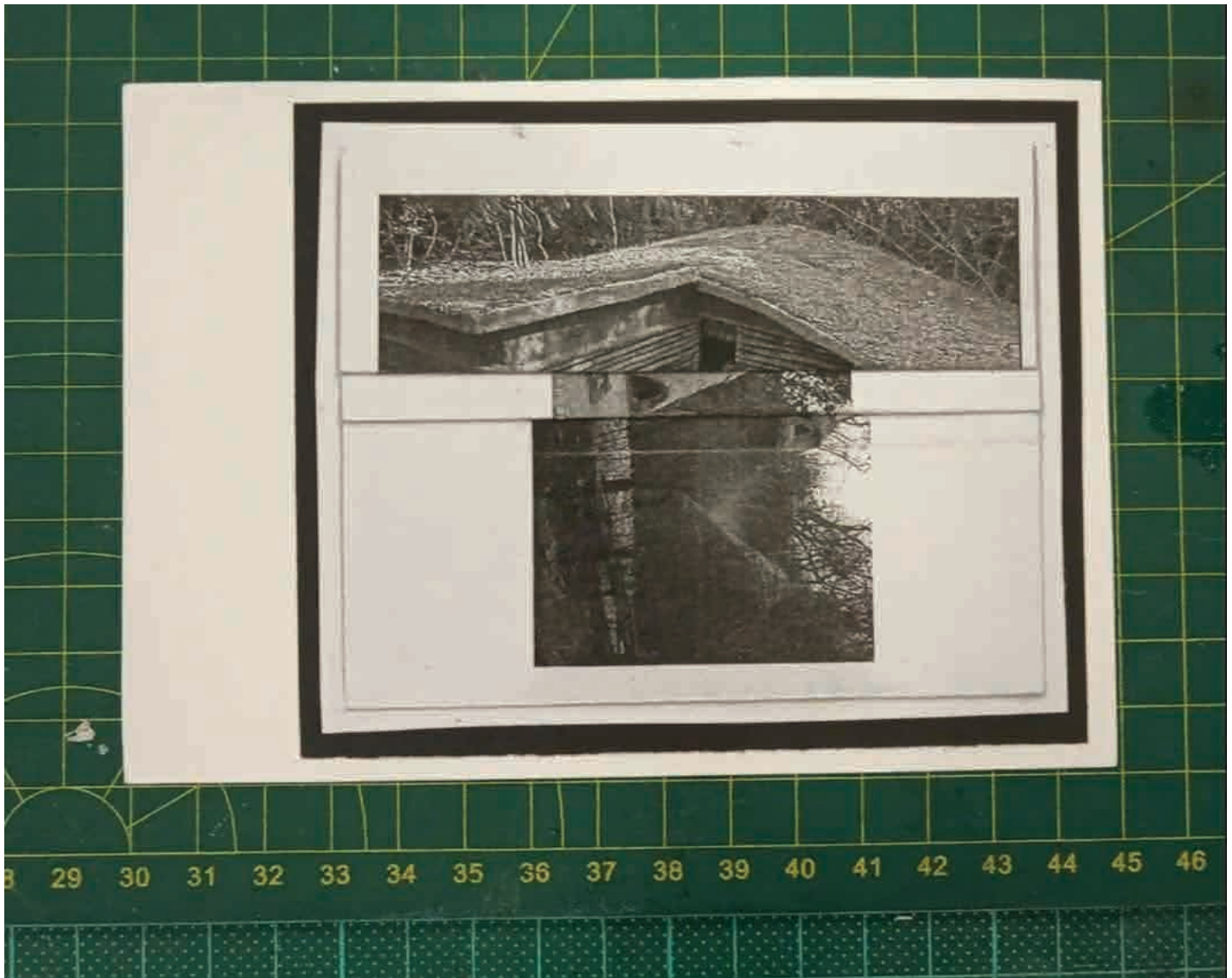


Figure 69: An attempt to preserve certain visual information generated inside my visual diaries by creating a small artist book, 2022. Photo: Jess Day.

## Preservation: Introduction

Preservation can be understood as the act(s) taken to shield an object or material from degradation or spoilage, or to keep something living alive and intact. In terms of this project, preservation operates as the third and final component of my practice-based methodological framework.

Preservation, in the context of this project, refers to the act(s) undertaken in highly individuated preparatory culture to ensure the longevity, durability, functionality, and persistence of objects and individuals in the face of unfolding or speculative crises. This might look like hemming, sealing with wax, storing food and water, waterproofing, making bandages, repairing, modifying, and resolving materials and objects. As a result, the preservation framework often tangibly presents as a mode of concealing and revealing goods to oneself and others. The preservation framework also includes concepts of comfort, commodification, the preservation of the self, of life, of skills, of others, of food, of water, of shelter, and of knowledge. This chapter introduces the preservation framework, and then links preservation back to the adaptable objects and narrative frameworks. A discussion of studio and practice applications of the preservation framework follows before explaining the forms of experiential and inscribed knowledge production. Finally, studio outcomes are discussed, with particular focus on preservation, safety, and security as experienced and expressed through my engagement with prepping practices.

## The preservation framework

Jamie Priestley writes that crisis creates a long-resonating shock on those unprepared for it, and that “what had become normal and reliable is disrupted, often suddenly, and crisis is the label we give to the ensuing struggle between one order and another” (2013, 465). Prepping may help mitigate some of this ‘shock’ through the variety of ways an individual may choose to prepare. It can be argued that prepping is ultimately about preservation in the true sense of the word. All of the efforts of prepping, at the end of the day, boils down to





Figure 68: Jess Day, *Sleeping Soundly I: S.A.S Handbook Symbology*, outdoor install test, 2021. Sleeping bag, high visibility line, cast aluminium symbols, waterproof dropsheet, spray paint, cloth tape, pallet. Photo: Jess Day.



strategies and methods of preserving core aspects of life and what sustains life in the face of speculative crisis. Naturally, in reality, these attempts at preservation, manifests in the case of prepping as a much more complex network of thought, action, reaction, and observation. This complex network is reflected in the ways in which preppers speculate on, and attempt to secure, or preserve, futures. Lisa Baraitser describes navigation of this complex network as “living in the time of waiting for the event” (2017 5). As previously established, prepping culture is not focused on the ‘zombie apocalypse’ or ‘Armageddon’ but rather on fulfilling basic metabolic requirements and ensuring the capacity to provide for loved ones in times of rupture (Barker 2019, 493). As a result of precarity within neoliberal systems of limited, if any, welfare support, preppers “imagine and foreshadow a socio-material context where these needs are met outside of networked infrastructure” (Barker 2019, 493). The alternative “shadow infrastructure”, or dispersed material landscape of basic survival needs, is “operating in the ruins – or extremities – of capitalism” (Barker 2019, 493; see also Tsing 2015; Wakefield 2017). Within prepping these dispersed material landscapes may aesthetically present in various ways, but often incorporate a workshop, shed, or working area; a storage or series of dispersed cache or collection areas; and a series of notes, stored digital research, printed research, and photography or video documentation, for future reference (see figures 22, 31, and 77). My own sculptural outcomes mirror this aesthetic.

Prepping actively encourages engagement with new skill sets through agentive acts of preparation, and the joy of accomplishment when achieving a new technique (Mills and Fleetwood 2019). My personal experience evidences this. The more preparatory acts I engage in, the more likely I am to find myself engaging in further preparatory activity. As previously discussed, identifying as a prepper demands constant imaginative work in both the unfolding present and when considering or speculating on the future (Acker and Carter 2018, 211). It is this imagining, in terms of this research project, that has resulted in increasing efforts to access new

materials, objects, and skill sets, in part to inform and expand this imagining, in part to fuel the aforementioned joy of accomplishment.

The preservation framework embodies concepts of resolution, containment, concealing, and revealing. Inside the studio, preservation occurs in a few different ways. Firstly, the preservation framework operates to ensure functionality and utility for all artworks made. Secondly, preservation is a means of finalising or adding finishing touches to sculptures that enable their longevity, such as hemming, sealing with wax, varnishing, painting, framing, or covering. Thirdly, preservation guides the communication of narrative through the refinement of symbols, colour, and text that operate to visually communicate knowledge and memories about survival. Preservation, as a framework, operates to embed knowledge obtained both through experience and inscribed sources, while ensuring the durability of the work made, and retaining or adding, depending on the sculpture, a utilitarian aspect that may be helpful in a crisis scenario. I will now extend these three points to explain how the preservation framework tangibly operates.

#### Functionality and utility: Practical engagement

The sculptural outcomes of this project primarily operate as artworks, that is, they are made to be seen within the context of art as art objects. Given the nature of prepping, it became important to me as a researcher to ensure that the works I produced around my engagements with prepping practice retained or, in some cases, obtained possible functionality beyond being sculptural objects.

Embedding utility and functionality into the work activated modes of engaging with materials and objects beyond the proposition of alternative uses. I began looking anew at the materials and objects I was collect-



Figure 70: Jess Day, *No Hidden Life*, 2020. Cast cement, expanda foam, acrylic paint, spray paint, salvaged pine, watercolours, screws, cement fragments. Photo: Jess Day.

ing. Each had a kind of protective quality, for example, the tarpaulin and drop sheet made me feel particularly secure and capable. This feeling was due to a combination of past experiences growing up in a rural location and all family holidays being camping trips, making the tent interior and, hence tarpaulin, a source of comfort. And also knowing that the material was flexible, long lasting, waterproof, and that it could also shield a body in the way I had sized the tapestries. In extending this material and object analysis, I found that this revelation extended to almost every object I had collected: woven straps, buckles and O-rings, rope and containers, water carriers and portable lights. Each object or material was, for me, in the context of prepping practice, rather comforting and operated as a kind of shield, not only from natural forces, such as wind and rain, but also ideologically, in the sense that through acts of making, I experienced security through my preparations. Ultimately, the act of ensuring an object's functionality shifted the way I was thinking about and making sculptural objects.

#### Preservation, adaptable objects, and narrative: Linking the frameworks

The preservation framework links to the narrative framework in several ways. The preservation framework enables critical reflection and refinement of how narrative and the associated experiential knowledge produced through prepping narratives can be embedded into sculptural works in aesthetic and utilitarian ways. An example of the link between the preservation framework and the narrative framework is the refinement of text in sculptural works, and the use of object inclusion to provide narrative prompts to a viewer. Including text prompts may aid in a viewer's narrative understanding of the work, but these text prompt also encourage ideas of preservation such as 'run' or 'shelter' (see figure 46). The preservation framework also connects adaptable objects with narrative through the ways in which objects may be included, discarded, or coded to communicate a specific speculation on possible futures. The inclusion of certain preserved goods on the tapestries, such as Redhead matches and zip-lock bags of wood shavings in my work *Starting Fires* (2021, see figure 20)

may also aid in the narrative reading of the work as pragmatic, or for a specific purpose, while simultaneously suggesting a fire which, may speculatively, be kindled in the future.

As communication and information studies theorists Amelia Acker and Daniel Carter have stated, “the ability to identify and represent the self as a prepper requires constant imaginative work about the future” (2018, 211). Acker and Carter evidence this finding through examination of social media posts with the hashtag #EDC, or Every Day Carry, in which preppers and likeminded individuals share the contents of their pockets on social media as a mode of displaying ‘necessary’ items and their level of preparation (207-211). These social media posts “draw attention to the unique codes, practices, and strategies of display that reveal the constant imaginative work that preppers need to do in order to make sense of destruction, collapse, aftermath and recovery” (211).

Importantly, as discussed in chapter 4, these acts of sensemaking that preparatory culture engages with are not necessarily about accurately depicting or considering the future, but more about the speculation and anticipation of unfolding futures, and how these may occur, and how individuals may respond (Acker and Carter 2018, 211). The example of EDC social media posting illuminates the complex ways in which these three frameworks interrelate. In a simple act of sharing the contents of one’s pockets, prepping culture actively imagines future narratives, while evidencing the highly individuated nature of prepping practices and adaptable objects, and the desire for self-preservation, and the preservation of useful tools. In these ways, EDC posts provide evidence of the ways in which preppers engage in imaginative speculation in order to make sense of speculative crises.





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Figure 71: (top left) Ivar Kvall, *Survival Fashion for D2*, 2022. Source: Figure reproduced from Hest Agentur (n.d.).

Figure 72: (top right, bottom) Jess Day, *Flood Jacket*, detail, 2022. Plastic yellow jacket, cloth tape, waxed thread. Photo: Jess Day.

The intersection of adaptable objects and preservation can also be seen in the numerous posts about ‘preserving’ on social media platforms which inform others how to preserve raw produce for future use. Examples include the storing of carrots in wax, pickling of vegetables, making of jams and preserves, keeping of bees for honey and wax (which can be used to store natural antivirals), and drying of meat and fish. These modes of preservation are usually presented through an ad hoc device<sup>25</sup> designed and produced by the individual posting, to mimic commercial or overly expensive food dehydrators or vacuum sealing products. Interestingly, much of the comments posted in reply to such posts revolve around speculation on how produce may be used in the future, and the possible value placed on such products as the scarcity of ‘luxury’ food items (especially fresh fruit and vegetables) tends to increase in crises. As discussed in chapter three, social media is an important tool in collective sensemaking, especially during crisis events (Granholm 2018, 30). Prepping engages with sensemaking through social media to combine various activities, cues of crises, scripts around speculative narrative, and possible roles in future and unfolding highly individuated preparatory activity. These acts of ‘making sense’ form part of the social and collective aspects of prepping, while also evidencing the broad spectrum of prepping activities an individual may engage in.

#### Preservation in action: Studio and practice applications

As previously mentioned, the preservation framework operates in three primary ways in the studio: (1) to ensure or obtain functionality and utility; (2) to refine outcomes and ensure durability; and (3) to produce and preserve knowledge which may also result in dissemination of that knowledge. It’s important to reiterate that I don’t necessarily think of these frameworks as separate entities when working but having them as differentiated parts of an overarching framework allows for a rigorous and critical approach, while embracing the fact that prepping is a minefield of highly individuated approaches to crisis mitigation. In the studio,

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<sup>25</sup> A personal favourite of mine is the adaptation of large tin cans into makeshift stoves and pots for cooking with.



Figure 73: Jess Day, *Break in case of Emergency*, 2021. Picture frame, blackout plastic, Velcro, heat reflective material. Photo: Jess Day.



Figure 74: Jess Day, *Containment*, 2021. Pig Melon Gallery. Expanda foam, picture frame, cotton drill, zip, yellow plastic chain, acrylic paint, spray paint. Photo: Jess Day.



preservation has been performed in a literal sense – in the pickling of vegetables (see figure 2), collecting of seeds for future planting, hemming of fabric works, and sealing of hand-painted ceramics.

#### Obtain and ensure functionality: Studio and practice applications

Chicago based artist duo Hideous Beast, comprised of Josh Ippel and Charlie Roderick, create structured events in which viewer participation is encouraged as a means to foreground activities outside the realms of “mainstream entertainment and fabricated desire” (Ippel and Roderick 2013). Hideous Beast have been examining survival culture in the US since their interactive *Resort* installation in 2013, where the artists installed a white cube space in a field and attached ten-foot periscopes which allowed viewers to examine outdoor sculptures from within the constructed gallery’s walls. Ippel and Roderick (2013) describe this experience as

surveying the surrounding landscape.... For survivalists, this act, rooted in fear, is a planned defence against future threats. *Resort* is an attempt to understand this culture of fear; to ask if art production and presentation could be embedded in the same conditions; and to investigate how the two cultural spheres might affect one another.

Ippel and Roderick’s structure, which is free-standing in an open green field, provides a literal framing of a preparatory activity as an artwork through both the structure’s literal framing by the four white walls and figurative framing as in the naming of the structure as a gallery and framing the activity as an ‘interactive artwork’. *Resort* retains a playful quality given the site<sup>26</sup> and mode of engaging with the preparatory activity of surveilling the site. The ten-foot-high periscopes encourage a viewer to question how preparatory activity, in this case literally through the viewing device, may frame our understanding of the world. The installation is

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26 *Resort* (2013) was installed in a sculpture park in Colorado, Illinois, a site for engaging with arts and culture, rather than a more remote site or one in which reading the installation as an artwork may have been more challenging, for example, a cabin in the woods.



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Figure 75: Karl Monies, *Comfort, No 29*, 2016. *Source:* Figure reproduced from Artsy (n.d.).

speculatively utilitarian and pragmatic in its structure, the periscopes are functional, and the structure is not reliant on external systems and provides a sheltered site to observe goings-on outside the safety of the four walls.

#### Refine outcomes and ensure durability: Studio practice applications

Artist and designer Karl Monies' *Comfort* series (2013-2016) (see figure 75) are both art objects, and objects that operate as quilts or blankets. The works use scout, military, and national emblems and symbols, and appear to be hand-stitched onto thick fabric backings. The works are able to operate as both art objects and blankets for use, should the purchaser of the work decide to utilise the work in the latter way. Monies, not unlike Australian artist Sera Waters, who is discussed in the next section of this chapter, believes that artwork produced in our contemporary environment can, and should, "ask what can my art do?" (Waters 2020, 26) Furthermore, as Monies states when discussing his *Comfort* series, it is "something you can activate, or use, in a way" (Macalister-Smith 2021). As a result, Monies has had to shift some of his previous ways of working to ensure his new series *Arcana Container* (2019) was waterproof, durable, and sturdy. Monies's desire to make these ceramic vessels functional directly changed how he was producing them. The vessels had to be glazed in the interior as well as on the exterior; their rope handles had to be replicable and sturdy; and the corks sealing each vessel had to be easy to remove while also being watertight (Macalister-Smith 2021).

In an attempt to preserve the utility of the vessel, Monies had to ensure his approach to making could retain, or in this case, obtain, utility similar to a more common everyday vessel, such as a water bottle. Monies's works gesture toward a use-value through the incorporation of the selected materials, and the assurance that if deployed in that way, the sculptural objects will function. Not unlike Monies and Waters, I am interested in the ways my artworks could, potentially, be used in a crisis scenario.

My sculptural work *Break in case of Emergency* (2021) was an experiment in thinking through this idea with more formal art frames, in this case a literal frame. I purchased some prefabricated A3 wooden portrait frames and made two very different versions of 'utility' in a picture frame. The first version, *Break in case of Emergency*, contained a section of black plastic which may be used to black out windows and conceal inhabitants from more extreme weather conditions or the prying eyes of others. The black plastic was folded up in a quick way, strapped down with some Velcro, and pressed between the outer glass and back of the picture frame (see figure 73). The concept was that the black plastic material was useful and versatile – it is waterproof, reasonably strong, a good way to heat water or retain heat around a body, a barrier against wind and rain. So, perhaps elevating it to the status of art object could demonstrate some of the ways in which prepping encourages a re-evaluation of everyday materials. The final outcome, though helpful in thinking through these ideas, did not result in a resolved artwork. This choice was the result of thinking about what this work did differently to the tapestry works, and deciding that the raw materials, removed from the picture frame, were communicating these concepts more effectively.

*Break in case of Emergency* did help me create other works within the A3 frame that played with the idea of utility in a crisis, such as *Containment* (2021) where I coated the frame in a fluorescent 'mould-like' growth, while placing a cotton-drill pouch in the centre allowing the deployment of a few meters of high-visibility, plastic cordon chain (see figure 74). I tried two other versions of 'utility' in a frame before moving past the picture frame as a way to literally 'frame preparedness'. These two other versions were *Engel Fridge Matt* (2019), and *Containment* (2021). *Engel Fridge Matt* acted as a heat resistant surface framed with rope and could be used to help cool an old plug-into-vehicle Engel refrigeration system<sup>27</sup> (see figure 78).

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27 Growing up we always had the Engel fridge in the car when going on big fishing or camping trips. I used to love the camouflage green colour of the fridge, and the gentle ever-present humming as it kept things cool. The luxury of cold goods when camping probably reenforced my love of the Engel fridge, as powdered milk could not compete with fresh cold milk over wheat-bix.

*Containment* presented a few challenges in the construction of the work due to my desire to ensure the plastic chain could be deployed at various lengths outward from the frame. In order for this to happen, I had to seal the work multiple times to ensure the 'mould' did not give way or break from the frame. To do so, I inadvertently developed a sealing technique using a variety of different sealing products with differing durational fixing. This technique was then applied to the previously made *Apocalyptic Objects* (2019) as a way to preserve their surface qualities. These examples evidence how the frameworks of narrative, adaptable objects, and preservation contain multiple components, and how these components may interact to inform new methods of making, while also contributing to knowledge production in this research project.

#### Produce and preserve knowledge: Studio and practice applications

Preservation, as a framework, verifies Barker's claim that prepping requires "multiplicity signals a system of value based on material flexibility and potentiality" (2019, 488). The preservation framework incorporates prepping's emphasis on everyday objects and their value. These everyday objects may present as having 'high' or 'low' value outside of a prepping context. This muddling of high and low value objects, as previously mentioned in chapters four and five, show an "idealised order of material relations and transparent system of attributing value is contravened. Materiality emerges as a trope mobilised to construct prepper pathologisation by implying an abhorrent subversion of value" (Barker 2019, 488). A similar theorising on the value of everyday objects can be found in Miller who explains, "For Bourdieu ... it was these practical taxonomies, these orders of everyday life, that stored up the power of social reproduction, since they in effect educated people into the normative orders and expectations of their society" (2005, 6).

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Figure 76: Sera Waters, *Survivalist Sampler*, 2019-ongoing. Source: Figure reproduced from Waters (n.d.).



Although the term 'preservation' denotes a kind of static or stationary quality, it is important to understand that objects and materials collected by preppers are anything but that. Even long-term food stores are rotated and topped up regularly. As Barker explains, "the value of these different objects is not sitting in suspension even though their 'crisis potentiality' is yet to be invoked. Their value is retrieved and utilised every day" (2019, 448). Speculative scenarios and rehearsals further evidence the use of objects, materials, and goods purchased for crises but deployed repeatedly in everyday or routine activities (Barker 2019, 448). Small carry objects and tools used in the everyday can be seen in EDC or Every Day Carry posts (see chapter five). As shown in these EDC posts, the choice of objects and materials is highly individualised, yet not without commonality. For example, EDC posts often contain the following: pocketknife, lanyard or paracord, and a means to start a fire, such as flint or a lighter. The ways that objects, materials, and narratives intersect for those engaged in prepping are complex, and oscillate between highly individualised and a more generalised, recognisable series of 'survival' aesthetics and stories.

#### Experimental and inscribed knowledge: Preservation

Given that prepping is a highly individuated form of preparation, the symbols, colours, and text deployed in the studio development and sculptural outcomes are a mixture of established survival knowledge communication and my own forms of knowledge and memory. The knowledge disseminated in prepping is evidenced through both formal (as in numerous survival guides and handbook publications) and informal (as in narratives by preppers on YouTube and other social media blogs) modes (Mills and Fleetwood 2019). Both formal and informal modes of knowledge dissemination present preparatory knowledge as a combination of inscribed and experiential knowledge, often by building upon or adding to inscribed knowledge through reflection on processes of adapting tools, objects, and skills to meet an individual's needs.

Inscribed knowledge about preserving life is often highly simplified and does not acknowledge the difficulties one faces in an actual crisis. My attempts and results of applying of inscribed knowledge, resulted in experimental knowledge production. However, these attempts also evidence the difficulty of applying known methods of preparatory activity in actual scenarios. These scenarios were rehearsals in the sense that my attempts were not undertaken in a crisis scenario, but rather as a means of practicing the performance of such tasks.

Practising these attempts at preparatory activities such as 'lighting a fire in the rain' underlined the value of rehearsals to improve one's skill, but also emphasised the difficulty of performing inscribed knowledge in a crisis scenario. The instruction on how to light a fire when it's raining is straightforward, and it was easy to underestimate just how difficult this task could be. Prepping culture places value on the discoveries made during the translation of inscribed knowledge for several reasons. Primarily, the experiential knowledge produced often results in 'another way' to do things, or a different solution to a problem, which may save money, is more convenient, more geographically appropriate, or simply easier given the tools or materials available. Nevertheless, there is another reason for why this translation is so valued. In the act of translating, a prepper is actively coming to terms with, or starting to 'make sense' of, the complex systems that surround speculative survival in crisis scenarios. This is important because a better understanding of these complex systems may result in better overall comprehension of the many facets of crises and reduce panic while activating a 'can do' response in crisis scenarios (Granholt 2018 30).

The two forms of knowledge production inform one another, and in prepping culture, this process of inscribed knowledge informing experiential knowledge and vice versa, is realised through active participation in prepping activities. This engagement, which shares many similarities with studio practice, often looks like

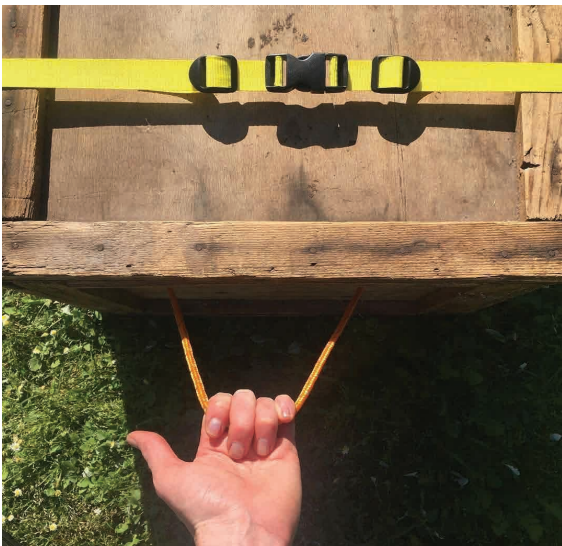


Figure 77: Studio attempts at returning utility and preserving the exterior of an old wooden chest, 2020. Photos: Jess Day.

repeated attempts at a single task, with varying degrees of adaptation by the individual of the original inscribed instructions. Often, this also includes note taking, observing, mimicry, adaptation, modification, and repeated outcomes until the desired proficiency or outcome is made manifest. Australian artist Sera Waters's practice shows some methods for how these two types of knowledge production can be embedded into a textile work.

Sera Waters's *Survivalist Sampler* series (2019-ongoing) embeds both experiential and inscribed knowledge through the use of embroidery (see figure 76). Waters explains in an article she wrote for *Artlink* in 2020 that the sampler is historically a stitched object which "preserves information identifiable with this era, and is stitched daily and slowly, pulling in useful tidbits from quickly unfolding news and events" (26). For Waters, the dedicated act of stitching daily while regarding unfolding events enables a sense of agency and purpose, while also engaging with the "histories carried in these processes ... indicating a form of resistance to the contemporary pace (of travel, work, expectations, consumption)" (2020, 26). These survivalist samplers include Australian First Nations knowledge (such as localised 'cool fire' burning to prevent large-scale bushfires), research the artist has undertaken (such as how to make a fertilizer from weeds), new phraseology ("new normal"), and government advice (such as "flatten the curve, remember civil liberties") (see figure 76). Notably on Waters's 2020-2021 sampler, she has embroidered "stop hoarding" only to run a line through the text, suggesting an amendment, or rethinking around this statement (see figure 76). I mention this amended phraseology because it seems to track alongside a broader cultural rethinking of survivalist histories and preparatory presents in contemporary Australian culture (Bardas 2020). Waters's work shows how making sense around speculative or unfolding crises may lead us to knowledge we may not have previously considered a priority, and that this knowledge may also come from a variety of sources.

The tapestry works I have made share knowledge production in a similar, if slightly less immediate, manner.

Whereas Waters stitches her text into the samplers, the tapestries I have produced communicate similar forms

of knowledge through the inclusion of objects. Although the composition and shape of the cotton drill and tarpaulin used in my work are directly informed by preparatory infographics, this link is not necessarily obvious to the viewer. Rather, by deploying the composition and shapes used in survival infographics, I hope to convey a sense of order and hierarchy to the objects assembled on each tapestry. The decision to convey a sense of order and hierarchy was deliberate, an attempt to share the security and order I felt when working with these materials.

### Concealing and revealing: Summing up the preservation framework

Concealing and revealing can be seen clearly in EDC posts, as those who post literally reveal the contents of their personal pockets, be it pockets on their pants, jacket, and/or bag (Acker and Carter 2018, 210). As Amelia Acker and Daniel Carter elaborate in their 2018 paper “Pocket Preppers”,

There is a kind of cultural primer of levels of containment and concealment to preparedness for the prepper community: first the everyday carry objects, then site- or activity-specific go bags (also known as bug-out-bags or when-shit-hits-the-fan-bags), then sites of containment such as a faraday cage for electronics, or a fallout shelter with food and water. (210)

The fallout shelter or bunker can be understood as a site which invites imaginative speculation regarding alternate forms of social and global power dreaming (Masco 2021, 137). Or, to word it differently, the bunker or fallout shelter culturally operates as a kind of chrysalis from which one may re-emerge into a world where power and social structures have altered after crises events (see Masco, 2021, 137-139). This altering of power and social structures is often portrayed as positive, even amid destruction, as the individual has remained preserved, and may now engage with these structures from a different standpoint, allowing an imaginative re-thinking of the individuals role in society and the power they may hold to shape their own life.





Figure 78: Jess Day, *Preserving*, install shot, 2021. 20L reclaimed plastic bucket, waterproof bag, polaroid, palm-sized rocks, cloth tape, heat reflective material, rope, waterproof dropsheet, high-visibility thread, bungee cords, freezer brick, collapsable 20L water carrier, strapping, repurposed plastic bottles, green throw net, reflective rope. Photo: Jess Day.

Although this research project has not focused on high-end or expensive prepping, such as bunker building or fallout shelter construction, low-income preppers do engage with the bunker concept through the ways in which they store, rotate, collect, and reuse materials and goods. Furthermore, low-income preparatory activity frequently engages in imaginative futures in which the individual's life is 'bettered' through preparatory activity. What I mean by this is that low-income preppers actively engage with imaginative concepts that fallout shelters and bunkers embody. Re-emergence, or the return to the structures of the world post-crises events is a utopian concept, despite the speculative post-event landscape being proposed, because the very idea of re-emerging suggests the individual has survived the crises events. Re-emergence does not necessarily require a bunker or fallout shelter from which to 're-emerge' after a crisis. Engaging with re-emergence concepts may simply look like collecting seeds to grow food 'after the event' or storing a canoe in the suburbs to be able to leave and return in a flood, since these preparations for speculative crises hinge on the individual surviving the crisis in order to deploy the canoe, or grow the seeds (see Masco 2021, 137-155).

As such, this project links the acts of concealing and revealing (goods, oneself to others, skill sets, tools, etc) inside prepping culture, which has also been covered in chapter two, as crucial to performing re-emergence. Linking re-emergence imaginings to concealing and revealing is evidenced in my sculptural works *Sleeping Soundly: S.A.S Handbook* (2021) and *Sleeping Soundly: Seed Bag* (2022), where the inscribed knowledge is literally 'revealed' by unzipping an otherwise average sleeping bag (see figures 24 and 56). This concept of concealing and revealing is important to how the preservation framework operates, both tangibly and in relation to the research undertaken regarding prepping activity. Knowing how and when to conceal and reveal goods, materials, and the self in crisis scenarios may aid in survival and help to preserve the longevity of goods and materials when replacements may be scarce. The preservation framework ensures the functionality, utility, embedding of knowledge, and durability of art objects when they are constructed in a prepping context.

The modes of engagement I evidence aim to present an alternative to previous cultural framings and stigmatisation of prepping practices. This is important given our cultural contemporary where 'crises' are highly normalised and almost constantly unfolding (see Barker 2022, 1-19). In doing so, this project presents a low-income alternative of how one might prepare for crises, as opposed to cultural or artistic depictions of prepping as an exclusively wealthy and paranoid activity. Further, by placing these low-income alternatives in the gallery space, the project offers the viewer an opportunity to productively question the responsibilising of the individual, under neoliberal systems, to prepare for speculative or unfolding crises.

Highly individuated preparatory culture, or prepping, is an increasingly popular practice in Western nations operating under neoliberal systems. As individuals are increasingly encouraged by authoritative bodies to be





Figure 79: Studio shot, (detail of broken mattress needle while stitching Velcro onto a canvas bag) 2021. Photo: Jess Day.

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# Conclusion



Figure 80: Jess Day, *Hope for the Best, Prepare for the Worst*, install shot, 2021. Photo: Courtesy of Cool Change Gallery.

prepared and responsible for their own preservation and ongoing survival in crisis scenarios, the choice to prepare for the future at an individual level is vital. As such, stigmatising the behaviours of prepping practice, whose participants are largely active members of society who maintain community ties and generate incomes, is not productive. Instead, this project has evidenced some of the ways in which an individual may choose to prepare that sit outside the previously established cultural parameters for understanding 'prepping'.

This project refuses the 'Doomsday prepper' image, and instead presents prepping as a series of small, ongoing investigations on an individual level with concepts of survival and materiality that may sustain life in crises. Further, this project has utilised low-cost, handmade, and easily obtained materials as a means of investigating preparatory activity. In doing so, I hope to evidence an aspect of the prepping spectrum, those often low-income earners who seek to further future-proof their already precarious security, who are often overlooked by mainstream media. This project aims to encourage meaningful discourse around the ways in which individual security is perceived.

Since the Second World War, Western governments have increasingly put the onus of security and survival in crises on the individual. This research project has provided a background for survivalism, the precursor to prepping practice, and identified how survivalism and prepping differ. Three frameworks have been developed over the course of this research project, which have enabled a critical engagement between prepping practice and practice-led research, culminating in the creation of a body of sculptural work. These three frameworks, namely, narrative, adaptable objects, and preservation, stem from commonalities of highly individuated preparatory culture identified by current academic discourse and my own direct engagements with prepping (see Barker 2019; Mills and Fleetwood 2019; Masco 2019; 2020; 2021; Acker and Carter 2018). The establishment of these frameworks was crucial to setting parameters for success and failure in this project,

which was vital given the critical nature of the research and the plethora of ways in which prepping may be materially articulated and aesthetically presented.

This research project set out to interrogate prepping culture as an individual response to crises both speculative and unfolding. In the beginning, I did not identify as a prepper, nor understand how my survivalist-like upbringing was so influential on my interests and artistic practice. Now, at the end of this project, I confidently identify as a kind of prepper, acknowledging that my position on the prepping spectrum is mid-ground, often unrepresented by the mainstream media, and is devoted to finding alternative ways to thrive inside a neoliberal system in which crises have been highly normalised.

I am even more fascinated by prepping practice now than when I began this research project. Many avenues of research that this project has not addressed could be studied further. These include, but are not limited to, feminist practice and prepping; archival practices and prepping, museology, and artefact studies regarding the high-and-low-value object 'muddling' in prepping practices; and prepping practices and Australian First Nations survival techniques in a colonised nation.

Given the recent rethinking around prepping practice in both academic and broader cultural spheres, largely due to the advent of COVID-19, this project is both timely and relevant. Garrett also states that "[t]he 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which preppers consider a 'mid-level' event, and many of them were well-prepared for, makes clear that scholarly attention to prepper's motivations and methods is both timely and valuable". This project focused on prepping undertaken outside dominant media representations of prepping and did not engage with high-end or 'wealthy prepping'. The focus of this research project has been some of the ways in which highly preparatory activity navigates objects, materials, and actions in the face of unfolding

and speculative crises. As a result, much of the methods engaged have been ad hoc, DIY, or based on the translation of inscribed knowledge to experiential knowledge, and back again. This research project offers a methodology through which artworks about highly individuated preparatory culture may be made. By no means do I propose my methodology to be 'the best' or 'the right' way; rather, it is simply a way that may be of use to creative practitioners engaging with prepping, given there is very little writing on the intersection of art and preparatory practices.

The final body of work, *Tapestries and Tools: Navigating speculative crises* (2022), uses sculptural practice to propose a series of approaches to negotiating speculative or unfolding crises. This body of work evidences the three commonalities identified in this exegesis, which operate as three methodological frameworks, narrative, adaptable objects, and preservation. These works also acknowledge the highly individuated nature of prepping through the inclusion of certain objects and activities reflective of my own engagements with prepping activity. The tools referred to in the title of this body of work include the visual diaries or *Prepping Journals* (2019-2022), *Bucket Lights version II* (2022), *Sleeping soundly S.A.S Handbook* (2021), *Sleeping Soundly: Seed Bag* (2022), *Trail and Error* (2021-2022), *Watch and Wonder Work Vest* (2022), *Flood Jacket* (2022), and *Smoke Scout* (2022). These sculptural works all engage with different preparatory activities, and present modes of engagement through the selected objects, tools, and materials used to articulate preparatory activity. All the works in *Tapestries and Tools* are made by hand allowing replication without external reliance. These works are also made with found, recycled, and cheap common items in order to articulate part of the preparatory spectrum, which is often over-looked, that of often low-income or everyday prepping. This body of work encourages engagement with prepping through the use of symbols, objects, and tools that gesture toward preparatory activity. The works are suspended in space awaiting the viewer to examine their potential as speculative sets of gear which may aid the preservation of life in a crisis scenario. The deliberately questionable inclusion of certain items like palm sized rocks, or the elaborately detailed jacket and vests, aims

to promote discussion around what prepping activity looks like, who engages with it, and what these tools and objects may be used for. *Tapestries and Tools* invites a questioning of what prepping is, and what it can be, who it is for, and what is being prepared for. And, in doing so, this body of work visually translates the research undertaken in this document into sculptural objects. The method of installation in the white cube space suggests that these sculptural preparations are in a state of anticipation, waiting to be used, but without clear purpose as to what for or when. In doing so the work acknowledges the anticipation and desire to be prepared generated by the almost endless stream of crises reported daily in news media.

The presence of the individual is suggested through the inclusion of garments that evoke a desire to be prepared, and evidence the highly individual nature of prepping practice through the inclusion of personalised survival iconographics. The tapestries, which combine inscribed and experiential knowledge produced through engagement with prepping activity, emphasise the difficulty in translating textbook understanding to actual crisis scenarios through the muddling of clearly pragmatic and more ambiguous objects. The overall installation suggests a dedication to preparation through the sculptural outcomes which evidence a spectrum of pragmatic to comfort objects, from familiar to highly individualised interpretations of prepping, and a desire to be prepared, but without necessarily knowing what for, or if or when that preparation may be necessary.

This project visualises the middle-ground of prepping activity, where individuals without huge financial resources and concerns over their futures operate, which is largely unrecognised in broader cultural articulations of prepping. During a period of increasing natural disasters, civil unrest, speculative financial collapse, and global pandemic, this project suggests that engaging with the spectrum of prepping activity may be a productive way of examining how an individual copes with crisis. It is my hope that this research and accompanying body of work contributes to the larger cultural conversations about individual security. And



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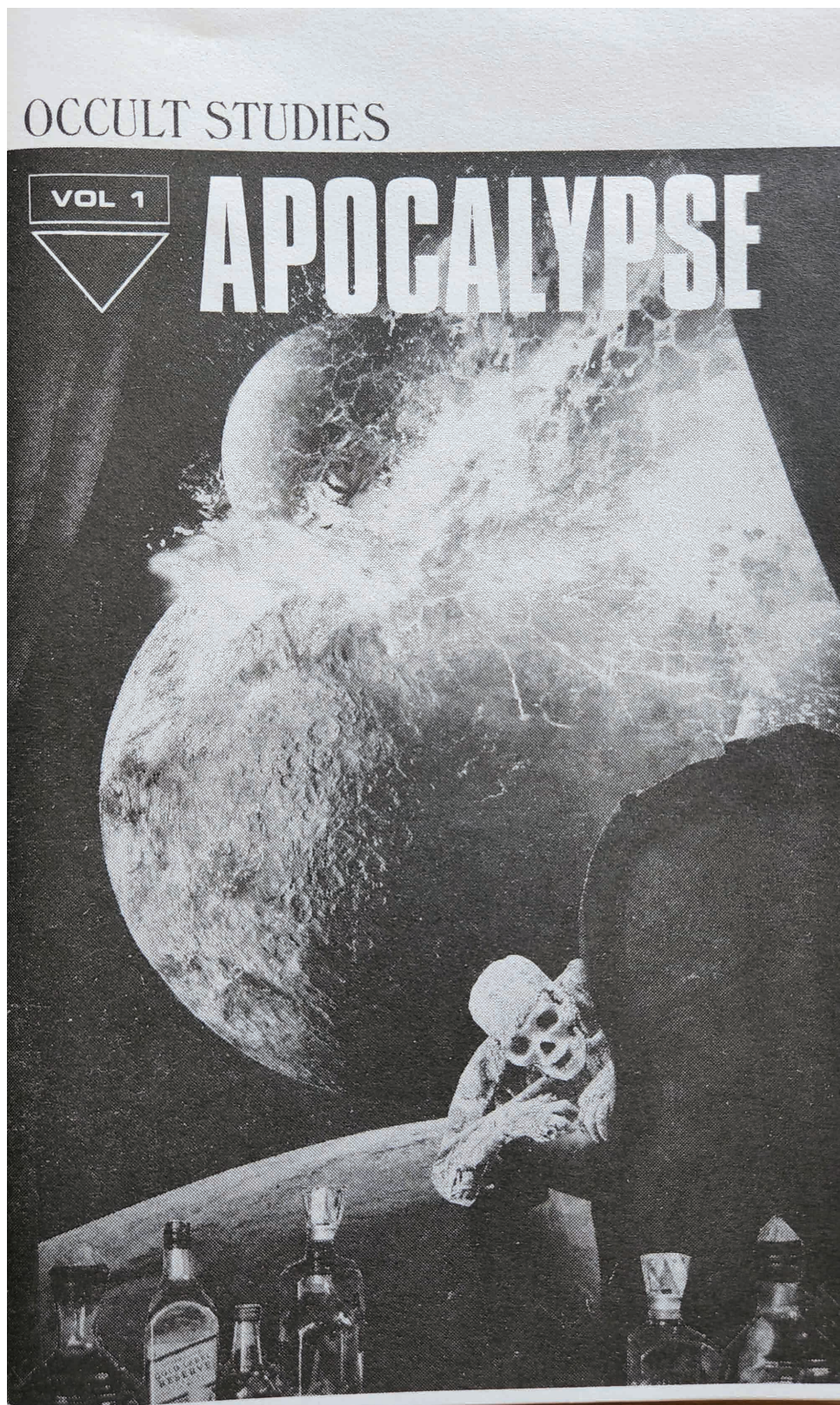
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Appendix:



SnakeHair Press Occult Studies Volume 1: 2020. This appendix features the short fiction I wrote and submitted in 2019.



**AN ACCOUNT OF SURVIVAL THROUGH SCULPTURE:  
THE CASE OF THE CAVES & THE CATACLYSM.**

At the time, I wanted to write about what happened to me, here on the edge of the world. But I couldn't seem to find the words, they wouldn't come out right. I had stacked the hundreds of yellowing notebooks, black cover, ring binder, A4- all filled with words and drawings of it. Wretched things. But none of it was close to what actually happened. I kept asking others who were there to recount pieces of information for me, but I kept getting conflicting stories, and none of their versions matched with mine anyway. I'd write up an account, only to cross bits out, circle things, highlight sections. The notebooks became diagrams. The notebooks became signs. But none told the story I wanted to tell.

In my mind I can see the event clearly. The cataclysm, the days that followed, the caves and the water. The sounds of dripping like an old watch ticking, the sounds of screaming – muffled by the mould, my mother crying. I've heard it said that trauma can make people forget, blackout the memory of all that horror. I haven't forgotten, I can see it easily. But describing it... I didn't know if I could do that with words. I rounded up all the notebooks. I burnt them all in a 44gallon drum once I'd got out of the caves and found a blue clam shell in the ashes. I kept the shell.

Twenty-five years after the cataclysm and I had long since left the edge of the world. I left my father, the bodies of my grandparents, I left my mother alone with her new garden, tending to the new strange plants. I had nothing left that was mine, and I was sick to death of everyone else. There was nothing I could do if I stayed anyway. They had all the touched by the cataclysm like me, but it affected them differently. I didn't realise until later, that I was alone in my effect and by then I was long gone. Moved. That's what they said to people left in the town. "Ah she's moved, might be back for a visit sometime though". And I was moved, but not in the way they kept describing it, and I visited only in my thinking.

Because after I left, I kept thinking about the cataclysm. I thought I understood what happened until I started collecting all those accounts, now I was uncertain about everything. Words got me nowhere, and no-one seemed to understand me anyway. After a while I started to change. It was subtle at first, then it sped up.



The doctors didn't want anything to do with me. They had fixed the effects of the cataclysm they had claimed to the press. I was an anomaly and they told me I was wrong. I couldn't be feeling the stabbing pain in my head, nothing was detected that could cause it. My skin was just tough from the wear of work, so what if they couldn't get a needle through it? I would be fine, and perhaps I should stop being so dramatic and wasting everyone's time. I was used to being told I was wrong, or stupid, or naïve. That's why I'd left. Moved.

I decided the best thing to do was to go someplace new, but this time I wouldn't be foolish enough to think I could live near others. I needed to be alone. I packed my bag. I packed my car. I left, again.

The caves were shallow at the start, it was easy to think that's all there was. But you'd be wrong. The caves were very deep, and they said we could all hide there when the cataclysm hit. There was no time to check the caves, only time to get in and hide from the violence raging up above. No one really understood what the mould was capable of until after. Maybe we should have stayed above ground and faced it. Maybe more would have survived. But no one really knows, there's no degree or qualification that can prepare someone for this level of destruction.

I found the new place alright. It was good and empty. Huge concrete pillars rose up to meet an old undercroft, the whole thing was semi-sunk into the side of the hills. No one had been out there since the cataclysm and multiple signs dotted the joint stating things like "Death Ahead!" and "Turn Back Now" and "Dangerous Infrastructure- Keep Out!" it was perfect. I started to get acquainted with my new home.

The place had been a university once, and I had managed to find what was left of the sculpture department. It was still beautiful, filled with tools and old offcuts. The office had a calendar from the year of my birth, 1989. When I saw it, I laughed, and the laugh sounded good in the sculpture department. It bounced all around the walls and sung in the metal sinks. Finally, I had found a place that was good. It felt good, just to be there.

Over the next few years I started building things. The place was great for it. The works started out small but grew in number and in size. I was

growing my own food and I didn't need much. Mainly I was building. The more I built the more I felt like I could tell the story in sculpture. The wet clay dripped like the caves, but the ticking was kinder, more like a song we could sing together, the clay and me. The generator would bounce and buck across the concrete floor when I welded the metals. The metals were many and bright hot or dead cold. The metals and I would laugh together as we made frames, squeaky, high pitched and silly. But I didn't mind, no one else was there to listen.

One day I heard a short sharp series of gunshots when I was pulling up some beetroot. Then silence. I never heard them ever again.

After many years I figured I'd done it, made the story real. It started with expander-foam, fat gloating and bulbous. Cream coloured. Arrogant. The holes in it stretched like spider webs, like the caves. I painted them grey and blue with a blush of green. Goopy strings, hare-wire triggers for prey. Then the concrete, big smooth lanes of it, slightly convex from the heat, petering out to piles of ash and gravel I'd mixed together. The highways and the burnt bodies melting into each other.

The dead fish were harder to work with. Waxed and golden carved with a pocketknife and floating in a series of 44gallon drums filled with Perspex and oil. The barrels had holes cut into the sides and clear plastic bags let you look right in. Some of the fish were trapped there, fixed in place. They'd never be moved. Some floated on the surface, coated in the oil, repelling the Perspex. You could hold these fish if you wanted, talk to them even. I'd modelled them after herring that washed into the caves after a very big storm.

A piece of broken mirror had been welded onto a nice long rod of bouncy steel, it caught different lights and threw them onto the whole thing at random intervals and in odd locations. Its base was held true by a ballast of sandbags I had filled when making room for the garden. I painted the sandbags to look the same as the signs out front, only it was harder to read the signs on the sandbags because of the curving of the cloth and the holes. I liked these signs very much.

An old car engine was strapped with octopus straps right on the back of an old grandfather clock, and I'd taken to that with a sharp young axe which had a bright red handle. I left the axe in the back



of the clock for good measure. Sometimes after you kill something for good, it's not properly dead. You have to be very sure, and I was not one for taking chances when it came to survival.

Since the clock had a lean, which I had given it with a series of triangular chocks, I had balanced the whole affair with a beautiful set of blue and green tarpaulin stitched up nice with many holes, cuts and drips of paint from the work. This lot hung from a beam of old wood that conveniently already had a lot of nails sticking out of it. In the bits with no nails available, I'd driven the tarp to with some handmade arrows. The shafts were yellow and red striped with magpie feathers as fletching.

Underneath the tarp, which met the gravel and ash pile and house the 44gallon drums on it's right and the expander-foam hellscape on its left, I created a dais, so the whole thing was in the round. Only slightly raised from the floor and in some places with the floor sticking through, weeds happily bursting onto new footholds that the dais presented. The dais was painted midnight blue while the silver flecks gloamed like stars through a broken limestone portal. A kind of secret promise, like the whispers in the caves.

Right in the middle of the dais, which was right in the middle of the whole sculpture, was a flare gun and a large wooden crate of flares. The gun was standard safety issue, emergency orange, black plastic handle and black hammer. The thing only had one barrel, but the range was fantastic. I'd given it a good testing out to make sure it fit the rest of the work by firing it into the dais under construction in the back room. The back room was very large, and the wall ceiling and floor were concrete, so I wore earmuffs as the flare was very loud. When I shot the gun, the whole room exploded into red yellow light, just like the light from the cataclysm, only much more beautiful probably due to its intensity and my proximity. I was underground after all when the rocks separated from the cataclysm and started pounding irreverently into the surface above. I could only see some of the bits through the holes in the limestone up top, the skylights I called them. The gun went into the sculpture.

Then the hose.

The hose was very good, and perhaps my favourite bit. It wound around the structure as a whole, binding it all together and feeding the various components. I didn't have enough of any one hose, so there were clear bits, green and yellow flecked bits, black hose for plumbing and red

hose for gas lines. I spliced them all together with gaffer tape, silver and grinning at any source of light. The hose led back to a pump which worked on a principal of gravity and continuously cycled saltwater from a runoff pond through the whole sculpture. The runoff pond was an old blue plastic clam shell you would see in suburban backyards for a time. I liked it because it reminded me of the sea, unassuming and easy to drown in.

Lastly, I had a series of large 'Dolphin' brand torches all strapped together. I'd found a pallet of them so stacked them on top of each other and shored it all up with expander-foam and gaffer tape, since I had used all the octopus straps already. It was about the size of a smaller stadium lighting panel. Six milkcrates formed 3 steps, allowing a staircase up and down to turn all the torches on. They had to be done individually and methodically, and this was vital to the sculpture's success as a whole.

I stood and looked at the whole thing with a sense of unyielding satisfaction. Perhaps no one would ever see it. I didn't need them to. I finally understood what had happened, I could say it in simple words, in a single word.

With this thought I let out a big laugh, and I laughed with all of the parts of the sculpture, the sound carrying upward and out the old sculpture department and into the bush. I had moved. And I was the laugh, my old body I'd left behind. Fixed and laughing, an old shell clutching a flare gun, confident and happy that I'd finally told my story.

**JESS DAY**

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