

Working alone, working together: exploring craft learning in open access community making spaces

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Abstract

This research uses ethnographic methods to examine the experience of learning craft skills in artist-led and community-led craft spaces, with the home setting used as a counterpoint. I spent six months engaging in informal craft learning alongside others in a ceramics workshop and a printmaking workshop, and embroidering at home, in order to understand embodied and situated aspects of learning craft skills in shared spaces as an inexperienced maker. I find that the processes of making, and *learning* making, are iterative and messy, with the research process reflecting this messiness. The analogue making space can be conceptualised as a 'permission space' that extends the notion of Oldenburg's (1999) third place through drawing attention to aspects of potential and constraint for the amateur maker. In relation to this I draw out the temporary, liminal nature of such spaces, through focus on commodified aspects of the experience, and in finding that this is a space in which to be *otherwise* (Woodyer, 2012). I show how improvisation is a key aspect of developing both skills and creative voice, and that the journey towards enskilment is not linear, or even necessary, in such spaces.

The application of theories of play to the journey towards enskilment extends the work of Brown, Greig, and Ferraro (2017) and Patchett & Mann (2017). Through its focus on autotelic aspects of informal creative activity, this research offers a counterpoint to the current significant cultural and societal emphasis placed on the value of instrumental aspects of everyday creativity; this research also offers potential for future investigation into the relationship between autotelic creative practice and strategic learning in informal craft learning contexts.

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Some doctoral theses are elegant productions, underpinned by careful planning and consistent focus that enables them to slot seamlessly together in a timely manner. The production of this thesis has, however, mirrored its *craftful* subject, in that it has involved much head scratching, improvising, unpicking and re-stitching, and a hefty dose of having to trust the process. The greatest thanks must go to my supervisors, Professor Leila Jancovich and Professor Jonathan Pitches, whose patience has been as remarkable as their wisdom. I have travelled a very bumpy road over the last six and a half years, and my confidence in their guidance has been instrumental in getting me to the journey's conclusion.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A Monday morning in mid-January 2019. A long, tall room in an old building, whose high windows allow weak winter light to catch stray dust motes hanging in the air. The room, which has a beige hue, is lined on two sides with shelves full of ceramics wrapped in plastic, in partial states of completion; in the opposite corner, and taking up a good chunk of the space, are two kilns, protected in steel cages. Seven people sit round a large table in the centre of the room, where marks of previous activity linger despite obvious attempts at cleaning. A series of wooden boxes along the middle of the table contain paint brushes, forks, scrapers. The people sit quietly, eyeing one another up, waiting for the ceramics course to begin.

My research investigates the experience of learning amateur craft skills in two open access community making spaces, with the experience of making at home used as a counterpoint. I use an ethnographic methodology to examine the processes through which we come to know tools and materials, and, in particular, how we begin to experiment and to improvise. I argue that the learning that takes place is strategic, in that the maker does not follow a carefully planned apprenticeship but instead acquires the particular knowledge that they require, dipping in and out as befits their interest, and that they can exit the process at any time.

This introduction necessarily sets the scene for the thesis as a whole, but there are certain tasks it must perform – just as, in the context of my research, the tutor must explain the structure and safety instructions at the start of a craft class. I start with an introduction to the topic, followed by my aims, objectives and research questions. I then broadly locate the research within its wider context, and explain how I will address the research gap I have identified. I then present my positionality, which is particularly significant in this (auto)ethnographic thesis. I continue by explaining the ways in which I apply two key terms, *novice* and *amateur*, then conclude the introduction with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

Research Context

The focus of this research on amateur craft learning is timely both in scholarly aspects and within wider social and policy contexts. Within academia there have been recent turns to creativity, to the amateur, and to making; amateur making has thus seen significant interest from within the fields of anthropology (e.g. Marchand, 2010; Ingold, 2013; Martin, 2016), from cultural geography (e.g. Patchett, 2016; Collins, 2018; Straughan, 2018) and from craft scholars such as Hackney (2013), Knott (2015) and Twigger Holroyd (2017). Hackney (2013 p. 187) notes that ‘the great strength of amateur hobbyist practice is that it brings communities of interest together reflectively and reflexively through a shared love of “making” and in the context of everyday life’.

While attention has been drawn to the positioning of craft as providing opportunities for creating income from self-actualising cultural work (Luckman, 2013), or as a means

of bolstering identity through consumption of craft materials (Stalp & Winge, 2008), elsewhere craft practices have been framed as offering means of resisting this commodification (Morris, 2016). Amateur craft is also framed within its capacity to offer routes to social connection (Maidment & Macfarlane, 2011; Platt, 2017) or to address isolation (Golding, 2015), and seems to offer us all of everyday life as seen through its lens. However, in probing the work of Knott (2015) and Twigger Holroyd (2017) in particular, we see glimpses of trouble: Knott's model railway fans avoid real life within their miniature and semi-alienated utopia, Stalp and Winge's home knitters dodge difficult questions about household storage space full of endless stashes of yarn, and Twigger Holroyd's amateur dressmakers struggle with the traces of handmade imperfection in the clothing that they produce. Despite this growing body of research into amateur craft, little scholarly attention has been paid to that population of beginners sitting in the foreshadow of the amateur practitioner, who are not yet ready – or sufficiently experienced - to define themselves as amateur craftspeople, except (I note with some irony) in the writings of ethnographic researchers occupying this position in pursuit of embodied understanding. Addressing this lack of attention is important both because it presents a gap in existing literature, and because it responds to an increase in practitioner initiatives and policy interest in this area, which I will discuss below.

From outside academia, there has been a parallel rise in interest in amateur creativity since the early 2010s. Projects such as the BBC's *Get Creative* (BBC, 2015), which developed from the Warwick Commission's (2015) report on the future of cultural value, and 64 Million Artists' *January Challenge* (2020) have encouraged the general

public to engage in small creative acts that do not rely on specialist knowledge or equipment, introducing a novice mindset while also encouraging the sharing of outcomes on social media. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-21 prompted an upturn in craft engagement, particularly in fibre arts such as sewing and knitting, partly through its potential for offering activity that could be undertaken at home, and partly in response to a demand for scrubs for medical personnel and face masks for the public.

From a policy perspective, both the 2016 *Understanding Cultural Value* report (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) and the Kings College *Towards Cultural Democracy* report (Wilson, Gross, Bull, 2017) called for more investigation into what they perceived as being the underresearched areas of amateur creativity. This has since been followed by Creative Lives, who represent the voluntary arts, reporting on spaces of amateur creative activity (Creative Lives, 2022), and most recently, work between Arts Council England and the Audience Agency in surveying everyday creativity (The Audience Agency, 2023). Instrumental aspects of informal creative activity, particularly craft and making, have also been highlighted through the rise of initiatives such as Men's Sheds (Golding, 2015; Gauntlett, 2018; <https://menssheds.org.uk>) and arts on prescription as used in social prescribing (Arts Council England, 2024) within primary healthcare. All this is to say that this is currently an area of significant interest, for the general public, in policy terms, and within academia.

Several ethnographies of researchers' embodied experiences of learning craft skills alongside others have been produced in the last twenty years, such as O'Connor's (2007) study of learning glassblowing in a shared workshop; Marchand (2008) on fine

woodworking; Patchett (2016) getting to grips with taxidermy; Brown, Grieg and Ferraro (2017) on developing ceramics skills; and Martin (2021) on working in a boatbuilding yard. The methodological context within which my research sits is well-established as a means of learning about, and understanding, embodied aspects of making – manipulating materials, using tools and sharing space alongside other makers – and is of particular relevance when sited within the turns to creativity, to the amateur, and to making, as outlined above.

Aims and research questions

The overarching aim of this research is to examine the experience of learning amateur craft in open access making spaces, as understood from the embodied perspective of the maker. Through this investigation, I aim to demonstrate that this is a relational, situated and necessarily messy process in which the maker must engage with uncertainty in order to learn.

The research objectives, which shape the focus of the research, are as follows:

- To explore and understand the teaching and learning processes in shared making spaces
- To investigate how different models of making spaces affect both the learning and making experience for the novice maker
- To understand the opportunities and limitations for the maker working alongside others, in comparison to making alone

- To examine the tactile, embodied experience of material and tool engagement for the novice maker, as the first stage of skill development
- To investigate the ways in which inexperienced makers begin to find their creative voice

The overarching research question asks:

- How do people learn amateur craft skills in open access community making spaces and at home?

The sub-questions then ask:

- How do participants learn alongside one another?
- How does the amateur maker engage with tools and materials?
- What role is played by the space in facilitating practitioners' development?
- How does the individual progress from instruction towards experimentation?

I discuss these questions at greater length in the Research Design section of the Methodology chapter.

Research contribution

The gap in this research is located at the cross section of multiple areas of scholarship. As described above in the Research Context, amateur making has recently received attention from several academic directions, but interest in spaces where making takes place has largely excluded those analogue spaces where novices can make alongside more experienced makers. Similarly, while recent craft ethnographies have shown particular interest in getting to grips with the processes of learning – to the point

where Hawkins and Price (2015, p. 23) have warned of the risks of 'fetishising' such approaches, to the potential detriment of the ethnographic work itself - thus far this attention has not focused on the experience of participating alongside others in such spaces. I use ethnographic methods to examine the haphazard experiences of making in this uncertain, liminal context, in order to demonstrate how such uncertainty is essential to the improvisatory processes required in developing craft skills.

Positionality: locating myself within the research

The initial spark for this research was ignited by two thoughts, one that arose through a chance encounter, and the other through my domestic context. In the first instance, I bumped into someone who mentioned that she was a lapsed ceramicist who wasn't currently practising as she didn't have a kiln at home; she wondered about places that might allow people to use their kiln on a drop-in basis. The other spark was formed from the experience of living in rented accommodation (with its restricted capacity for mess), while watching homeowners turn what had been potential messy spaces such as garages and sheds into extensions of living rooms; this led me to think about the potential for, and realities of, making within the home. I knew that shared creative making spaces existed; I began to think about how these spaces functioned, and the experience of spending time in them. Were they as easy to use as a library, where you could pop in, or would they be closed shops where outsiders were unwelcome? Could I learn something new creatively as a way of finding out about the learning process, and in doing so could I draw on this to consider larger themes relating to the experience of this informal learning in such spaces? This was the initial point from which the project developed.

The methodology employed in this research involves me as researcher, taking first steps in creative learning alongside other participants in two shared making spaces. As part of the research involves me engaging in creative activity instead of remaining at one remove, it is particularly important to explain my positionality for the reader, not least in order to acknowledge the insider/outsider dilemma (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) of such research approaches: am I a participant, a researcher, or both? What acknowledged biases do I bring to the situation as a consequence?

The notion of consciously placing oneself in a position of being a beginner, vulnerable and exposed, is firmly established in craft research, with ethnographers developing 'vulgar competence' (Atkinson & Morriss, 2017, p. 324) as a way of both understanding practice (e.g. O'Connor, 2007; Patchett, 2016; Banfield, 2017) and locating the researcher within the making space (O'Connor, 2007; Atkinson, 2013). However, to present myself as that beginner would be problematic: I arrived at this research having received an extensive practical art education, studying Fine Art to undergraduate degree level, and have subsequently sustained various creative interests such as dressmaking and drawing as a hobbyist. My level of previous experience in the three activities of my research ranges from none with clay, through some previous experience with printmaking (albeit twenty years previously, at school), to a consistent embroidery practice that is ongoing at the time of the research. While I was not familiar with the specific processes of ceramics, and my memories of printmaking were at best hazy, I therefore came to research with a degree of prior acculturation. I am seeking to investigate the experience of engaging with skills and processes at which I

am inexperienced, but which sit within an existing frame of reference in relation to the experience of making by hand, alongside others – I already have awareness of the ways in which I use my hands and tools in the manipulation of materials, and recollections of manoeuvring around other creators in shared studio environments. This subtle shift in positioning recognises more accurately my prior experience, while also acknowledging that I am now placing myself in a position of uncertainty. This position has precedent: in order to understand the experiences of new practitioners in the amateur sewing groups she is both delivering and researching, Shercliff (2014) signs up for a stone carving class in order to place herself in the position of being a beginner learning new skills. She chooses to undertake this activity instead of simply asking others about their experiences of being a beginner, because she is particularly keen to experience the embodied sensations of undertaking the activity – what Atkinson & Morriss (2017) refer to as ‘situational competence’, which offers ‘an acculturated facility in the ceremonial order of situations and encounters’ (p. 328), and while Knott (2015, p. 118) observes that it is impossible to unlearn existing skills, he notes that the researcher can adopt ‘a different tool order’:

... the experience of the naïve amateur at the first stage of learning can be partially appropriated... through the process of temporary abandonment of the set of tools that defines [the artist’s] specialism, in preference for those of another with which the artist is not familiar.

It is with this precedent in mind that I place myself so centrally within the sites of my research. I use what can be conceived of as this sideways shift in order to discomfort myself, with the intention of stimulating an alertness to what is both apparently familiar, and that which is very much unfamiliar, of the field sites; however, it is

important to acknowledge that I cannot shrug off my previous arts-educated self entirely, and that even if I could, this would not be appropriate. There is an aspect whereby the researcher will inevitably be drawn to study that which interests them, even if this can at times look to the outsider like a means of legitimising the pursuit of an existing pastime (Carr & Gibson, 2016; Hawkins, 2017). As it turns out, there are many points during the fieldwork where I discover that learning ceramics, in particular, is more a test of will than a pleasurable experience, and not just because of the participant/researcher tension: clay is slippery, messy and unexpectedly shape-shifting in ways that unwittingly mirror the experience of undertaking this research.

Defining and positioning the novice

Within this research, both its construction and its execution, it is necessary for me to define what I mean by the novice, in the context of someone beginning to learn a craft. The Collins English Dictionary describes the novice as ‘someone who has been doing a job or other activity for only a short time and so is not experienced at it’ – synonyms include beginner, amateur, pupil or newcomer (Collins English Dictionary, 2023).

Literature on skill, such as Dreyfus’ (2004) presentation of five stages of skill acquisition, positions the novice as being at the start of a journey. We can therefore assume that the novice is inexperienced. However, three questions arise: is it that the novice must only be inexperienced in this particular discipline? For example, while I am almost entirely inexperienced at manipulating clay, as mentioned above I have an undergraduate degree in fine art, so working within a creative space is not unfamiliar to me. Second, how far back can we consider muscle memory (Polanyi, 1962) to

extend? My fieldwork for this research involves printmaking and ceramics; I have done some printmaking prior to starting on my fieldwork, but this was some thirty years previously while still at school, and while I have vague memories of carving strips from linoleum, and of putting the carved lino and paper through a press, I remember little more than that about the experience. Should this previous experience be brought to bear in examining experiences of tool engagement when in the print space? Thirdly, how much experience must be accrued for the novice to consider him or herself an amateur, the next stage in Dreyfus' (2004) skill arc? If we apply this arc to an apprenticeship, for instance, the novice might remain in this stage for a year or so, whereas with the subject of my research, the courses I undertake are a maximum of twenty hours long – a blink of an eye in comparison to a year of apprenticeship, and infinitesimal when held alongside the reputed (and, it should be noted, widely disputed) ten thousand hours required to attain expertise at a skill (Gladwell, 2009; Macnamara, Hambrick, Oswald, 2014). I choose to use novice - rather than 'amateur' - as a synonym for the inexperienced maker or newcomer, in order to highlight that while this person might be inexperienced at this particular craft, this does not mean that they are entirely unfamiliar with all craft practices.

The structure of the thesis

This thesis begins with a literature review covering five areas: space, time, the process of making known, the role of error and improvisation within the making process, (which I have titled mess), and connections, that is, the socially-situated aspect of working in shared making spaces.

The methodology is informed by the literature review, with craft ethnography as the mode of enquiry. It begins with the research questions; these are followed by epistemology and ontology, then research design, methods, ethics, and analysis.

I have chosen to combine the findings and discussion within each of three chapters, under an overall heading of Findings. The first chapter focuses on the space, time, and socially situated nature of this amateur craft learning. The second chapter examines experiences from the field sites to investigate the processes of developing amateur craft skills. The third chapter builds on these to explore the improvisatory, playful experience of the maker developing their voice, acknowledging failures and stumbling along the way towards independent practice.

This is followed by the conclusion, in which I respond to the research questions, and state my contribution to knowledge. I also share the implications of my findings, as well as limitations of the research, and, finally, recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The focus of this research, on the experience of first steps in learning crafts in the open access making space, does not sit easily within a single discipline; rather, it draws on work from areas including cultural geography, education, creativity and anthropology. In framing my enquiry I chose to structure the review based on the key aspects of the space itself (Making Space), the time taken (Making Time), processes of learning (Making Known) and interactions with other people as part of the experience (Making Connections). As my reading developed and the role of improvisation became more significant, this developed into the chapter entitled Making Mess.

Making Space

Introduction

Understanding the spaces in which making takes place is useful in thinking about the wider experience of learning craft skills, as this is a situated activity: there is potential for different locations and contexts to affect both processes and outputs. One of my research questions asks about the role played by the making space in practitioners' development, and the literature reviewed here responds most specifically to that question. In this chapter I consider the idea of making space in several ways: I start by considering how an open access making space might be defined, in order that this can offer parameters to my research. I then think about the place where making takes place as a physical space to be navigated by users: how do we encounter an environment in which we are interacting with tools and materials, and how does the setup this environment enhance or detract from our making experience? I then move

on to exploring the space that an individual's making practice takes up, and the mental space that it occupies, in order to consider the individual's relationship with their practice. I also draw on ideas about the body in space to think about how participants share spaces and resources in practice. I use these strands to consider how space can be produced physically, bodily and mentally.

The functions of the open access making space

Recent interest in what Edensor, Leslie, Millington, & Rantisi (2010) describe as spaces of vernacular creativity - those places where informal creative activity happens, such as allotments, community centres, cafes, sheds, and local high streets – has allowed scholars to both expand understandings of, and reveal new forms of, amateur and small-scale making practices, siting them within contemporary environmental, social, development and labour contexts (Price & Hawkins, 2018). Within this, a smaller selection of studies have focused specifically on the open access community making space, which might take any one of a number of forms: a community darkroom, a drop-in ceramics studio, or, increasingly, what is termed a *makerspace*, where creators can use shared 3D printers and power tools (see, for instance, Sheridan, Halverson, Litts, Brahms, Jacobs-Priebe, Owens, & Rantisi, 2014; Taylor, Hurley, Connolly, 2016). As with contested definitions of craft (Greenhalgh, 1997, Adamson, 2013; Gauntlett, 2018), there is no single agreed way to define the entity that I term the open access making space; in attempting to map the sector, a 2015 NESTA survey use the description of 'an open access space (free or paid), with facilities for different practices, where anyone can come and make something' (Sleigh, Stewart & Stokes, 2015, n.p.) to define the 'makerspace', as described above, alone. This definition means that the

survey excludes those spaces that focus on a single practice, thus ruling out community darkrooms, printmaking workshops, dedicated ceramics spaces, and so on. NESTA position their survey to include hackerspaces and FabLabs, which can be characterised by the presence of computer-related facilities such as laser cutters and 3-D printers (ibid.). In contrast to the sparse literature focusing on more analogue craft spaces, there is a growing body of literature focusing on the makerspace in this technologically-driven format (see, for instance, Duvfa 2017; Sweeny, 2017) and while these spaces might in theory be open to all, their demographic tends to be skewed more towards male users (Collins, 2018). Terminology used in describing these spaces evokes links with manufacturing, prototyping and entrepreneurialism rather than, for instance, development of craft skills (Taylor, Hurley, Wilson, 2016), or emphasis on who the users of the space might be, as in Edensor's (2018) suggestion of spaces designed to accommodate both highly skilled work and hobbyist enthusiasm. Several studies from within the field of cultural geography in particular have considered the use of such spaces of what Edensor (2010) terms vernacular creativities in wider placemaking contexts (Hawkins, 2017; Price and Hawkins, 2018; Edensor and Millington, 2019); however, a survey of this literature is outside the scope and focus of this study, which is specifically concerned with the embodied experience of making within such spaces, rather than with framing the spaces. Sheridan and Halverson (2014) offer a useful definition, that,

Many makerspaces resemble studio arts learning environments, where participants work independently or collaboratively with materials to design and make. (p. 508)

This definition of makerspaces accommodates multiple different forms of making together, which aligns with the focus of my investigation. However, I choose to use the term open access community making space, with the intention of capturing the most significant attributes of such spaces: that they can be used for independent practice (the open access aspect), that their use is not restricted to, for instance, a closed-to-outsiders studio group (the community aspect) and that they are spaces in which making can take place (which is self-explanatory). I expand further upon these ideas below.

An open access community making space offers more than simply access to tools and the space necessary to create the work. The *Towards Cultural Democracy* report describes a need for co-creative spaces which offer widely accessible opportunities to create culture (Wilson, Gross & Bull, 2017); Holden (2015) and Gauntlett (2018) both refer to these spaces as platforms, which can also act as connectors, bringing people together. Hawkins (2017) describes studio spaces as sites of both material and immaterial production, sharing Sjöholm's (2014) observations on the studio as a repository for ideas and experiments as well as more tangible outputs; the maker space can offer this sort of platform for creativity (Gauntlett, 2018), which is also suggested as a space that functions not only as a repository of knowledge, but where people can come together to make new knowledge through trying things out.

Oldenburg (1999) describes third places, which are neither home nor work (e.g. the pub, the community centre, the sports facility) but which offer a location for hanging out. For some participants, the making space fulfils this role, in that it offers an environment where they might encounter like-minded individuals. This idea is extended by Gee (2004) through the conception of an affinity space, which builds on

ideas of the community of practice to consider the role of shared points of connection between participants – or rather, *affinity* between users of the space, whether this is, as in Gee’s research, an online videogaming space, or, as in my research, the offline shared making space. To extend this line of thinking about the space as an entity outside the rest of life, I draw a link with the Foucauldian ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 4): a space in which to be other. While Foucault applies this notion to such spaces as brothels and colonies, there are multiple ways of being other, or trying on a new identity, such as when spending time in the third place of the making space, trying out a new craft activity, whether the participant is in search of enskilment, escape, or social engagement. By linking this with Stewart’s notion of ‘bloom space’ (Stewart, 2010, p. 340), implying a real or conceptual space laden with affective potential, in this section I begin to formulate the idea of the making space as a *permission space*, in which the user is afforded the opportunity to create; I develop this idea further in the first Findings chapter on *Establishing the Conditions for Making*. While permission can imply enablement, it also suggests constraints and power dynamics; I consider the space in terms of its affordances and limitations below.

The dedicated making space can be thought of as a site of multiple affordances (Gibson, 1979; Ingold, 2018) for the maker, with its access to tools, facilities, and other people (both other users of the space, and those with more knowledge, such as technicians or tutors). In thinking about tools and facilities, Gibson (1979) characterises an affordance as the possibility of a particular behaviour conferred by an object or environment - for instance, a chair affords the possibility of sitting. In this way, we can see that a carpentry workshop offers multiple means by which a carpenter is enabled in making a table: they have the tools to hand, they have a dedicated space in which to

work, and if others are using the space, there is a likelihood that these others are also familiar with, or at least interested in, the workings of the space and the processes of woodwork. However, Ingold (2018) usefully unpicks the tension in Gibson's belief that, on the one hand, objects retain intrinsic properties – 'the affordance doesn't change as the need of the observer changes' (Gibson, 1979, pp. 138-9) - but that on the other hand, affordances only exist as realised in the activities of a person for which they are of consequence; Ingold rightly notes that both positions cannot simultaneously be true. Ingold instead considers affordances as *potential* (my italics), rather than as what he terms 'objects-in-themselves, closed in and contained' (p.39); similarly, Glaveanu (2016) notes that affordances are always contextual, referring to them as 'action potentials' (p. 16). Glaveanu also plays with the notion of canonical affordances (Costall, 2012), in which certain objects have predictable and commonly agreed uses, such as, in the example mentioned above, the way that a chair affords sitting – he argues that the chair can also offer multiple other affordances, particularly in terms of creative approaches to its use, or in different sociocultural contexts. This, in turn, enables us to think about wider interpretations of affordances than objects or environments, including how different people encounter and experience the world in different ways, and how in attuning our movements to participate alongside one another, we are able to locate or notice affordances in common. For instance, a further affordance of formalised making spaces, of particular relevance in the context of this research, is the opportunities they present to learn new skills from more experienced practitioners.

Ingold's interest in what he terms submitting to the world, or to situations, in order to achieve mastery, is part of a wider idea about the world remaking itself, in which we

are in a constant state of becoming. Similarly, Smith (2019) uses notions of *communitas* and *liminality* (his italics) to think about how stepping into a workshop space – in his case a woodwork space used in a therapeutic recovery programme – enables people to come together to work differently than they might when out in the world, participating alongside others as equals (*communitas*) in the functioning of this previously unfamiliar space (the *liminality*, after Turner (1969)). Another possibility afforded in the provision of a shared workshop is what Hooson (2014), describing a multi-user ceramics space, describes as a ‘flattened hierarchy and non-judgmental space’ (p. 74), which he considers key to engendering creative activity; this also links back to Gauntlett’s notion of the space as a platform. If we think about the open access making space as a space rich in potential for making, it follows that we can consider it a creative space; that is, a space in which we can be creative. Sennett (2012) notes in a chapter on the workshop that the conditions for creativity and experimentation are created simply through the presence of the workshop facilities and tools – that is, the affordances of the space, through which the user can understand that this is a space in which creative activity can take place. However, Kharlamov (2016) draws on Lefebvre’s (1974, 1991) distinguishing of perceived space, conceived space and lived space, in which the first two are linked to the aspirations, intentions and constraints of constructed space, while the third – lived space – relates more to imagination, subversion, and unplannable novelty. He uses this to argue that the idea of a creative space in and of itself is misleading, as it is in the relational interplay between participants and resources within this affordance-laden environment that is where creativity lies. I will use these considerations of what is afforded by the making space through its provision of spatial, material and social potential, and how users of the

space come to understand and exploit this potential, as I unpack the making spaces of my fieldwork in subsequent chapters investigating my findings.

From examining the ways in which we can consider the open-access making space, and what it can offer the maker, both as a platform and via its affordances, I now move on to considering in more detail the experience of navigating the space as a maker.

Social making – sharing space with others

In this section I explore and reflect on what the experience of creating alongside others might bring in addition to sharing of craft knowledge. In extending the examination of affordances offered by shared making environments, as discussed above, one affordance not yet discussed is access to other people. This might take the form of a tutor or instructor in an environment where learning is more explicit, such as the classroom (Marchand, 2010) or an apprenticeship (Gowlland, 2019), or other group members in both formal and informal crafting groups, with whom the participant can engage in social interactions and, potentially, learning exchanges. There are many ways in which people might come together to connect socially while participating in a particular leisure craft activity, for instance knit and natter groups, communal quilting groups, or model railway clubs (Parker, 2010; Knott, 2015; Platt, 2017), and this model continues into newer forms of maker activity such as the hackathon (Davies, 2018). The phenomenon of the (usually female) knitting group (sometimes termed *knit and natter*, or, more recently, *stitch and bitch*) with its particular emphasis on friendship and social interaction, has received a great deal of academic scrutiny for both intrinsic and instrumental aspects (see, for instance, Maidment & Macfarlane (2011) on knitting and wellbeing, or Platt (2017) on knitting groups and placemaking). In an example of a

making space set up primarily for its instrumental aspects, namely creating opportunities for men to engage in meaningful activity alongside others as a method of reducing isolation, with no obligation to engage in conversation, Men's Sheds is an international movement of independent workshop spaces where older men can participate in woodwork or metalwork activity for themselves or the community (Gauntlett, 2018), or simply spend time with others, the idea being that 'men don't talk face to face, they talk shoulder to shoulder' (Golding, 2015, p. 171). The Men's Sheds movement is relatively recent, having existed since 2013, so is a topic of particular interest, particularly for arts and health and social prescribing research, Many such studies focus on the instrumental benefits of participating in amateur craft groups, for instance building community (Maidment & Macfarlane, 2011), addressing loneliness (Mayne, 2016), improving mental health (Smith, 2019) or exploring issues of sustainability (Hackney, 2013). There is a possible argument for a contrast between formal making spaces, that is, spaces specifically set up to respond to a particular need, such as community development or reducing isolation, (e.g. Men's Sheds) – we could think of these as *instrumental* uses of the making space - and informal spaces that develop organically with people coming together in pursuit of a shared interest – these being *intrinsic* uses, as the motivator here is the activity itself. Examples of this latter include the knitting groups described above, and the model railway club, which might be very structured with rules and weekly meetings, but whose members participate primarily because of their interest in trains, with any wellbeing benefits being incidental to this. There are, however, plenty of examples of making spaces that cannot be so easily categorised, such as hackerspaces cobbled together by a friendship group (Davies, 2017), which exist under the same heading but in direct contrast to the new

wave of carefully-curated targeted makerspaces to be found in museums, libraries and universities (Taylor, Hurley, Connolly, 2016).

Craft groups, whether more or less formally constituted, can be considered as communities of (craft) practice, in terms first defined by Lave & Wenger (1991), whereby new participants are drawn into the community through experience and interaction with other participants, moving from being the newcomer to ending up as the old timer at the centre of the group, who serves as a repository of knowledge about the community. Gibson (2019) usefully considers the role of the shared environment in the process of craft learning through this lens, arguing that significant craft learning can only take place when it is understood and valued within the maker's community of practice: 'successful practical learning relies on community participation and the sharing of common values and goals. It requires constant contact with others,' (ibid., n.p.). While the notion of a group of people sharing a space to work harmoniously according to shared values could be considered as an aspiration, we must remember that shared social capital does not always equate to cohesion (Hackney, Maughan, Desmarais, 2016). It is important to acknowledge that such capital is not distributed evenly, and that more and less subtle hierarchies are always at play.

The body moving through (shared) space

Having considered the affordances offered by the various forms and functions of different shared making environments, this section will now focus on the embodied experience of making in these spaces. One of my research questions asks how people learn alongside others; it is therefore important to explore how people navigate shared space corporeally as well as socially. There has been recent interest within geography

in locating the body at the centre of experience, practice, and emotion (Hawkins, 2017) in craft practice; ethnographies of micro-geographies of making have considered glassblowing, woodwork, and taxidermy (O'Connor, 2007, 2016; Marchand, 2008; Straughan, 2018; Patchett, 2016). By situating themselves as participants within the making experience, researchers offer insights into the sensations and accrual of bodily knowledge involved in the development of craft skills, while also demonstrating the mechanisms through which the social world of the shared workspace develops: in one example, O'Connor uses the shown, not told approach to learning the use of tools to observe that, 'people create group lives with hands as well as tongues' (O'Connor, 2007, p. 191).

In a passage on the way in which luthiers – makers of stringed instruments - navigate a 'cello workshop, Sennett (2012) likens the luthiers' manoeuvrings to choreography; he observes how they 'move agilely in the jumbled space, weaving and ducking, sometimes executing swivels like dancers around the cutting saw now shoved into the centre' (p. 205). In their understanding of the movements and tools required to perform each aspect of the job, the luthiers are able to sense one another and to move their bodies accordingly, without recourse to verbal requests; for instance, the luthier using the cutting machine is, at that moment, tacitly agreed to be in command of the workshop as this is the most precise job. In this way Sennett draws out the non-verbal communications constantly taking place within the space. The navigation he describes also serves to foreground others' activities within the space for the maker, in that through manoeuvring round one another, it is not just bodies that must be swerved, but also the work at hand; the interface between the tool and the object is at the centre of the movement. Marchand (2008) also considers experiences of learning fine

woodwork alongside others in a structured learning environment, but his focus is on the development of fine motor skills in tool use and so does not reflect the experience of using tools in a communal workshop space where resources are limited and so must be shared, as is the case in my research.

O'Connor (2016) explores a similar interdependence between workshop users in her description of working in an open-access glassblowing studio, describing how 'a proficient choreography of production requires that the team members inhabit and extend themselves through each other's bodies *in unison*' (author's italics) (p. 114); she describes the movements required as a glassworker manipulates a pole on whose end is a ball of very hot molten glass, with another glassblower ready to anticipate her actions, opening the glory hole (the door to the furnace) at the right moment, or stepping aside at another moment. The atmosphere of the workshop is also made explicit – this is a rich ethnography, replete with descriptions of the intense heat, the dirt of the process, and the tough physical labour of the making process. Here, in contrast to other accounts of the making process that focus purely on an act of bodily engagement with tools, for instance Ingold's account of the experience of sawing a piece of wood (Ingold, 2011), for O'Connor the bodily engagement extends beyond the workshop and out into the life of the maker.

In this section I have demonstrated how the shared workshop space is a necessarily collaborative space, in which users must engage bodily as well as socially, in the process of using tools and materials. At present, there is a gap in the literature covering the experience of how new users might navigate such a space alongside others, and it is within this gap that my research sits. In examining the experience of making in shared space, it is important to contrast this with the experience of working alone,

partly as a way of highlighting the challenges and opportunities presented to the lone maker, and partly in order to compare and contrast their experience with that of the participant working in a shared space.

Making in private space

Many makers work in physical isolation, whether by choice or necessity. They might be amateur or professional, and could work in dedicated studios or garden sheds or within the home. Working in isolation presents different challenges to working alongside others in shared facilities: in theory, the maker can mould the space to their own needs, but they are unable to take advantage of the material and social opportunities of the shared space.

Jackson (2013) describes a *project space* within the home and environs, to which the serious amateur maker can retreat to make work; he suggests of such spaces that

... not only do they allow the work in progress and accompanying tools to be left out in between project sessions, they also offer a sense of order in a controlled private world. (Jackson, 2013, p. 185)

However, not all home makers are afforded such luxury of space to leave work between sessions, to be picked up or put down at will: Stalp (2006) describes the problems of living with a space-consuming leisure activity within the home, as the quilters of her research negotiate storage for their stash of fabric and other quilting materials, and also negotiate space to undertake a pastime whose spatial demands can encroach upon, or even render temporarily unusable, prime domestic real estate such as the kitchen table. Similarly Shercliff (2015), an established textile artist and academic, observes that the 'well-organised and well-equipped home-based studio-

workshops' (p. 198) of the serious home maker (Jackson, 2013) is not a space available to her, so she must adapt her practice to accommodate her domestic circumstances. In this way, it is apparent that making at home can present as many problems as working in the shared facility, unless the maker has secured a dedicated space in which not only can they keep tools and materials, but which also offers a space for construction, experimentation, and reflection, such as Sjöholm's (2014) private artist's studio, which Hawkins (2017) presents as a repository of both material and immaterial work. For those without such access to the private space of a studio, shed or dedicated home space, the home maker is at a similar disadvantage to the user of the open access space who must carefully plan their use of materials and equipment, using shared resources that might not be *quite* what they want or need, and whose use of the space is always negotiated with others, even if our maker is, at that time, the sole user of the workshop space.

Conclusion

This section has discussed the notion of the making space, and also how space is made for making. While various studies explore the experience of making alongside others, or making in an open access space, there has been little investigation into comparing and contrasting the experiences of participants in what I frame as formal, informal and private spaces – that is, instrumental spaces where creative activity functions as a vehicle for wellbeing or community development, intrinsic spaces where the creative activity itself is the purpose, such as artist-led making spaces, and the private space of home or the dedicated studio. In investigating the affordances and constraints of the various spaces, I have begun to formulate an idea of the making space as a permission

space akin to, but not the same as, the 'heterotopia' (Foucault, 1984, p. 4), the 'bloom space' (Stewart, 2010, p. 340) and the 'affinity space' (Gee, 2004, p. 72) revealed in the literature: an environment in which to be *other*, outside the rest of life.

Embodied aspects of participating in the different spaces is made visible through the literature, with engagement and encounter experienced in highly situated ways – the Men's Sheds where people work 'shoulder to shoulder' (Golding, 2015, p. 171) and the glassblowing workshop where caution is required in navigating molten glass on the end of long poles (O'Connor, 2007), for instance, offer very different experiences for the maker, in particular when applied to the position of the uncertain novice. The literature also demonstrates how the embodied aspect of working in these spaces extends to consideration of the both the space allocated to individuals for creative work, and the ways in which the work created functions as an extension of the corporeal self, left behind when the maker exits the space. These aspects are not yet contextualised within the amateur experience and in the particular environments of my research, and thus create rich seams of potential in responding to the research question regarding the role played by making facilities.

Of my research questions, I have begun to address how people work alongside others, and the role played by facilities, but in order to consider how space is used, it is important to think about the role of time, whether this is time spent in the space, or simply time available for leisure learning. In examining Making Time, in the next Literature Review chapter, I start to develop the theoretical space within which informal craft learning sits.

Making Time

Introduction

One challenge of research into developing craft skills is that, as Knott (2015) observes, craft takes time, both in its learning and its processes. Having previously explored those spaces in which making occurs, and the space taken up by making, it follows that in thinking about learning craft skills, I now investigate the role played by time. In this section I explore time as it is experienced throughout the making process, from time taken in the production of a piece of craftwork to the time required to learn new skills, and what this might involve. Following this, I specifically consider the notion of the *pastime*, in which craft is undertaken as a form of leisure activity, and how this is practised. I then move on to examine interpretations of what we might think of as the *free time* in which amateur craft is practised – that is, time outside work and other obligations.

The etymology of the term *pastime* is useful in contextualising this chapter: the Online Etymology Dictionary suggests that it dates from the late fifteenth century, is an adoption of the French *passe temps* (literally: pass time), and is defined as referring to ‘recreation, amusement, diversion, sport’ (Harper, 2023), with an implication of frivolity, or at least, *not serious*. The amateur craft learning examined within this study is still considered as a pastime, and so can be viewed through a lens focusing on informal leisure; however, while this is not about apprenticeships or other training course as part of employment, nor is it the serious leisure (Stebbins, 2001) of the more practised amateur maker, there is still a purposeful aspect to the notion of learning a new skill. Framing the study within these terms also clarifies that it focuses on the intrinsic, that is, the more autotelic aspects of amateur making (i.e. of and for itself),

rather than instrumental benefits as are currently the source of extensive research, such as the link between creative activity and wellbeing (e.g. Maidment & Macfarlane, 2011; Golding, 2015; Hall & Jayne, 2016; Mayne, 2016).

Time is considered as one of the five aspects of amateur craft learning within this literature review because of the multiple ways in which time is significant to creative activity. If the first section of the literature review presented arguments for the usefulness of a dedicated creative space, it follows that we can also think about the necessity of a similarly boundaried allocation of time for the development of creative practice. Time can be considered as a muscle that needs training (in particular in thinking about notions such as Ingold's education of attention (Ingold, 2015)); it can be considered durationally, as in the time taken to develop skills, or for materials to transform from one state to another (raw to finished, wet to dry, and so on); and it can also be considered as a form of commodity. With so many options for how we might spend time, what benefit does choosing to spend it engaged in amateur making activity confer on the maker? I will consider all of these aspects within this chapter.

If we think about informal creative leisure activity as taking place in free time, then it is necessary to define what we mean by free time. One way of describing it is as 'time left over from other things' (Knott, 2015, p. 95) – but what are these other things, and is this time truly unfettered? In this section I undertake two tasks. First, I explore the relationship of time to practicing, in the process of engaging with craft activities and refining skills; I then go on to explore the notion of free time as an oppositional concept, examining how this relationship with those obligations that seek to constrain it has changed (rather than evolved) over the last fifty years.

Practising

It is widely agreed that personal knowledge, in the form of embodied understanding of actions, can only be acquired through practice (Polanyi, 1962; Harrod, 1999). While craft literature contains extensive examination of processes of enskilment, exploring experiential and material aspects of the making process (see, for instance, Banfield, 2017; Brown, Grieg, Ferraro, 2017; Ingold, 2013; Patchett, 2016; Straughan, 2018), there is seemingly little literature on the relationship between the experience of practising and the passage of time. While O'Connor's ethnographic writings (2006, 2007) about her glassblowing apprenticeship consider durational aspects of the process of blowing glass vessels, there is also little else in the literature about the role of anticipatory time within the making processes, where, for instance, one might have to wait for a piece of work to dry or to emerge from a kiln. This temporal focus is therefore productive both in understanding the experience of making both within conceptions of *free* or *leisure* time, and in framing my experiences of instructed craft learning within a wider sense of time taken to accrue craft skills.

While the notion of practice can be considered as a means of doing something, for instance an art practice, it also has a meaning (particularly as *practicing*) as a refinement or rehearsal through repeated action (Sennett, 2009); we practice the action before we perform it. Woodyer (2012, p. 316), describing playful behaviours, positions these as 'other' than conventional, rational, real life. This conception – and this tension - enables us to extend the notion of making time as somehow outside the standard subdivisions of daily time, as with an example presented by Jalas (2009), in which the process of boatbuilding by hand offers a way to slow the passage of time; in

the case of my research, it also offers a way in which we can think of the introductory craft course as a way of trying on that activity. In these ways, practicing can be considered as a way of 'becoming,' as suggested in the work of Brown, Grieg, Ferraro (2017, p. 210) , in which through navigating through successes and failures, the maker finds a way of 'going along' (Ingold, 2013, p. 1). This can function as a means of moving to a different level of enskilment, or of developing one's thinking to embrace more processual ways of engaging with creative work rather than focusing on end points and outputs. Ingold notes in a description of what he terms 'ongoingness', that 'we are not so much being as always "becoming"' (Ingold, 2015, p. 117). The act of practice can, of course, become the entirety of the activity, with an end point never reached, as for process knitters (Lampitt Adey, 2017); elsewhere, it tips into obsession, as for Knott's model railway enthusiasts constructing layouts that go nowhere and that will never be finished (Knott, 2015). Here, the time taken up by practicing can be seen as autotelic (Jalas, 2009; Knott, 2015) - the rehearsal is the event, and the final performance will never take place.

How might the inexperienced maker begin to engage with these ways of going along? I now turn to considering the time of amateur making and flow, as practised in the making space.

Passing time in making spaces

The experience of being immersed in a task to the point where one is oblivious to distraction is termed flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002); this condition, in which the participant undertakes a task that offers a challenge, requires concentration, and allows time to slip by unnoticed, is often associated with participating in craft work.

Twigger Holroyd (2017) differentiates between two sorts of flow, rhythmic and focused, the first involving repetitive action (for instance forming the stitches in knitting) and the second involving intense focus, such as when thinking about and planning for adjustments when cutting out pieces for a garment while sewing. These two forms of flow can be seen in other craft disciplines, for instance in woodwork where sanding or planing might offer opportunities for rhythmic flow, but complete focus must be brought to bear, working on the maxim that one must measure twice, cut once, when sawing wood (see, for example, Korn (2013)). The flow state is often positioned as a desirable consequence of craft activity, whether through using making to achieve the dream-like flow state or experiencing this state as a side-benefit, but this is not always the case; in situations commonly found in amateur practice, such as when learning new skills, dealing with unpredictable materials, or simply in undertaking creative activity without having extensive experience to fall back on, this position is either not yet attained or might be actively resisted or disrupted (Sennett, 2009; Knott, 2015; Price & Hawkins, 2018); Knott in particular problematises Csikszentmihalyi's demand for rules and frameworks as part of the flow state. The maker might be at a stage where knowledge of techniques is not yet tacit, so awareness and attention will be directed towards successfully performing tasks accurately rather than, having assimilated the tool competence, towards employing those skills in the process of production – what Polanyi (1962) refers to as subsidiary rather than focal awareness. Sennett (2009) also suggests the idea of resisting the flow state as a way of offering the opportunity to consider corporeal anticipation, in which the maker thinks consciously about their next step, which might involve, for instance, refining a hand movement. This resistance is extended further by Knott (2015), who perceives the flow state to be

results-focused, in contrast with the experiences of struggle, repetition, and obsession that he defines as key characteristics of amateur craft; surely, however, the struggles and repetition are undertaken in pursuit of refinement of practice. Of course, the maker might easily spend as much of their making time engaged in *not* making, or at least tinkering and pottering; in this way they are also exerting control over their free time, through deliberate avoidance of engagement.

Free time in its wider context

Various scholars writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s turned their attention to thoughts about the ways in which we might use that time available to us outside work. If industrialism sought to separate the previously-integrated work and leisure so that non-work became more problematic (Gelber, 1999), and the idea developed that work was good in and of itself – hence the *work ethic* (Weber (1958) in Gelber, 1999)– then free time can consequently be viewed as existing in opposition, as a chance to hold something back for the self. While Cohen and Taylor (1976) suggest that hobbies are among a number of strategies we might use to escape what they term the prison cell of everyday life, Adorno’s belief that ‘free time is a shadowy continuation of labour’ (Adorno, 1969, 1991, p. 194) is borne of the assertion that we are so immersed in the capitalist project of work that we are prepared to endure a passive orientation towards that time that we spend outside it (Gauntlett, 2018). Adorno (1969, 1991) is careful to distinguish between leisure pursuits and hobbies, as ways of occupying that time outside work. For him, leisure pursuits involve long-term focused practice – what Stebbins (2001) identifies as serious leisure, and as undertaken by the likes of Jackson’s (2013) committed amateur makers in dedicated home workshops – and hobbies, which

Adorno considers merely as ways of killing time, going so far as to describe them as forms of 'pseudo activity' (Adorno, 1969, 1991, p. 188). Gelber is less damning, observing of hobbies and informal leisure that, 'Such leisure is socially valorized precisely because it produces feelings of satisfaction with something that looks very much like work but that is done for its own sake' (Gelber, 1999, p. 12). If we believe Adorno (and Arendt (1958, 2019)) in their assertion that leisure time merely mirrors the conditions of normative capitalist work (Knott, 2015), it follows that this time is not really free, and that it must be structured to produce tangible outputs, whether they be skills, objects, or progress through leagues and competitions. This conception does not offer space for curiosity, doubling-back, experiment, or even the social opportunities to hang out with like-minded souls, with no particular intention of producing anything at all (Davies, 2018). Knott's argument that amateur time is an extension of other temporal modes, in which the amateur can dictate the pace and conditions of their activity, and are able to create 'personal, miniaturised utopias and alternative worlds, for a limited time only' (Knott, 2015, p. 90), allows us to more easily frame the use of leisure time as being for exploration and investigation. This in turn links with the idea of Jackson's project time (Jackson, 2013) and the notion of the maker going to what Cohen and Taylor (1976) refer to as a free area to do an activity through which they can exercise individual agency, albeit for a constrained block of time, as with the craft course participants of my research. In examining the various challenges to the notion of leisure time, it is, however, important to acknowledge that free time is not experienced similarly by all everyone: work does not take up the same fixed amount of time for all workers, and some people are using making spaces in a

therapeutic capacity, or are outside work (for instance, through retirement (Reynolds, 2009), unemployment or rehabilitation (Smith, 2019)).

Having considered the use of leisure activities as both perpetuating the characteristics of work, and also as a means of demarcating work and non-work time, I now think about the use of leisure in staking claims to identity during periods of economic turbulence, when work is less assured and, as such, cannot be so easily distinguished from non-work, or for those outside work. For example, as with previous trends for craft engagement at times of economic downturn, such as the *Make Do and Mend* response to resource shortages in World War Two, and the surge in interest in hand craft in the early 1970s that coincided with the oil crisis, amateur craft came back into vogue following the 2007 banking crisis. The post-2007 rise in craft engagement coincided with what Chanksy (2010) describes as a third-wave feminist reclaiming of free time, and the rise of craftivism (Greer, 2014) in which craft, most commonly fibre arts such as embroidery, patchwork and knitting, are used to deliver political messages. In this way, free time is used not only to perform a hobby, but also to provide a voice via a medium more used to carrying connotations of genteel femininity (Parker, 2010). However, this idea of the craft project as an escape has been hijacked by its own commodification as part of the 'side hustle'; Luckman (2013) writes specifically about how online creative marketplaces such as Etsy.com have co-opted women's home-based crafts, creating opportunities to reposition and to monetise leisure pursuits. While both Luckman and Gauntlett (2018) note the potential unleashed by the growth in online making communities and marketplaces, shifting from what Gauntlett describes as a 'sit back and be told' culture to a 'making and doing' culture (Gauntlett,

2018, pp. 17-21), the line marking out the free time described by Adorno, that is only able to exist because of its opposition to work-time, is here blurred through the potential for *all* time to be work-time – that is, both materially and financially productive. There is significant scope for further examination of this notion of commodification of leisure time (and space), particularly in relation to the use of the open-access making space as a resource shared by makers engaged in both autotelic and commodified craft production. Another aspect is the extent to which the maker is either responding to and exploiting opportunity, or *being* exploited by economic necessity, capitalist messaging (such as the notion of the side hustle), or the frameworks that ostensibly enable but which can also constrain, such as online maker markets like Etsy (Luckman, 2013).

In a similar vein to Adorno's (1969, 1991) interest in productive leisure as commodified time, there has been recent significant focus, particularly from cultural geography (Collins, 2018; Price & Hawkins, 2018) and everyday creativity researchers (Creative Lives, 2020; The Audience Agency, 2023), on instrumental aspects of informal creative practice – this might be its health benefits, community cohesion, or other outcomes – with less attention placed on intrinsic aspects, specifically autotelic creative activity such as that practised by Knott's model railway enthusiasts, endlessly constructing, dismantling, tweaking, reconstructing imaginary railways that go nowhere and serve no purpose other than the pleasure in their creation (Knott, 2015).

Amateur craft – and by extension leisure time – can be seen to be increasingly both commodified and instrumentalised for purposes other than its intrinsic value and the pleasure in its undertaking. If we consider the time we spend away from work as

enabling us to reclaim a form of constrained freedom (Knott, 2015), we should also consider the choices we make about how we spend leisure time to be, at least in part, about how we reclaim our attention from its commodification via a continual bombardment of information. In a recent book entitled *How to do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Econom'*, Odell (2019) describes the reclaiming of attention from electronic devices in order to make conscious choices about how we spend our time; similarly, Ingold (2018) describes 'the education of attention' in encouraging deliberate focus on the tasks and processes of what he terms 'wayfinding'; that is, gathering skills and noticing signs as we find a way through the world. In this context, the choice to engage in craft activity as a pastime can be seen as enabling the creator to train their attention and to make deliberate choices about how their free time is used. However, as described in the paragraph above, the distinction is not so simple. Craft activities can offer the maker opportunities for mindful focus and a means of accessing the flow state, in which the maker's attention is channelled into an engaging but challenging task to the extent that they do not notice time passing (Dissanayake, 1994; Korn, 2013; Cato, 2014); on the other hand, in considering craft participation as increasingly commodified, there is no suggestion that the maker's engagement will linger any longer than the duration of a course, or, as with those half-finished jumpers and matchstick cathedrals secreted in cupboards and beside sofas in so many homes, abandoned long before the conclusion of a project, let alone an embedded relationship between maker and artform. The desire to engage in a craft activity does not always marry up with the lived experience, and the visibility of an activity, whether on television or online (Luckman & Tower, 2022), with attendant perceptions of its accessibility for all, can easily fall short in the lived experience (Alfody, 2015). For the

newcomer, the opportunity to engage in the focused, mindful processes of craft both subverts and perpetuates notions of its commodification: hands-on making activity can offer the maker the opportunity for mindful immersion in a task – that is, *flow* experiences, as described earlier - but there is a risk with the commodification described above that this experience becomes a performative exercise, whose aim is to produce an output with no thought for (or obligation towards) further engagement. In this section I have demonstrated that while spaces for making are significant, consideration of the time spent is of equal importance, whether this time is spent engaged in purposeful work-like endeavours, or, in the case of Davies' (2018) hackerspace participants (among others), subverting this commodification through taking the opportunity to simply hang out with like-minded individuals.

In considering the temporal affordances of the external making space, it is also important to reflect on the same opportunities and constraints as presented for the maker using domestic space for leisure making. That time referred to by Jackson (2013) as project time (that is, a dedicated timeslot in which the maker can focus on a current project), ideally offers reprieve from interruptions or distractions, and depends on the maker being able to extract or isolate him or herself from other obligations, for instance other family members, the demands of work, and so on. Stalp (2006) demonstrates that this dedicated time can be something of a luxury that is hard to find within domestic contexts where there is no specific dedicated space for craft, as it is likely that focus will be interrupted by the proximity of the making space to other household obligations. In Stalp's example, the maker cannot pick up and put down a project at will – for instance, work cannot be left out on a table whose primary use is

for mealtimes; there will always be a hiatus while the maker either sets up their work, or packs it away. The work is consequently not immediately available at the point where the maker steps through a door into a workshop, ready to make, as in Jackson's examples where the kayak builder can resume at the exact point at which they paused, without having to set out cleared-away tools, or lay out the pieces of an intricate construction whose assembly requires precision and focus. In reflecting on what Hawkins (2017) refers to as the porosity of domestic making, without clear demarcations of space and time for creativity, the usefulness of a third place, that is neither home nor work – for instance the open access making space - becomes apparent, not only for the space it offers but for its ability to demarcate dedicated time. The craft activities of this research that take place in shared making spaces, whether on courses or via temporally-bound drop-in sessions, cannot be considered as solely occupying Knott's left-over time (Knott, 2015), as mentioned earlier; rather, by choosing to use free time in engaging in a craft course or by using a making space during specified hours, I contend that this is in fact *chosen* time: that is, time set aside and protected from the onslaught of the everyday.

Conclusion

In this section I have considered time in relation to amateur making, from the idea of free time as oppositional, moving through to time as process, time taken to develop skills, and to the immersive experience of flow – and how this state might usefully be resisted, particularly when developing new skills. We can consider leisure craft as a form of temporal resistance; a method via which we can reclaim the self from the quotidian through the use of material routes to creative expression; however, we must

consider the extent to which our subversions and escape routes are constructed and routinised, and what this means for how more and less structured forms of learning take place. As described earlier in the section on practicing, there is an apparent gap in the literature relating to material time within making processes, such as drying time; if it exists, it is not referenced in most of the more widely-sourced literature. As such, this will form part of my original contribution.

Having considered the spaces in which making happens, and the relationship of time to making, I now move on to build on these by examining the process of making known, by which I mean bringing things into being, as the third of five aspects of the amateur making process in shared workshops. I will specifically consider how knowledge is created and shared in the experience of using the making space, the ways in which knowledge is both exposed and concealed, and the methods by which knowledge is made visible in the transmission of learning.

Making Known

Introduction

Thus far in the literature review, I have firstly considered making space - those ways in which we make space for making, and the spaces in which making might occur - and the relationship of time to making. This section I build on these ideas by examining the ways in which, through considering the processes of making, we can think about how knowledge is made both tangible and visible. The chapter follows three lines of enquiry: firstly, processes of material engagement, by which I consider how the maker engages with tools and materials in the production of artefacts – the ‘bringing into being’ described by Merleau-Ponty (1945, 2012) - and what we can learn through engaging with materials; secondly, embodied ways of knowing, and how knowledge can be revealed through the experience of making; thirdly, the performance and spectacle of making as work is revealed and concealed to the maker and others through the stages of its development. This is not just about learning with the hands, as reflected through Pallasmaa’s *Thinking Hand* (2009), but about sensory engagement in which the maker is able to engage and understand the significance of, for instance, the sound of ink sizzling as it is rolled out by the printmaker, or the meaning of sounds made by a ceramic glaze as it continues to dry after firing.

Within this chapter I do not intend to deliberately privilege visual modes of understanding, as Pink (2015) observes, rather, I explore multiple experiences of bringing into being drawn from across the senses, whether through the tactile processes of transforming materials from one state into another, or in considering the ways in which we observe and learn from others when making socially. I also consider

the ways in which tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) is made overt, on the basis that making processes must be made explicit before becoming implicit; particularly for the newcomer (as in my study), learning must be understood and knowledge generated in order to be assimilated.

Processes of material engagement

At the core of craft activity is a coming together of maker, material and process (Aktaş & Mäkelä, 2019). This way of knowing relies on human engagement with material and the processual activity that leads to the formation of a new thing – in the case of this research, a craft object, such as when a maker's hands engage with a lump of clay to transform the sticky, slippery, fluid matter into an artefact. We can consider this process of material engagement as starting with the maker's first action, such as slicing a lump of clay from a larger piece, or casting on a row of stitches when knitting. Ingold (2014) refers to the 'processual', by which he means the developmental process in which we reabsorb knowledge and apply it anew in the production of objects – he suggests, following Dewey (1934, 2005) - that we '*learn by doing*, in the course of carrying out the tasks of life' (Ingold, 2013, p. 13, original italics); that is, that we are able to both create and reveal knowledge through experiential engagement. Similarly, Bolt (2010) draws on Heidegger (1962) in considering the process through which we must come to know the world materially before we can know it theoretically, in particular considering the process of exploration as we come to see and understand new knowledge.

Through considering the significance of the experience of engaging with materials, we are better able to understand the experience of making as a whole. For the researcher

seeking to understand this experience through direct engagement with the process, there is opportunity to consider the tactile sensations at play, and how they inform our decision-making within the development of the work. Dewey, writing long before Ingold, noted that, by simultaneously doing and observing, we are able to progress:

As we manipulate, we touch and feel, as we look, we see: as we listen, we hear.

The hand moves with etching needle or with brush. The eye attends and reports the consequence of what is done. Because of this intimate connection, subsequent doing is cumulative and not a matter of caprice nor yet of routine.

(Dewey, 1934, 2005, p. 51)

In considering craft learning, this can take the form of feeling our way through materials; for instance, when making a pinch pot the ceramicist starts with a ball of clay held in one hand, into which they press the thumb of their other hand. They then begin to pinch the clay, turning the clay round and round in their hand, until the clay thins out and the form of a vessel emerges. Groth, Makela & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen (2013) describe how a blind ceramicist makes his way through the creation of such an object by feel alone. In this example the ceramicist cannot use his sight to perceive how thin the clay is at any moment but must instead rely on applying prior knowledge, built up over time, of how clay feels between the fingers, in order to form this vessel; as he is unable to use visual clues, he must rely on haptic response from his fingertips to evaluate his progress in forming the vessel. When presented with a ball of clay the novice practitioner has no such knowledge to fall back on, and cannot feel a way through; while they are 'following the materials', (Ingold, 2010), it is an uncertain progression as both the material and the processes are not yet fully familiar. However, we see that, as within Groth's example above, as we repeat the processes, so our

knowledge develops; in applying this accrued learning in manipulation of materials, the maker is able to make their knowledge tangible, as the accumulation of learning is revealed in improved skill and, consequently, more refined outputs.

In considering how the maker engages with and manipulates materials, Malafouris (2014) and Ingold (2014) debate this process; Malafouris' Material Engagement Theory explores 'thinking and feeling *with, through* and *about* things' (p. 143) and by doing so, committing to a processual approach – that through engagement, the thing evolves and emerges. Malafouris suggests that his view differs from Ingold's by implying that Ingold's maker brings preconceived ideas to the materials while Malafouris' maker, engaging in 'creative thinging', finds that the material has its own agency through which it steers the maker. However, Ingold uses ideas about the maker 'paying attention' to the material to develop a notion whereby the maker 'goes along with' the material, positioning the engagement with matter as part of a wider intention to focus on the sensations of experience. For Malafouris, the material leads the way, whereas for Ingold, the material is a collaborator in the overall experience. Within the research of this thesis, I – the maker inexperienced at manipulating the materials before me - am engaging with these materials and finding that their particular properties are shaping what I want to do with them, but as a newcomer I am not yet attuned to the materials' particular nuances. The new maker could therefore be said to be undertaking an 'education of attention' (Ingold, 2018) as much as an education of bodily engagement with tools and materials, as part of the process of learning craft skills.

We can also think about material engagement by considering Heidegger's *The Thing* (1950, 2010), in which he describes a handmade ceramic jug not by simply describing

the jug as an object but also by describing the void within it; the jug is the *thing* but it is also shaped by that which it is not. Our response to it is shaped accordingly, in that when we are working with our craft activities we are learning to work as much with what materials won't do – that is, their limitations and points of resistance - as what they will do. This is considered by Aktaş and Mäkelä (2019) as sitting somewhere between Ingold and Malafouris' ideas, in the explicit suggestion that what takes place is not the material leading the maker or the maker having full cognition over the material, but a form of negotiation between the two – a more feasible representation of the potential tussles with material experienced by the inexperienced maker as they discover that the material is perhaps not as compliant as desired. This tension is useful in considering the research questions about how we learn about materials and tools, and also about the move from instruction to creative experimentation; it offers a case for hands-on engagement with materials as a way of understanding their affordances and limitations for the novice, as I explore further on in the Findings chapters.

Embodied ways of knowing

In this section I consider one of the core premises of this thesis: that craft knowledge is acquired through bodily engagement with tools and materials. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1945, 2012) talks of 'being-in-the-world' as a way of recognising that we exist, are present in and are engaged with the world and all its materials and processes; we can think of embodiment as the bodily, sensory experience of being-in-the-world.

As I explored previously in the chapter on Making Space, there has been recent interest within geography in locating the body at the centre of experience, practice, and

emotion in craft practice (Hawkins, 2017); Patchett (2016), Banfield (2016) and Straughan (2018) take bodily knowing one step further in studies navigating the processes of taxidermy, grappling with fur and sinew while – in Patchett’s case – narrating to a supervisor the movements required to extract the body of a squirrel from its skin (Patchett, 2016); in this last example, the researcher demonstrates their understanding of the processes through verbal communication of embodied sensation. Polanyi observes of tacit knowledge that ‘we can know more than we can tell’ (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4), following Ryle’s (1949) differentiation between *knowing that* and *knowing how*, which suggests that this sort of knowledge – such as knowing how to use hand tools - is developed through the trial and error of engagement rather than theoretical understanding. Inexperienced participants in amateur craft practice are likely to be at an early stage in their relationship with the materials before them – engrossed in first attempts at manipulating these materials, trying things out, experimenting, at the early stages of knowing in practice, and without yet possessing the knowhow or *knack* of more experienced practitioners. As an example, until we try to thread a needle, we only have a theoretical understanding of the process of threading that needle, and first attempts might result in repeated frustration, until we discover that we might wet the thread and flatten it before feeding it through the needle’s eye, or we could learn about a specific tool designed especially for this purpose. This idea is expanded by Meyer and Land (2005) through observation of what they term *threshold concepts* within formal education, those moments that mark conceptual and ontological shifts in a student’s understanding. An example of this is colloquially termed the *eureka moment*: the student is unable to grasp the concept, which seems incomprehensible, until the moment when it is understood, and thereafter it cannot be *not*-understood:

the threshold has been crossed. The use of embodied learning to access this understanding is explored extensively across craft literature, for instance when Ingold (2011) considers the experience of finding an effective way of wielding a saw when cutting a plank of wood, in Crawford's (2009) account of learning by *tinkering* with tools and engine parts in becoming a motorcycle mechanic, and in O'Connor's various accounts of her experience of becoming a glassblower, in which no matter how many times she is shown by others how to hold and manipulate the glassblowing tools, she can only assimilate the necessary techniques through full bodily engagement with the processes (O'Connor, 2007, 2016). However, while extensive examples of feeling a way to bodily competence exist within the literature, a direct link has not yet been made between discussions of Threshold Concepts and the learning processes taking place within the informal craft making environment; I will address this gap within the second findings chapter, which focuses on processes of enskilment.

Collins' (2018) conception of the 'maker habitus', in which a bank of knowledge of the potential of materials, tools, and processes is formed from a body of accumulated embodied experience, is particularly useful in its relation to my third research question, which asks how novice practitioners move from relying on instruction to being able to make informed, self-directed choices within their making activity. The practitioner busy working with tools and materials, compelled to constantly refine their responses to challenges presented through the process, is engaged in a process of refining their perception (Ingold, 2013; Patchett, 2016) *through* this engagement with materials, rather than by reflecting *on* it. This experience of navigating and refining perceptual instability, or, as Ingold frames it, 'attuning', (Ingold, 2013) can only occur through embodied engagement, which in turn enables the maker to *see* the potential in tools,

materials and processes (Merleau-Ponty (1945, 2012) – or, as Gibson (1979) would have it, their affordances – and, in time, enables the maker to try out new ideas, armed with greater understanding of the potential both before them, in the form of the objects of their craft, and within them, in their embodied knowledge.

In responding to my research questions, in particular the question which asks about how people learn tools and materials, it is important to consider the tactile, embodied experience of functioning within the fields of material and social relations of the making space. In an account of a particularly intense session as an apprentice at a glassblowing studio, O'Connor (2016) describes a moment of realisation that she has sweated so much and become so covered by glass dust that in the heat of becoming a glassblower she has also begun to vitrify, to become glassy; at this point of reflection when she has left the studio for the day, leaving behind the team, tools and materials with whom she has been so extensively engaged for the previous several hours, she is able to become aware once again of herself as an individual. Through observing the fusion of material, environment and process in the glass crystals she rinses off in the shower, she realises that she cannot shake off her relationship with the all-pervading heat of the studio, and with it the connection with the field of relations. Within my research it is this tension between participants, space, and material engagement that I intend to draw out, on two fronts – firstly, that while I may be making in a shared space with others, I take my experience away with me at the end of the session and that it carries on as semi-alienated engagement with the field of relations, and secondly, arguably more significantly, that in my own research in these spaces, processes might at times be collaborative but that for the most part, practitioners work not together but *alongside* one another, connected as part of a community of practice but

ultimately alone. I will discuss this notion of working within a community of practice further in the literature review chapter on Making Connections.

Knott (2015) notes that amateur craft can also exist as an absence, with characteristics including invisibility, privacy and submission. In considering the experience of functioning within the social world of the shared space, I must also consider the ways in which the lone maker – whether working in isolation in the shared space or in a separate space altogether, as at home – might come to know, feeling their way through material engagement without recourse to the social relations (and potential bolstering) of the shared space. Ingold suggests that ‘submission leads, mastery follows’ (Ingold, 2015, p. 138), in which submission implies a necessity to concede to materials and to be vulnerable in the process of developing skills; for the amateur craftsman, this can offer an opportunity to turn away from the world, drawing the gaze inward to attend to activities that are entirely self-focused.

The spectacle of making

In considering the embodied experience of *making visible*, there is a counterpoint whereby we come to understand aspects of the making process by watching others at work. This might be through operating in a shared space, by watching instructional videos or even via written instructions. Lehmann (2012) suggests that observing the making process offers elements such as kinaesthetic identification with the process – that is, by watching others we can imagine the experience for ourselves – and a display function that can both reveal and conceal aspects of the process. There is little in the literature specifically about the process of making visible within the craft space, for instance the moment termed ‘the reveal’ in printmaking, where the print emerges

from the press for the first time (Danek, 2020), or the point where a kiln is opened after firing and the potter first sees their object transformed from pliable to fixed state. We can consider the embodied experience of making as being performed, as described earlier in Ingold's (2014) notion of undertaking a series of actions in 'following the materials'. However, we can also consider the experience of making in a group situation as a form of performance. For instance, O'Connor (2006) describes 'unnecessary, but persistently present, "performance anxiety"' (p. 185) when developing glassblowing skills as a relative novice in a mixed ability class. This is of particular relevance in considering the novice maker trying to pass as competent, as, for example, at moments of error when the performance of identity is disrupted (Goffman, 1959). The novice maker, who hasn't yet been able to combine the materials in front of them with tacit knowledge of the actions that must be performed, might here rely on mimetic learning – that is, watching others and imitating their actions - as a way of passing (Bachelard (1971) cited in O'Connor (2007)) – though this brings its own risks, as the novice compares their work with that of more experienced workshop users (Gauntlett, 2018, pp. 195-6).

The learning that takes place when sharing space does not always require the mimetic relationship between master and apprentice in which the apprentice learns by attempting to replicate the master's movements (Gowlland, 2019), or through verbal explanation of the task, accompanied by a demonstration to a group of learners (Marchand, 2010); in observing the gestures of fellow participants in an informal space, the maker can also absorb and apply refinements to their own practice: 'The momentary raising of the shoulders can serve as a voiceless cue to another person to step back, doubt, or at least think about what he or she is doing' (Sennett, 2012, p.

208). Sennett goes on to qualify that this does not just apply to the beginner, but can also act as a sign to others that the more experienced practitioner is certain of their habituated actions. Tacit knowledge is thus transferred through gesture, corrective direction and bodily sensation, which all relies on observing and experiencing alongside other makers (Collins, 2018).

Various literature explores the experience of watching making as mediated through a camera lens (e.g. Lehmann (2012) , Gowlland (2015), Marchand (2015)); considering this aspect is useful both as an ethnographic exercise, in considering the method of observing and documenting physical processes, but also, more pertinent to the literature review, in reflecting on how craft is performed and how the observer experiences this. In considering ways in which we can analyse and understand craft processes, Marchand (2015) suggests that ‘visual representation is arguably vital in studies of craft and craftsmanship’ (p. 309), arguing that it is the only way to fully absorb the complexity of processes and interactions taking place during craft activities between person, tool and material. While my research does not focus specifically on using video as a way of observing craft, in drawing from studies of this approach I am able to consider some of the affordances offered by this observational tool. For instance, we can think about video as offering a literal and metaphorical lens through which to consider processes but also as a way of passively experiencing the process before trying it for ourselves (e.g. Kirk (2014)) This links to ideas about craft participation as a reflective, meditative act (Adamson, 2019), in which through reflection we can reveal new knowledge about tactile processes, where habit delivered through the hands and undertaken unconsciously might otherwise preclude interrogation (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 2012); reflecting on these slow processes can

reveal insights about tactile work that are overlooked during mechanised processes. This distortion of time might be seen in a process video, such as those shared on YouTube or Instagram, in which aspects of the process can be either exposed or concealed via careful framing and editing; the craftsperson – or videographer – can thus shape the narrative to tell their story. If we are viewing craft production through this mediated perspective, we have no way of knowing whether we are watching an edited view, where mistakes are easily masked (Lehmann, 2012), in contrast to being present at an expert's display or when we are participating in the activity alongside others, where the activity is very much on display (e.g. Marchand (2008) on apprenticeships).

In observing our actions from an objective position, as when using a camera, we are able to separate the processes from ourselves; we can effectively become disembodied. This process is used as a mode of understanding and refining movements, as when Kouhia (2015) records herself knitting in what she terms an autoethnography, in order to reflect on her experience, in an action that is as significant for her research as the making that it records; similarly, using visual technology to record action allows the researcher to speed up, slow down, replay recordings in order to analyse and interrogate behaviour (as in the case of Andersson and Johanssen (2017) when observing a classroom of school pupils learning craft skills). Taken from this perspective, the camera acts as witness to the act of making, in particular the fine motor movements and bodily positions of hand craft, which can then be observed in a similar way to how a sportsperson's movements might be filmed and scrutinised in order to improve performance.

Conclusion

In this section I have considered the ways in which we 'come to know' craft skills, through engaging with and manipulating materials, and also through observing craft processes whether directly or mediated via recordings. The most significant areas for investigation within my findings include an uncertainty, highlighted by Aktaş & Mäkelä (2019) in relation to the Ingoldian notion of 'following the materials' (Ingold, 2018), around whether the material directs the maker or vice versa. Ideas drawn from education literature on strategic learning and, particularly, the notion of Threshold Concepts, are currently underrepresented in literature focusing on informal craft learning. My project offers opportunity to draw out a role for strategic learning, whereby the learner seeks out pieces of learning as related to their aims rather than acquiring a wider foundational education, and there is also scope to consider those eureka moments in the learning process via the lens of threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2005), which has hitherto only been applied in formal education contexts.

While various studies exist that explore how makers develop skill through learning the ways of tools and materials, the literature gap offers an opportunity for me to focus on the processes of negotiation between person, tool and material, particularly at novice level, in understanding how this knowledge becomes, if not entirely tacit, then at least familiar to the practitioner. There is also seemingly little existing focus on interactions and observations within craft groups where work is made visible in front of others; instead, even in research taking place within these contexts, the focus of attention rests more heavily on the mediated gaze of the practitioner-researcher. In investigating these areas, I address all four of the research questions, from how makers learn

alongside one another, how people learn tools and materials, the movement from instruction to creative experimentation, and the role played by the facilities in this experience. I will consider these aspects within the context of creative development in the next section.

Making Mess

Introduction

It might seem strange to locate making a mess, and making mistakes, so centrally within the experience of making things; after all, for many amateur makers, there is a huge sense of pride in working through a process to create a finished craft object (Alfody, 2015). However, in this chapter I explore how it is often in the undoing that we are able to better understand the process of learning through making, and are thus able to make progress (Rosner & Fox, 2016; Stalp & Winge, 2017). My third research question asks how the novice maker progresses from relying on instruction to being able to experiment creatively; this section investigates the development of skill, the experiments and the stumblings that occur along the path towards both creative competence and confidence.

My research does not focus on the processes that will lead to the apprentice becoming a master craftsman, able to forge a career from a particular skill; rather, it focuses on the experience of the newcomer as they accrue embodied experience while getting to grips with what might be entirely new skills and materials, whether at home or in a new space. We can think of these first steps as a form of play, taking place within a prescribed space (Huizinga, 1949, 2016), in which external selves are parked at the door. If we think about the dedicated making space as akin to Foucault's 'heterotopia' (1984, p. 4) (or *other space*) as discussed in the earlier Literature Review section on Making Space, we can conjure a sense that here, anything is possible, vulnerability is accepted, and participants' lack of familiarity with materials offers opportunities to experiment with few consequences, should ideas fail (Rosner & Fox, 2016). However,

as described in the earlier chapter, not all spaces are created equal – the options available to the maker appropriating space within the home are likely to differ significantly from what is on offer in a dedicated shared making space. In this chapter I investigate the role of play, trying things out, and failing as a way of learning, both in informal making settings and at home.

The process of developing craft skills

Several accounts exist within craft literature of inexperienced practitioners fumbling the production of their creations, because they do not yet have the ability to precisely control outcomes (see, for instance, O'Connor, 2007; Atkinson, 2013). The beginner might be attracted to a particular craft through a desire to create a particular object, for instance being able to make a wheel-thrown pottery bowl, and it is easy to underestimate the complexities of producing what is ostensibly a simple object. For instance, at an early stage of a three-year apprenticeship in a community glassblowing studio, O'Connor (2007) sets out to make a glass goblet and is disappointed to realise that she has instead produced what she describes as a 'globlet'. The frustration she experiences echoes a wider perception of craft learning as a linear process whereby the practitioner accrues skills and is then able to produce the object (see, for example, Leach's *Potter's Book* (1940), which offered a skills development template for studio potters and is still held in high regard today). This elegant linear perception of an arc of skill as presented by Dreyfus (2004), where the practitioner moves from novice through to expert, is disrupted by Brown (2021), who, in researching the process of developing hand-thrown ceramics skills, observes how as her skill develops, there is frequently a need to double back to earlier stages in the 'skill arc' to re-examine earlier

perceptions. The adage often applied in informal PhD discussion applies here: ‘the more you know, the less you know’; Brown demonstrates that this is a process of constant revision and refinement, in which the accrual of experience enables the practitioner to become more attuned to spotting errors in both process and understanding. The more experienced practitioner, who knows that tools, materials and distractions all offer potential to disrupt this journey, is arguably more able to recognise these errors as useful aspects of the process, rather than mere frustrations ascribable to ineptitude. For instance, the professional woodworker Peter Korn (2013) describes turning table legs and having to make seven in order to end up with four suitable for the table: ‘A moment’s inattention, an unpractised (*sic*) hand, and my skew chisel was shedding splinters faster than I could react’ (p. 121). Here we see an example of how risk can become very finely focused: the experienced craftsperson is familiar with the context but the scale of risk for him has been refined to take place at a very specific moment within the making process. Similarly, Gates (2016), another experienced furniture-maker, deliberately invites risk into his woodworking processes in order to disrupt his practice and create space for improvisation; in my research, however, the amateur practitioner is likely to lack sufficient control to be able to manage risk so intentionally, and instead must navigate the pleasures and disappointments of unanticipated outcomes (Marchand, 2016).

The idea that the handmade cannot escape the mark of its maker has a long tradition in craft literature; for instance, Ruskin (1853) associates the use of mechanised processes with a dehumanizing aspect, despite the ability of these machines to create objects of consistent quality, at scale, and instead calls for a resurgence in hand craft with all its potential for imperfection. Pye (1968) draws on this thread in a

consideration of what he terms the workmanship of certainty and of risk, in which the machine-made object is produced through automated processes, thus assuring a certain quality and similarity – the workmanship of certainty - but that in creating by hand, we risk at any moment ruining the object we have been working on – thus, the workmanship of risk. The possibility of creating a unique object brings with it the constant risk of producing flawed work, even for the competent practitioner, and risk can emerge in many forms. As the maker's concentration is disrupted, distractions can present risks: while sawing a piece of wood, the maker becomes conscious of the saw doing the work, rather than focusing on the cut that the saw is making, and there is potential for error (Ingold (2011), Gates (2016)). Similarly, in a paper on learning to throw pots while blindfolded as a way of exploring sensory aspects of skilful making, Groth, Makela and Seitamaa-Hakkarainen (2013) describe how they encounter problems in the throwing process at moments when they feel less confident in their tactile processes; their emotional uncertainty leads to physical wobbles and ruined pots. The risk can therefore be seen to be present even when material and environmental factors are under control.

Developing new craft skills is not so simple as starting from a position of complete ignorance and, through repeated practice, following a linear path of accruing sufficient knowledge and skill to become an expert. It can be more accurately likened to what Ingold (2018) terms 'wayfinding', in which the practitioner is engaged in a form of 'correspondence' with the practice: to extend the journeying metaphor, we 'feel our way forward, both following a trail and relaying it as we go' (p. 160). We also follow false paths and backtrack as we move towards mastery (Brown, Greig, Ferraro, 2017; Patchett & Mann, 2018). At the early stages of learning, improvement is not an

assured outcome: as Patchett and Mann (2018) observe, incidents, accidents and disruptions to the field of relations can all impede progress in the moment (but might offer longer-term opportunities). As Tanggaard (2016) observes, 'it is in and through making that insights emerge, are detected, fail, or lead to new developments' (p. 33). It is difficult to anticipate and understand all the errors we might make until we begin to make those errors, getting our hands dirty in the process; as with so many processes in which engagement with material is the only way to reveal the solution to a problem, this necessity to sit with uncertainty corresponds with Dewey's (1925) observations that we accrue knowledge through practical action; Tanggaard (2016) shares the artist Olafur Eliasson's observation that ideas are embodied in practical work in the world, and we not only reveal these ideas but also develop them through employing sociomaterial processes of engagement – that is, drawing on the relationship between social practices and materiality in a particular environment. The learning happens through engagement with(in) a field of relations.

As discussed in the previous section on Making Known, a key affordance of the formalised making environment is that it offers the learner the opportunity to participate in this field of relations, including receiving instruction from more experienced practitioners, be they tutors or fellow users of the space, rather than relying on trial and error alone to learn new skills and solve problems. However, a question arises about the extent to which this offers an affordance or a constraint, in enabling the maker to develop confidence, or serving to inhibit their ability to take risks. I will be exploring this notion of experimentation further in the third findings chapter. Gowlland (2015) uses an experience of developing a relationship with a mentor when throwing ceramic pots to argue for these hierarchical social relations as a

key aspect of the learning experience; Marchand (2010) describes how a fine woodworking apprenticeship enables learners to parse physical practices from more experienced practitioners, incorporating this mimicked expertise into their own lexicon of gestures; Patchett (2016) works directly alongside an expert who directs her every move, urging her on at moments of hesitation as she manipulates the body of a bird in the pursuit of taxidermy skills. In all of these examples, the less experienced practitioner is guided through demonstration from a more experienced practitioner, on hand to steer the newcomer away from errors obvious to the old hand but to which the newcomer is largely oblivious. Despite this watchful presence, the supervisor can only help to guide the learner; there is no way round the need for hands-on practice. Ingold (2018) suggests that the only way to progress towards competence is through *submitting* to tools and materials – where the novice, who does not yet understand the refined touch required when throwing a pot on the wheel, might be told to ‘let the tool do the work’ instead of applying brute force. We can consider that this submission is not just applied to the tactile sensation of using tools to manipulate materials, but about learning the sensibilities, potential and limitation of tools and materials so that we begin to have a feel for what is happening to the clay beneath our fingers, or how to best roll out ink on a piece of lino, to the point where it is no longer necessary for this to be a conscious thought; it becomes assimilated. Patchett & Mann (2018) build on this notion in considering how the body and mind are inseparable in this aspect, as the craftsperson is constantly responding to the material manually as well as mentally. Pallasmaa (2009) refers to this as the ‘thinking hand’, in which the hand becomes the main point of articulation, not so much following the mind’s work as leading the way. For the beginner, though, this is the challenge: not so much of getting the hand to

deliver the mind's thought, but in accruing sufficient embodied experience to permit the hand to become the point of engagement and response (Patchett & Mann, 2018).

For the newcomer, transferring skills from existing competences into a new area can also bring new insights, as when Banfield's (2017) novice painter suggests a technique revealed by accident that she can then share as a new process for an established amateur painter within her group; the new participant is not yet aware of the rules of engagement, for instance, particular ways of mixing paint, and so in this instance is able to effectively transgress with impunity. Knott (2015) observes that,

amateurs have their own convoluted, inefficient and superfluous processes of production that reflect their subjectivity and freedom from the obligation to produce a defined output (p. 86)

In starting to engage with the materials, tools and processes of craft, the maker is able to reject – and, in cases like Banfield's, disobey - the constraints of the mass-produced world in which they perform the role of consumer, shifting, even if only temporarily, to the role of producer or inventor, and thus enacting their own agency upon the world (Campbell, 2005; Knott, 2015)).

The role of uncertainty within the making process is also explored by Pallasmaa (2009) in reflecting on the skills that develop over time as the practitioner learns to trust the process:

Through a growing capacity to tolerate uncertainty, vagueness, lack of definition and precision, momentary illogic and open-endedness, one gradually learns the skill of co-operating with one's work, and allowing the work to make its suggestions and take its own unexpected turns and moves. Instead of

dictating a thought, the thinking process turns into an act of waiting, listening, collaboration and dialogue” (p. 111)

Ott also notes what he terms the ‘contingency’ of making processes within a cordwainers’ workshop: ‘There is no single right way of doing things. The workshop is a place of carefully managed predicaments, where the optimal course of action is dependent (contingent) on internal and external situations...’ (Ott, 2018, p. 197). The confidence to go along with this vagueness is, however, very much the territory of the more experienced practitioner, and such fluidity might be inconceivable to the novice, for whom structure offers a form of scaffolding (Marchand, 2016). The reader will note that I here contradict my suggestion earlier in the chapter that the novice is not yet constrained by knowledge of the rules of engagement: I intend to explore this tension between learning the rules, and not yet being constrained by them, within my Findings chapters.

The beginner can become discouraged by the failure to marry up the vision in their mind’s eye with the finished creation in front of them, in all its spectacular failings; every error is writ large (Pallasmaa, 2009). Here, the problem is arguably exacerbated by the expectations borne of familiarity with mass-manufactured goods (created through Pye’s (1968) ‘workmanship of certainty’, where each item is uniform in appearance and quality): Twigger Holroyd (2017) describes how novice knitters buy yarn, follow patterns, create garments, but end up making items that they consider disappointing and unwearable in comparison to either shop-bought garments or the visions in their minds’ eye, in which the hand making offers a route to a form of knitwear utopia. Adorno notes of the work created by these novices that it is ‘superfluous’, and that it is this superfluousness that reinforces the inferiority of the

product and thus the pleasure taken in its creation (Adorno, 1969, 1991) – this somewhat brutal observation offers little kindness towards the enthusiastic but not-yet-competent beginner, nor motivation to continue in the hope of improvement. These disappointments and frustrations at this stage of making practices are, perhaps unsurprisingly, noticeably underrepresented in craft literature; these are not the handmade objects that become heirlooms, but rather, the items passed on to polite relatives or deliberately not collected at the end of a course. The production of elegant objects is not the only motivation for participation, though, as noted in the earlier chapter on Making Time; for some, the pleasure lies purely in the process (Dissanayake, 1994). I will reflect further on the experience of making items whose production might offer more satisfaction than the final outcome, as I unpack and consider the findings from my fieldwork in subsequent chapters.

It is not always easy to embark on the making process with an open mind, to see what will happen; the maker might be trying to make a particular garment or create a particular ceramic object, for instance, and will have an end goal in mind. However, as described above, even for simple tasks the path is not always clear: the dressmaker might misplace pins or sew the wrong pieces together, while the potter could ruin a perfectly structured piece with problematic glazing. It is in the finely balanced tension between frustration and satisfaction that much of the pleasure of amateur making lies, in overcoming obstacles and solving problems to achieve the desired outcome (Alfody, 2015; Gauntlett, 2018). Stalp and Winge (2017) argue that failure is a vital part of the handcrafting process, but their reflections are limited to knitting, where mistakes can be unravelled and resolved with little material consequence, unlike, for instance, woodwork, where the maxim of ‘measure twice, cut once’ must be employed to avoid

mistakes that cannot be so easily rectified. With sewing, stitches can be unpicked, but fabric cut incorrectly cannot be re-cut; while the visible mending movement openly displays the resolution of what we might consider failures (whether that be, for instance, elbows of a garment worn out through overuse, or holes created by peckish moths), Twigger Holroyd (2017) suggests that while we might wear our mended garments and our homemade attire with pride, knowing that we have engaged with material processes and thus imprinted our selves on our garments, there remains a tension in wearing items that are perceived as ‘imperfect’, with all their attendant connotations of being ‘wonky and somehow a bit crap,’ (Twigger Holroyd, 2017, p. 96) as one of her participants puts it. The desire to make the homemade seem polished to the standard of the mass-manufactured sits awkwardly at odds with the ethos of choosing to make by hand, and thus to inevitably display the mark of that maker’s hand, in the first place.

Experimentation through play

If the maker is obliged to acknowledge error and failure as key parts of the learning journey, how might this awareness be built into the process? In learning how to work with these processes, and, in starting to subvert established rules, there is potential for the maker to introduce improvisatory and playful aspects, as I explore in this section. Regardless of the skill level of the maker, craft processes demand that there are, of course, still rules that must be adhered to, both materially and, when working in shared contexts, socially. These might relate to the order of procedures when making work – from the detailed, such as Heidegger’s consideration of ‘tool order’ (1962) or O’Connor’s accounts of the glassblowing process (2007, 2016)), through to larger-scale

concerns around how a communal workshop space is navigated (Sennett, 2012; Ott, 2018). Dewey (in Juelsbo (2016)) uses the example of a game of football to consider the importance of rules in play, acknowledging that these rules can also take the form of material constraints; these can offer a framework within which the activity can take place, within whose boundaries the practitioner can perhaps exploit limitations. The player can, of course, also manipulate the rules, creating potential for improvisation (Sicart, 2014). This research focuses predominantly on the context of learning within an open-access making space; rules might be imposed by those running the space, as a way of maintaining order, or through the maker choosing to use a constrained approach (see Juelsbo (2016) for an example of the creative potential afforded by a photographer choosing to use only analogue equipment), for instance printmaking using only screen printing techniques, or adhering to the requirements and limitations of a shared making space in navigating the available tools, space and expertise alongside other users. My third research question asks how the maker moves from a clear process of instruction, towards creative experimentation; how might playful modes be introduced into this situation while maintaining adherence to the rules outlined above?

Caillois (1961) describes a form of play - *ilinx* - in which pleasure is derived from the participant's proximity to risk, for example when climbing a tree or spinning round in circles, where excitement is derived from the potential for failure as much as from the act itself. There is a sense of this form of play within the uncertainties of novice making, in the lack of material competence that means that failure could be just one false move away. The participants have not yet accrued sufficient knowledge of tools or

materials to be able to resolve issues as they arise, and so every stage of the process carries a certain amount of risk, treading what is sometimes a fine line between triumph and disaster (Marchand, 2016); Halberstam (2011) observes that in freeing us from constraints, acceptance of failure as an outcome can invite playfulness and a form of anarchy. This sense of playfulness, in which failure is a safe option, offers a form of freedom for the amateur maker; if, as described in the earlier section on Making Time, we consider leisure time as an escape from the obligations of work life, then this mediated form of play to be found in amateur craft, in which things can be tried out and discarded, made imperfect or unfinished, presents an obvious escape route. Huizinga (1949, 2016) suggests that one of the five essential criteria for play is that it should take place outside the confines of real life and here, in the shared workshop spaces of my research, the maker is able to experiment without significant consequence. Participants working alongside one another in a community making space, for which they have perhaps paid by the hour, have not yet had to make substantial capital purchases to equip a studio space, and they are also outside the home environment where quotidian demands can be hard to escape (Stalp, 2006). It is in these first stages of craft practice that we might first observe the sense of freedom, joy, and play that brings amateur craft close to what Knott (2015) describes as the utopian dream of unalienated labour.

Halberstam (2011) presents an argument for failure as a type of knowing, and it is in this vein that scholars such as Tanggaard (2016), Wegener (2016) Makela (2016) consider creative explorations as emergent processes that cannot fit within linear structures. We see that mistakes offer affordances in developing skills, which will

involve some forward progression but some doubling back, some sideways steps, and some rejection of established pathways in favour of experiments – all of which might come to nothing. Of this approach, Juelsbo (2016) also contends that,

This intersection between human doing and knowing represents a flexible engagement with the world, entailing open-ended processes of improvisation with the social, material and experiential resources at hand. (p. 139)

Within an amateur making context, this improvisation is therefore not simply about experimenting with materials; it is about the whole experience. The site, the time spent, the presence (or absence) of others – all can influence the process and outcomes. Hallam and Ingold (2007) extend this belief with their argument that creative improvisation is part of becoming and of forming one's creative identity; we can extend this to consider whether, through engaging with making processes, we are also (re)making ourselves. While Korn, writing as a long-established master woodworker, observes that 'For a craftsman [sic], making is a lifelong project of self-construction and self-determination' (Korn, 2013, p. 67), I consider that this process starts long before the maker is prepared to declare him or herself a craftsperson, and instead begins with the choice to use some free time in trying out a new craft skill, as for the novice makers of my research. This notion of informal experimentation is embedded into some spaces at the outset: the notion of *tinkering*, in which the maker dismantles things, explores them, and reassembles them in new ways, is commonly used in hackerspaces (Davies, 2017) or, as they are sometimes termed, 'tinkerlabs' (Wilkinson & Petrich, 2014): this terminology implies that an invitation has been extended, through the facilities, for the maker to experiment, without commitment to a particular outcome (see also Gauntlett (2018)). By establishing the possibility of

making as *testing out*, and through focusing on processes rather than outcomes, an opportunity also opens up to experiment with new ways of being.

For the newcomer to making, there is no obligation to be creating anything in particular; however, Jackson's (2010) more experienced practitioners have moved on to the stage of skill development where they are no longer making purely for themselves but instead exist in a pro-am hybrid space of supplying finished products to others, while retaining their amateur status through a stubborn resistance to making their craft activities into a full-time income stream; in this sense they can be said to inhabit a form of liminal part-commodified space, while still retaining a hobbyist identity. These people are highly efficient, established practitioners, and are thus much further along the skill spectrum than the novice makers whose experience of amateur craft is considered in this thesis, where first steps are taken and there is no expectation even of proficiency, let alone saleable outputs. Jackson's makers inhabit the world of serious leisure described by Stebbins (2001), in which participants are highly experienced, often to the level of professional practitioners, and for whom success is more assured, but for whom the risks and pleasures of unfettered play are no longer as easily attainable. This is relevant in thinking about notions of error and its resolution, as Korn (2013) notes that for the more experienced maker, failure shifts to a different stage in the process; while the maker has a more expansive toolbox of skills (Crawford, 2009) and their decision-making has elevated significantly from rudimentary questions about basic issues of material handling and tool use, the mistakes that create problems are, at this stage, likely to require more complex or innovative solutions. The interaction between maker, tool and material will produce glitches at every stage of the arc of skill

development (Dreyfus, 2004), but the skills being developed include gradual refinement of the ability to improvise solutions.

In thinking about the use of play as an aspect of amateur making, I draw on Woodyer's sense that play offers a way to be otherwise (Woodyer, 2012). When Sicart (2014) claims that, 'play is being in the world, through objects, toward others' (p. 18), there is a parallel to be drawn with Tanggaard's sociomateriality of creativity (Tanggaard, 2012) in the connection of these three aspects – the human connection, the material engagement and the aspect of play, or creativity, in which the potential for action lies. If Sicart is suggesting that play offers a route to heightened engagement, Caillois suggests, through his conceptions of *ludus* (the structure of playing), and *paidia* (the freedom to play and to privilege improvisatory actions), play as a way of pretending or performing the behaviour of others. Woodyer extends this through the notion of play not only as individual behaviour but also as an attitude: that is, being playful. This sense in which playful approaches offer opportunities for alternative ways of being in the world, or trying on a new self, links clearly to the various conceptions of the making space as a space in which to be *otherwise*, as described in the previous Literature Review chapters on Making Space and Making Time. These theories of the potential for being otherwise can be used in the context of thinking about both the *space* in which amateur craft takes place, and, more pertinently to this particular chapter, the *experience* of undertaking amateur craft; this conception currently exists as a gap in the literature.

Conclusion

While several scholars consider the progression that takes place from novicehood to competence in craft practice, (e.g. O'Connor, 2007; Marchand, 2008) there is currently little focus on the fumbling incompetence of the beginner. Patchett (2016) and Straughan (2018) both describe processes of learning alongside more competent practitioners as they navigate the intricacies of taxidermy; while their studies use experiences of embodied material engagement to consider trajectories of skill, they are, however, more attentive to geographies of practice than is the focus of this research, on developing tool use or creative expression. My work aims to extend this existing literature through a focus on the inevitably messy early stages of creative engagement particularly in the shared making environment, specifically considering the first stages of enskilment through embodied engagement with previously unfamiliar tools and processes.

In this section I have considered the messier side of embarking on amateur craft practice – the uncertainties, errors and experimentation that occurs as inexperienced makers accrue skills and experience. One of the conclusions that can be drawn relates to the tension encountered by the novice as they waver between not knowing the rules of engagement, and conversely, not being constrained by these rules. This links to ideas about how the making process can offer the maker opportunities for what we can consider as play, or as Tanggaard terms it 'fooling around' (Tanggaard, 2014), finding ways forward through improvisation with tools and materials. I intend to make this tension explicit within my findings through responding to the research question which asks how the maker moves from instruction to creative experimentation. The chapter also draws attention to another aspect of play, namely Woodyer's (2012)

conception of it as 'a way to be otherwise'; this links to ideas presented in the earlier section on Making Space, and offers rich scope for thinking of the making space through this lens.

I now move on to examining literature relating to the key final aspect of undertaking craft activity in the shared making space: the experience of working with, and alongside, other people.

Making Connections

Introduction

There has been much recent interest from across several academic disciplines in the ways in which we connect through making, most notably from sociology (e.g. Sennett, 2012; Gauntlett, 2018); cultural geography (Shercliff, 2015; Collins, 2018; Gibson, 2019), and cultural policy (64 Million Artists, 2020; Creative Lives, 2022), and in wider conversations around everyday creativity (The Audience Agency, 2023), as discussed in the first literature review chapter on Making Space. The activity within area of research is sometimes termed *social making*, as used by Gauntlett (2018) amongst others; the act of coming together physically or virtually to hang out with like-minded people, engaging in creative work with no specific conclusion, is considered to be of value in its own right; for instance, in a local knitting group, ‘creativity is predicated on informality and friendship’ (Platt, 2017, p. 4). The forms that participatory making might take include the human-computer interaction of makerspaces and FabLabs, via Men’s Sheds spaces designed to address social isolation among older men, through to community knitting groups, and every instance of people coming together in between; online initiatives include the *January Challenge* from 64 Million Artists (2020), where participants responding to a daily creative prompt are encouraged to share their output on social media. For my research questions, however, my main focus is on thinking about how people learn alongside one another, and about the role played by open access making spaces in facilitating this activity. What does making with – or rather, *alongside* – others, in a dedicated space, bring to the experience of making?

In considering the role played by open access making facilities in people's development, it is useful to refer back to Ivan Illich's *Tools for Conviviality* (1973). Illich, writing at a time of significant economic disruption, suggests that we think about bureaucratic institutions as tools – e.g. the city council, the school, and so on – which grow from being useful institutions, or *tools*, to becoming instruments of oppression. Illich develops ideas from Ruskin and William Morris when he challenges the constraints of late-stage capitalism and demands opportunities for joyful self-expression; the continuation of this approach can be seen in contemporary amateur and community craft activities where personal subjectivities and human agency are foregrounded (Hackney, Maughan, Desmarais, 2016). What Illich calls for are what he terms 'convivial tools', affording individual agency – those tools including, in this case, the open-access making facility. These spaces afford opportunities for individual makers, and, in theory, constraints relate only to navigating the shared space, rather than placing limitations on the nature of users' production; I will explore the accuracy of this suggestion in subsequent chapters based on my findings. In these spaces, while there are opportunities for collaboration, users can work independently of one another, adopting a position *alongside* others rather than *with* others (Sleigh, Stewart, Stokes, 2015). This key distinction (*alongside/with*) forms another key aspect of my research into the experience of using such spaces, and will also be explored in discussion of my findings.

Making together

The open access making space can be said to offer a community of practice for craft activity, with participants entering either as novices or as outsiders, moving towards a

more consolidated role within the space as their engagement increases (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Gibson, 2019). Participants are united by a common interest within the space, even if this interest is as broad as *making things* or *wanting to be aligned with a space where making things happens*. Users daunted by stepping into the existing community of practice might decide that the only way to assimilate is to participate fully, receiving informal instruction from more experienced practitioners (see, for instance, O'Connor (2006, 2007)). There is sometimes a necessity for the newcomer to prove him or herself through an initiation process, which might take the form of a particular craft challenge or some less specific form of membership ritual (Crawford, 2009); for other newcomers, the experience of trust is more about them as participants feeling settled within the space rather than being about other users trusting – and accepting – them (e.g. Smith, 2019). For amateur learners undertaking the foundational skills that provide their induction into the space, this can be considered a form of *communitas* (ibid.), in which members of a group are brought together through a rite of passage, despite a course of a few hours or days not offering a particularly extensive apprenticeship. For the user of the open access making space as considered in my research, the transition to insider status is more likely to take the form of an induction into the facilities before the participant is welcomed into the space as a fully-fledged independent user.

The theme of making as a way not only of connecting with others, but also of developing one's own identity, comes through particularly in the work of Gauntlett (2018), who observes that, 'making things is about transforming materials into something new, but it is also about transforming one's sense of self' (p. 276). If we think about Goffmann's (1959) ideas about the presentation of self in front of others as

being akin to of stepping onto a stage and performing a role, this can also be transferred to the processes of becoming part of a craft group, in particular the sense of vulnerability and exposure.

Participating in a group setting not only offers access to instruction; the opportunity to engage in friendly interaction is also significant, as part of a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53), whereby people with a shared interest improve their ability to do that thing while interacting with one another. As one learner in an informal repair workshop observes, 'People don't want certificates, they want the social aspect' (Collins, 2018, p. 184). The interactions between people whose disparate lives are united by this common interest can offer camaraderie and new insights: Straughan (2018) and partners laugh as they simultaneously recoil in horror when a squirrel carcass emerges with unexpected speed from its skin, and a group of mechanics hang around a workshop, offering sometimes facetious, sometimes helpful suggestions while Crawford (2009) works on a motorcycle. These sociable and informal interactions suggest shared creative spaces as offering the convivial tools suggested by Illich (1973), though in contrast to his interpretation of conviviality as being very specifically about tools that serve individuals, rather than managers, these sociable exchanges are more redolent of Gauntlett's interpretation that '... human beings flourish through warm, supportive, personal friendship connections' (Gauntlett, 2018, p. 164).

Alone, alongside others

Makers using an open-access space are less likely to adhere to the fixed time structures of, for instance, a knitting group; where knitters might meet once a week for a couple of hours, the format of an open access making space allows for more flexible access as

users choose (Sleigh, Stewart, Stokes, 2015). This can, however, offer a potentially curious paradox of not-making in the makerspace. Davies (2018) observes of the makerspaces in her research that some users have no intention of making anything: they are there purely to spend time in a 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1999) , outside home and work, that feels like a clubhouse. For some of the users, hanging out in a hackspace offers a certain cachet, as if by spending time in the space they will somehow 'become' a hacker. Being in the space allows them to 'try on' this identity (Goffman, 1959).

It is important to acknowledge that in certain contexts, the opportunity to engage in the act of hanging out in the making space is the most significant aspect of participation. Various recent literature frames craft activity within a wellbeing agenda, focusing on its instrumental values: craft groups encourage socially isolated people to come together (Hall & Jayne, 2016), and elsewhere, knitters connect over the internet (Mayne, 2016). Some open access making spaces exist where craft is used more specifically as an instrument for addressing social isolation, and in these spaces, lingering without necessarily participating is actively welcomed – the most visible example being Men's Sheds, an initiative originating in Australia and now spread across the UK, where older men can gather together in a space equipped for woodwork or metalwork. These spaces are ostensibly for members to make and mend things for themselves or others, but they offer the added subtext of encouraging this demographic out of isolation through making, learning and spending time alongside others (Golding, 2015). While the use of craft as a tool for wellbeing is an area of much current scholarly interest, it is not a specific focus for my study, as the spaces I will use in my research do not target these motivations.

Alone, at home

In examining how people work when making together or alongside one another, it is useful to also reflect on the flip side – the experience of making at home – as a way of better understanding what sharing space can bring. My research questions variously consider the processes involved in learning alongside others, learning how to use tools and materials, the development from instruction to experimentation, and the role played by the facilities available to the maker. For the craft practitioner working from home or simply while isolated from others, particularly the novice, the context for these questions is very different. In contrast with the rich provision of literature on the experience of making with and alongside others, significantly less scholarly interest has been paid to the experience of makers working alone, at home; Jackson (2010) ascribes this to a greater scholarly focus on extrinsic interests such as social wellbeing, rather than intrinsic motivations – the autotelic pleasures of creativity for its own sake, and, perhaps, as a deliberate choice to work alone.

In the transmission of craft skills, the idea of ‘show, don’t tell’ is useful in explaining embodied and sensory aspects of the process, so that the novice is able to imitate bodily positioning when sawing, or to recognise the sound ink makes when it is sufficiently rolled to be ready for printmaking, and the absence of others can leave the novice guessing. For makers working at home, learning their craft from books and through practice, Gibson’s claim (in support of communities of practice) that, ‘successful practical learning relies on community participation and the sharing of common values and goals. It requires constant contact with others’ (Gibson, 2019, p. 8) might seem easy to refute; however, production cannot happen in a complete void, in

that even without the physical presence of a master or at least a more experienced practitioner, the craftsperson is likely to frame their production in the context of what others are making or have made. Sennett (2009) observes the difficulty of describing in words what can be so easily expressed in watching and doing. Later, he notes how

Do-it-yourself instructions inevitably prove maddening when they fail to show the gesture required to take each step; we need to see the bodily gesture to understand the act (Sennett, 2012, p. 207).

He instead calls for what he terms ‘expressive instructions’ that bridge a gap between meandering conversation and over-concise writing. In contrast, elsewhere the notion of instructional manuals as ‘neutral’ sources of information is called into question: Knott (2015) notes of supposedly seminal texts such as Bernard Leach’s *Potter’s Book* that despite the high regard in which it is held among ceramicists, alongside the information it imparts on all aspects of pottery, it also presents a particular anti-industrial, pro-studio perspective. The inexperienced maker, following the instructions while working in isolation, cannot be expected to locate such ideological slants within a wider framework of knowledge; after all, they want to make a pot, or a jumper, or a sideboard, and the author is the seeming ‘expert’ at that thing – the *master*, to the reader’s *apprentice*, though in this case the master remains hidden behind the pages of the manual or magazine.

For the home maker in particular, and as an opportunity for global connection, the internet can open up spaces for amateur making and make hidden practices visible (Collins, 2018), though increasing virtual engagement has seen a demand for tactile interaction with physical materials (Gibson, 2019). Both Carpenter (2011) and

Gauntlett (2018) draw on the advent of user-generated content on the internet (also known as Web 2.0) to describe a move away from DIY to ways of sharing content with others, termed DIT – Do It Together. This line of thought emphasises re-skilling, hacking, and extending formats into a digital-analogue hybrid space, bringing craft skills into the present and facing towards the future. The Together aspect of the DIT movement is more focused on the fusion of digital and analogue processes than on collaborative or connective approaches between people. The coming together here is about both sharing online and the advent of FabLabs and Makerspaces, which offer space and facilities in the same way as other open access making spaces, except that here the focus is on that digital-analogue connection: there are likely to be laser cutters, 3-D printers, and so on, with a distinct emphasis on electronics (Taylor, Hurley, Connolly, 2016). Elsewhere, online spaces such as the US-based but globally-populated knitting site Ravelry, or content sharing platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and blogging sites, allow makers to share their completed products and, increasingly, to document and reveal hitherto concealed aspects of their processes (Gauntlett, 2018). While video in particular can offer indications of bodily positioning and finer detail that can help the learner, this offers only a simulacrum of sharing a physical space with others and figuring things out together.

Conclusion

In this section I have considered how makers connect with one another, at various stages along the making journey. My focus has not been on collaboration, involving activities such as communal textiles activity or amateur dramatics, where participants work together to put on a show (e.g. Gray, (2020)), not least because these activities

are about collective creative work rather than individuals focusing on their own work, alongside others. While there are opportunities to develop existing research on social capital in making spaces, or to frame my research within the current wellbeing agenda, this is not the focus of my study. The material and social experience of learning alongside others in shared making spaces is lightly represented within the existing literature, and I believe that the research in this thesis will go some way to addressing this gap.

Chapter 3: Methodology: the why and the how of the doing

Introduction

In this research I employ ethnographic methods in order to explore the embodied experience of learning craft skills alongside others in shared spaces and at home. The key methods I use include participation in – and reflection on – making activities, observation of other participants, and semi-structured interviews with participants and tutors. This chapter begins with my research questions, followed by explanation of the epistemology and ontology underpinning my decision-making. I then explain the research design, how I chose the research sites, the explanation of and reasoning behind the methods I chose to use, and examine the messy approaches I employed in analysing data.

Through developing the literature review, I found that several aspects of the experience of learning amateur craft were highly pertinent to the construction of a research methodology, the key aspect being the use of craft ethnography, and along with it the use of embodied, experiential engagement as a mode of enquiry.

Ethnography offers an established means of investigating craft processes, as seen in the work of O'Connor (2007), Marchand (2010), Atkinson (2013), and Patchett (2016) amongst others. I discuss ethnography as an aspect of my research design below. The use of embodied inquiry is a key aspect of craft ethnography, in that the ethnographers are also engaging in the processes they are observing; they encounter and explore their physical and mental interactions with tools and materials while embedded within the craft environments of their research. Elsewhere in the Literature Review, the

experience of sharing space is considered, as is working with others (and also alone). I examine the role of play and improvisation, and think about time, as spent undertaking leisure pursuits and, more directly, when engaged in making. In this way, all five sections of the literature review play their part in informing the methodology, whereby I spend time in making spaces, learning craft skills while working alongside others.

Research Questions

The research questions have been developed through a consideration of *what* is learned, *how* it is learned, and *the space* in which it is learned. The overarching research question therefore asks:

- How do people learn amateur craft skills in open access community making spaces and at home?

The sub-questions then ask:

- How do participants learn alongside one another?
- How does the amateur maker engage with tools and materials?
- What role is played by the space in facilitating practitioners' development?
- How does the individual progress from instruction towards experimentation?

The study began with the overarching question, after I identified literature that investigated the experience of using open-access making spaces (e.g. O'Connor, 2007; Sheridan, Halverson, Litts, Brahms, Jacobs-Priebe, Owens, & Rantisi, 2014; Rosner & Fox, 2016; Davies, 2017), and a small selection of recent literature on the experience of learning craft skills (e.g. Atkinson, 2013; Martin, 2016, 2021; Patchett, 2016)), but was unable to find literature that joined the two. The questions about how participants

learn alongside one another, and how the maker engages with tools and materials, led on naturally as ways of more precisely interrogating this overarching question; the first developed from reading about sociomaterial approaches to creativity (Tanggaard, 2012, 2014), in which the situated, social nature of these making spaces is brought to the fore, while the second drew on the work of material engagement thinkers such as Ingold (2014) and Malafouris (2014), who interrogate the tactile experiences of making. Following literature on various domestic and external workshop, makerspace and compromised making environments, it was important to specifically consider the significance of the space, together with its affordances and constraints, and the implications of this for the newcomer's experience of developing skills. The final question was the last to form; while much of my early reading and reflection focused on more practical aspects of the making experience, as I read more, particularly in relation to more-than-human and sociomaterially-oriented accounts of creative activity, I began to wonder when the maker might begin to veer from a carefully-laid path towards competence, in search of their own creative voice, and how this journey could be articulated.

Epistemology and ontology

In this section I explain the epistemological and ontological position from which I will be addressing the research questions. I approach this work from a social constructivist perspective – a position which states that all meaningful reality is socially constructed, and that our perception of the world is understood through our human interactions (Crotty, 2003), formed through communication with others, and shaped by

participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014). In the case of this research, this position enables me to consider multiple interpretations of the ways in which craft knowledge is transmitted via material engagement, practice, reflection, and human interaction. The notion that in craft activity we learn by doing, that is, getting our hands on the tools and the materials and feeling our way forward, connects a line from Ryle's (1949) differentiation between knowing *that* (episteme) and knowing *how* (techne), through Heidegger's (1962) notion of the 'thing in use' – that tools, for instance, are just objects, until we begin to understand them by putting them to use for a specific task – and Merleau-Ponty's observation that 'habit is... a question of knowledge in our hands, which is only given through a bodily effort and cannot be translated through an objective designation' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 2012, p. 145). It should be noted that whilst habit is not the same as craft, through training and practice we can embed this knowledge in our hands. My research will test how I develop knowledge about the world through my interactions within it and my reflections on these interactions.

The research model (described below) acknowledges that the activity under examination is not a static event, but rather, that it is live and evolving, and so must be capable of revision and development. The nature of this form of learning means that opportunities will arise that cannot be predicted at the start of the process; Carr and Gibson (2017) describe this iterative approach as being 'adaptable to the dynamics of experiential, performative or nonrepresentational geographies of place' (p. 5). In the drawing together of disparate threads of experience, using the materials that are to hand (that is, my prior knowledge and experience of amateur making, together with the inductive approach within fieldwork sites), I align myself with Brinkmann's 'abductive tool-user' (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 722), who concerns himself with reasoning

that is neither data-driven nor theory-driven, but is instead concerned with the relationship between situation and enquiry. This position allows me to follow lines of enquiry, to double back, to become entangled and to consciously embrace the uncertainty of the research process. Through working within this abductive position, by doing the research I am engaging in the process of *coming to know*.

Research design

The section on research design first makes the case for the choice of ethnography as a methodology, with important justification of why, although I use autoethnographic methods, I do not consider it to be an autoethnography. I also present the affordances and practical limitations of this approach.

In this research I use embodied methods, foregrounding personal experience to provide insights into the process of learning amateur craft skills that I believe cannot be gathered through observation of others alone (Pink, 2015; Coffey, 2018). A sensation can be described, or explained, in an interview or via observation, but it cannot be truly felt (Pink, 2015): how does it feel, in a pottery class, to hold a rubber kidney in the right hand, pressing it against a clay vessel to smooth its surface as the left hand rotates the metal turntable upon which the vessel sits? Not only to feel the tool beneath one's hand, but to observe the surface of the vessel becoming smoother, to note areas that need more work, to hold the sense of the finished object in one's mind? How does one learn this knowledge – and then how is it articulated? The primary research method is 'actually doing the thing' (Gauntlett, 2014) – participating in making activity alongside others in the spaces. This participation allows me to

experience the act of making, to understand the process of learning, and to reflect on the affordances of the space from the position of a user of that space.

Why ethnography?

Ethnography involves observing people's activities and experiences, building an understanding of a community or environment to gather insights into the ways in which people make meaning through social and material interactions (Coffey, 2018). The decision to use ethnography fits with the social constructivist ontology (discussed earlier in the chapter, in the section on ontology and epistemology), whereby knowledge is constructed in collaboration with others. Social constructivism (Creswell, 2014) posits that knowledge is created through social interactions and shared experience: an example of this is in Gibson's (1979) conception of affordances, whereby, for instance, we see an object that has three legs positioned beneath a flat surface: via exploration of the object, and through agreement with others, we decide that it offers the opportunity (the *affordance*) of sitting, but then someone demonstrates to us that we can also use it as a step, to raise ourselves higher off the ground, or some other use that we have not yet considered. The use of ethnography as a research methodology for examining the experiences of learning craft processes alongside others also offers the opportunity to observe how people share and build on existing knowledge to create conceptual artefacts, how people come to understand how we learn to work with tools in the creation of physical artefacts, and also how we can build on what we perceive to be the existing affordances of artefacts to improvise new ways of doing things. The ethnographic stance of being 'in correspondence with' (Ingold, 2014, p. 390) research subjects reflects both the embodied experience of

working with others in a craft workshop where everyone is involved with their own work but is also part of a group navigating the space, as well as the experience of the maker engaging with tools and materials.

I consider that participating alongside others provides a method of engagement with materials, fellow participants and facilities that simply being in the space does not: in learning alongside others, I am able to experience the feeling of tools in my hands, navigating the space, and engaging with the processes, in a way that provides more insights into the embodied experience of craft learning than can be derived second-hand, from observations and interviews with others. Indeed, Atkinson and Morriss (2017) observe that,

Practical competence is acquired through apprenticeship, through repetitive practice, through trial-and-error. It often depends upon personal, embodied, or experiential knowledge. (p. 328).

Being engaged in the making activity also enables me to reflect on the learning process as it happens – an ‘aha!’ moment of understanding a particular technique, or coming up with a solution to a problem, can be a highly internalised moment, invisible to others, but through experiencing this it can be noted and made explicit via field notes or later reflection, rather than remaining implicit until it is hopefully recalled in response to a specific query from outside, as would be the case if I were to remain in a purely observational role in relation to participants. Participation in the activity also offers the researcher the opportunity to reflect-in-action (Schön, 1983), and, as the research process progresses, to reflect more longitudinally on the process – I can see the development of my skills and ideas made visible.

This longitudinal aspect to participation in the research sites is supported through the ethnographic approach. As Atkinson and Morriss (2017) observe of ethnographers entering field sites, 'Adequate competence, gained through repeated interactions and encounters, allows the participant to develop a working understanding of the normal modes of interaction, some of the exceptions and surprises' (p. 328). As a researcher, it is important that the study I undertake is of sufficient duration to embed myself within a community of practice – a one-day course might offer insights into processes, and a camaraderie between participants (see, for example, Atkinson (2013)) - but the brevity of such a course is unlikely to offer the same level of insight into how people develop their practice – and into my own development - that might be observed over the duration of a multi-week course.

Is this an autoethnography?

Having explained the choice of an ethnographic methodology and described its suitability for research into embodied creative processes, I now raise the question: is this an autoethnography, and if not, why not? I centre myself and my lived experience within this research, and use reflective, reflexive methods to think about my experience – all of which suggests that this is autoethnographic (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011). However, I maintain that while I am using some autoethnographic *methods*, most notably the creation of a piece of embroidered reflective work, what I am doing is based firmly within craft ethnography, as I follow the well-trodden path set out by scholars such as O'Connor (2007), Marchand (2008), Crawford (2009), Atkinson (2013), Patchett (2016), Brown (2021), and Martin (2021) among others. Were this to be a full autoethnography, I would place more emphasis on personal reflective insights and

creative outputs, rather than locating my own embodied experience so clearly within a wider situation of observing others' activity. This wider framing functions as a form of mirror to the experiences of craft learning within my research sites, in that within the making spaces, all group participants are working in relation to one another, whether this is tacit or acknowledged. I consider that if I were to position and develop my approach as purely autoethnographic, this would limit its potential to fulfil the aims and objectives of my research.

Affordances and limitations of this approach

Many of the affordances of this approach have been outlined above, in the section asking 'Why ethnography?' Through locating oneself within the research site and experiencing the activity under examination alongside others, I am afforded insights that cannot be easily gained through alternative means. Another affordance of this approach is the opportunity to introduce uncertainty and mess (Mellor, 2001) into the process. In learning by doing (Dewey, 1925), one necessarily opens oneself up to unexpected outcomes and opportunities for the research to evolve into new directions. However, there are clear limitations of an (auto)ethnographic approach. It is important to note that the position draws criticism (Adams, Holman Jones, Ellis, 2015), most obviously in the accusation that this is an extremely narrow and highly subjective lens through which to focus on a particular research area. The work also necessarily lacks replicability.

There is an additional risk of the research becoming 'a quest for personal fulfilment on the part of the researcher' (Atkinson, 2006, p. 403). This is an understandable concern, particularly for research whose subject area can be both categorised as hobby activity,

and which in this case engages significantly with the researcher's previous experience. The tension held within this position can also lead to the opposite of what Atkinson posits, that the researcher in fact starts to become repelled by their previously-loved subject, as explored in a paper very aptly entitled *Taking the fun out of it: the spoiling effects of researching something you love* (Rossing & Scott, 2016).

The role of being both participant and researcher presents a tension, in that the researcher occupies a space of being both insider and outsider, and is potentially neither, but instead sits in a liminal space of discomfort (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Tanggaard, 2016) – struggle to be both things. Dwyer and Buckle say of the insider-outsider tension that 'This hyphen [*between the two words*] can be viewed not as a path but as a dwelling place for people. This hyphen acts as a third place, a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction' (2009, p. 60); in this way, the fluctuating location of the participant researcher can be seen to echo the uncertain space occupied by the novice maker, whose position is not yet affirmed.

Why these sites, and why these activities?

I have previously explained why I am undertaking research by 'actually doing the thing' (Gauntlett, 2014) alongside others. In this section I explain the reasoning behind my choice of activities, and the locations in which research will take place.

The research involves participating in courses, then undertaking drop-in activity, in two external sites and one domestic setting:

- 1) Learning ceramics in a space which uses arts and craft activity as a vehicle for community development (Hive Bradford: www.hivebradford.org.uk)

- 2) Learning printmaking in an artist-led open-access printmaking space (Leeds Print Workshop: www.leedsprintworkshop.org)
- 3) Making at home, specifically the experience of developing embroidery skills through creation of a daily 'stitch journal'.

Hive was initially set up as a community arts organisation, using art and craft as a vehicle for community development (Hive Bradford, 2020), with significantly discounted course fees for participants who receive low-income benefits; though the space is also used by makers with an established practice, for many participants the creative activity provides a vehicle for social engagement and wellbeing aspects. In addition to ceramics, Hive offers woodwork facilities and also offers space for fibre arts, drawing and painting, and stained glass work. In contrast, Leeds Print Workshop is an artist-led cooperative, established by and for existing printmakers; courses are a significant part of its income, which enables subsidised access for its core membership of artist printmakers. This space is dedicated to printmaking alone, though under this heading there are facilities for paper and textile screen printing, intaglio (etching) printmaking, and relief (lino and woodcut) printmaking. In considering these spaces in relation to my research questions, while it is reasonable to assume that there are likely to be similarities in the ways in which people learn tools and materials, the other three questions, about how participants learn alongside others, the ways in which participants learn to experiment, and the role played by the facilities, all offer potential for substantial variation in experience between the community-focused space and the artist-led open-access space. In choosing these particular spaces, I am able to consider comparisons between the two external spaces and the contrast between them and the experience of making at home; there is also scope to draw on contrasts between the

two external spaces, as while both offer broadly similar opportunities, namely courses and drop-in facilities, they are underpinned by subtly different ethos. Are there subtle or more overt variances in teaching styles in a community-driven space than an artist-led space? Does each space attract a different participant population? Are there different social dynamics in a multi-artform space than in a single artform space? How is the experience of developing skills alone at home different to working alongside others in a shared space? I will consider what conclusions can be drawn from *across* the spaces and *between* them.

In terms of the activities to be undertaken during the research, all three activities involve material engagement (Ingold (2014); Malafouris, (2014)) and transformation of one form into another. All three involve creative expression, and all three can be considered as craft activities (Crafts Council, 2013). I discover from taster sessions in my proposed external fieldwork sites that there are practical concerns: clay is messy; it must be used in spaces where there are both the facilities to manage wet clay throughout its journey from raw material to finished form, and to ensure that the risk of dry clay in the air is contained and suppressed, due to its links with respiratory conditions such as silicosis. Clay also requires specialist equipment such as a kiln, and perhaps a potter's wheel. For the beginner, learning in a purpose-built shared space is a sensible choice, which reinforces the decision to use Hive, the dedicated ceramics space, as a fieldwork site rather than, for instance, attempting to consider the experience of clay-based material engagement in a domestic context. With printmaking, there is again some necessity for messy space and purpose-built facilities, for instance specialist cleaning facilities to ease the process of washing silk screens for

screen printing, or specific presses for particular printing techniques. Printmaking processes such as lino printing can also be done in the home, as long as the printmaker is careful in managing printing inks, without the need for a printing press – but at home there is no technician on hand to help an inexperienced maker with technical problems, the risks involved in using inks in a home environment are significant, and while there are printing techniques that use simple equipment, the affordances such as large printing press or specialist lightboxes for screen printing are only likely to be available to the print workshop participant. There is also a history of community or activist-run print cooperatives dating back to the 1970s, underpinned by the democratising opportunity for cheap distribution of printed matter; in participating in such a space, in addition to access to facilities, the maker can feel themselves both part of a creative group and also part of a movement with a substantial sociopolitical history (Baines, 2015). With sewing, the home is traditionally where leisure sewing activity has taken place (Stalp, 2006; Parker, 2010). In the case of my research, my tools, sewing machine and materials are in this space, and the habits and routines I deploy in undertaking this activity are significantly established, which enables me to reflect on these established skills in the context of learning new skills elsewhere. Another aspect to the rationale for choosing to continue this established activity at home rather than, for instance, as part of a sewing group meeting up on a regular basis, is that this activity is familiar, solitary, and, except for when I choose to share specific aspects online, largely private. This contrast with the shared environments of the two external making spaces, whose creative activities and environments are less familiar to me, offers opportunities to consider, specifically, notions of visibility,

performance and the feelings created by the obligation (or not) to reveal one's work to others.

It is important to consider the ways in which each of my research sites is run. Alongside its courses, Hive (Hive Bradford, 2020) offers drop-in availability for its members throughout the week and in its 'Saturday Club'. These members, who have paid a nominal £10 per year membership fee and undertaken an induction into the space to cover health and safety aspects, can make work freely and will only pay for the clay they use when it is fired, on what the centre terms a *weigh-and-pay* system. From experience of using the space for a prior research project, I am aware that the space functions as much as a social space as a creative space for users, who are a mix of craft enthusiasts in search of tuition or simply facilities such as a kiln and messy space, and participants encouraged to use the space through various community development initiatives; the fees for these latter are substantially subsidised via grant funding. The dedicated drop-in sessions enable makers to drop in for an hour or two, to pursue an ongoing project or to hang out without specific intention, and the presence of a café space within the building (a kitchenette and some tables, rather than a manned café) offers the opportunity to spend time in the space without being obliged to engage in any creative activity. Hive has been open for 35 years, during which time it has refined its model to suit the needs of users, for instance moving towards running courses in the evenings and providing open access at weekends. Many users are long-term members, greeted with familiarity by staff and other users: this is a socially-driven space. Leeds Print Workshop (Leeds Print Workshop, 2023) is a relatively new printmaking space, formed in 2016, which aims to provide printmaking facilities and a

social space for established and experienced printmakers. It runs numerous (largely introductory) courses, and members can also use the facilities on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays for £3 per hour. At the time of my fieldwork (2019), the space was still refining its model; there are times when a member might be the only user of the space apart from a technician, and there is currently no equivalent of Hive's Saturday Club where printmakers know they will be working alongside others in the space. The lack of specifically defined sessions such as Hive's Saturday Club, and the need to pay by the hour, give the space a more purposeful but less socially-driven feel: if you're hanging out, you're paying for it, so you'd better make it worth it. Much preparatory printmaking activity can be undertaken outside the workshop, so those in the space are *on the clock* and less likely to have called by just to see who's around. In contrast with activity at both Hive Bradford and Leeds Print Workshop, the sewing I undertake at home is an entirely solitary activity, where I make creative choices, celebrate successes and resolve problems alone for the most part, occasionally calling a more proficient practitioner (my mum) for help, or consulting manuals or the internet to overcome particular challenges. While all three spaces provide space and facilities for making, and Hive and Leeds Print Workshop ostensibly share a similar offer of courses, facilities, and drop-in opportunities, there are substantial variations in structure and tone of the spaces. The positioning of Hive's model is structured more towards access to creative activity for all, where the activity might function purely as a vehicle for wellbeing and social cohesion; Leeds Print Workshop, meanwhile, is primarily designed to serve the needs of its committed printmaking community, with opportunities for newer makers finding themselves in a potentially uncomfortable liminal space in which they lack experiential capital; in contrast to both of these spaces, the domestic space

as a research site offers the foil of familiarity; however, the lack of opportunities for social engagement (with all the attendant affordances and complexities), and the constraints of having access to limited facilities present different challenges, particularly for the inexperienced maker. The diverse mix of these three sites therefore offers potential to interrogate both discrete and overlapping experiences, as I respond to my research questions.

Having described the research activities and locations, I now move on to defining the methods I employed to gather data, setting out the rationale for my choices.

Methods

This section discusses the methods used in my research. I describe their relevance for my research, consider their theoretical benefits and drawbacks, then explain how I used them, illustrating their affordances and limitations for my particular context. I begin with a chart that explains how the methods map to the research questions, which I then unpack below.

RQ1: How do people learn craft skills in open access community making spaces and at home?			
<i>Focus of the questions over time (from beginning, to using space independently)</i>			
→			
<i>Sub questions</i>			
RQ2: How do people learn whilst working alongside one another?	RQ3: How does engagement with tools and materials develop?	RQ4: What is the role played by the space in makers' development?	RQ5: How does the balance between training and experimentation shift in the development of a creative voice?
Methods relating to each question			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Autoethnographic participation - Participant observation - Field notes - Written reflective journal - interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes - Reflective journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes - Photographs - Participant observation - Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Autoethnographic participation - Written reflective journal - Production of material outputs through craft processes - Sketchbook
Focus of observations/recordings/notes			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Points of interaction between myself and others. - Progression through each session – what have I done? - Learning by doing - Transmission of knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sensory ethnographic considerations – e.g. how do materials feel in the hand? What is the sound made by rolled ink when it is ready to apply to a plate? What does clay smell like? - Using new tools and becoming more adept at handling them - Material engagement - Tactility of things - Development of tacit knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Navigating the space, including working alongside other people - Processes associated with the space, e.g. group activities, cleaning up, using a particular facility for a specific making task - Points of confluence in the space, e.g. areas where participants can make drinks, encounter the space outside workshop participation, or use shared tools such as a printing press or the cleaning up sink - The nature of the space – artist-led / community development / home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative process – developing ideas, observing errors and dead ends - Introduction of new ideas, materials, techniques as more knowledge is accrued over time - Autoethnographic context – considering the influence of previous creative experience - Input from tutor / other participants

(Auto)ethnographic participation and the production of material outputs

In this research I use embodied methods, foregrounding personal experience to provide insights into the process of learning amateur craft skills that I believe cannot be gathered through observation of others alone (Pink, 2015; Coffey, 2018). This method enables the researcher to focus inwards, on their own experiences of participating alongside others, rather than simply observing the participant population (Adams, Holman Jones, Ellis, 2015). While it can offer insights through the researcher experiencing the phenomenon under examination more fully, it offers a highly subjective perspective; it also requires the researcher to engage as participant while also attempting to remain sufficiently aloof to be able to capture insights, both during and after the activity. The autoethnographic aspect also requires a further level of researcher reflexivity, in committing the researcher to interrogate their own experience in relation to the research activity. Use of this method within the context of my research affords the ability to gain a fuller understanding of the experience of being a course participant and a maker, but as a strategy the complications are myriad. The participant observer treads an uncomfortable line of being neither one nor the other, always at one remove, and risks failing at both aspects; additionally, in this creative context, while in theory participation happens as a means of gathering research data, the experience of committing to learning new skills in the shared environment is daunting: what if I'm disastrous? Will this affect how other participants interact with me? Making creative work in a shared environment carries a degree of risk for any participant, even without this added layer of complexity. The intention at the outset of the fieldwork is not to seek to become highly proficient in any aspect of craft, but rather, to become what Atkinson and Morriss (2017) describe as a 'socially acceptable

incompetent' (p. 323), able to participate alongside others, and able to engage in making activity to sufficient extent that I can 'make explicit what those fully enculturated members take for granted' (ibid, p. 324). However, in using this method in my research, as per my research questions, the focus is on embodied understanding of the experience of learning rather than on becoming a skilled ceramicist or printmaker. Whether this sufficient extent means that I learn enough to be able to produce the object or print that I intended, or simply to be able to engage with processes in the space, is a decision I leave to the experience of the fieldwork, rather than establishing it as a fixed intention at the outset.

It is important to note that, as discussed in the introduction, I do not consider my research to be an autoethnography, but rather, that it is research using autoethnographic methods; as immersion in practice is a recognised method of craft ethnography (see, for example, O'Connor, 2007; Atkinson, 2013; Patchett, 2016; Brown, Greig, Ferraro, 2017), it is questionable as to whether the fieldwork methods I employed are truly autoethnographic at all, or that they are, in fact, simply ethnographic.

Participant observation

This is the foundational method of ethnographic enquiry, whereby the researcher locates her or himself among the group being researched, observing interactions between group members, in order to develop conclusions about the customs and behaviour of the group (Coffey, 2018). This method offers insights that can only be arrived at through being in situ, particularly in relation to those moments that might be

overlooked if using an information-gathering technique such as an interview, such as playful interactions between participants, challenges relating to the space such as the need to queue to use sinks, or some of the power dynamics between different participants. There is a risk of the researcher creating an intrusive presence within a community, though in the case of my research, I am participating alongside others; nevertheless, it is important that I declare my presence, state my intentions, and seek permission from other participants, who are in the space to engage in making as an informal leisure activity, and are under no obligation to accommodate my research.

Field notes

Field notes offer a way of capturing what the observer notices about the participants and environment under observation. The intention is that field notes are written up as soon as possible after leaving the field site, then developed to capture a fuller picture of the situation (Emerson, 1995, 2011). While the researcher is participating in the field site, there is a tension between observing and making notes: if the researcher is truly observing, it becomes difficult to make notes, and vice versa. An additional layer of complexity is added when participating in messy hands-on processes. I addressed this by scribbling brief memory-jogging notes while in situ, or recording a voice note as soon as I left the space, then writing up more comprehensively from these scrawled observations.

While in some circumstances the researcher might be aiming to capture the entirety of an experience, I had begun my fieldwork with some specific questions derived from the initial research design, relating to the experience of learning craft skills in the spaces; these initial enquiries developed into the research questions that drive this thesis.

Interviews

In addition to reflecting on my own experiences in the making spaces, I conducted interviews with other participants in the spaces; this was in part a way of investigating the research question about how users of a shared making space learn craft skills when working alongside others, and partly as a way of contextualising and framing my own experiences over the various courses. The interview is a key ethnographic tool, offering a means of gathering knowledge about people's experiences within the field; it sits within a range of more and less formal exchanges, including overheard comments or casual in-situ conversations with other participants (Coffey, 2018). The interview also enables the participant to present their perspective. While structured interviews involve rigidly constructed questions, and open interviews enable unstructured conversation, I used semi-structured interviews which enable the researcher to pursue avenues of enquiry as they emerge, while still facilitating some openness. While making scribbled field notes during sessions was useful for capturing some snippets of conversation during and immediately after fieldwork sessions, interviews enabled me to ask participants more specific questions (Coffey, *ibid.*). I devised a set of questions for use with participants, and a separate set for use with course tutors. The interview questions for participants focused for the most part on people's experiences of engaging in craft courses, and were thus undertaken towards the end of courses, when I had already developed a rapport with other participants (Coffey, *ibid.*). The questions I chose to ask focused predominantly on participants' experience of undertaking whichever course we were concluding, and whether they would continue to pursue the activity in future. For tutors, the questions focused more on both their wider

experiences of teaching, and on how they worked with individual course participants. Interviewees' responses were analysed in an approach that did not privilege any single aspect of the data gathering I had undertaken, which I will discuss further below. In future, if using interviews in ethnographic research, I would adopt a less structured format, allowing for more open conversation.

Photographs and video

As my fieldwork progressed, and the limitations of trying to capture observations via notetaking became increasingly apparent, the research design demanded the use of photographs as an efficient means of capturing situations while immersed in the spaces of my research: reaching for my phone's camera offered a more immediate, and complete, way of recording a moment than scrawling a note to decipher later (*Figs 1-3*). While I had asked permission of participants to take photographs, many people were more comfortable with only their hands in shot; consequently, many of the images I gathered were of my own work and processes. The photographs were used both as data to be analysed, and for illustrative purposes; in future, and following the example of ethnographers such as Harper (1987), O'Connor (2007), and Martin (2021) I would further exploit the significant scope that images offer in facilitating greater understanding of both the making processes and the wider dynamics of people interacting within and manoeuvring around the space.



Figure 1 starting a pinch pot



Figure 2 the half-formed pinch pot



Figure 3 the completed pinch pot

Making as a mode of reflection in and on action

For many craft researchers, making offers both the subject of study and a means through which the maker can reflect on the research process (e.g. Aktaş & Mäkelä, 2019; Brown, 2021). The sewing aspect of my fieldwork has involved the use of hand-stitching as a reflective mode of enquiry (Twigger Holroyd & Shercliff, 2014; Shercliff, 2014): I created what I term a stitch journal, in which I embroidered/applied a 5cm square sequentially onto a large piece of linen every day (*Fig 4*). The stitch journal, which comprised 735 entries over two years, functioned as an exercise in distilling lived experience into material form; the accrual of entries allowed me to observe the development of embroidery and applique techniques, introducing and exploring new materials and nuances as the project grew. The learnt techniques were in themselves relevant to the research in its focus on developing craft skills, but so, too, was the reflection contained within them; the interplay between the two aspects highlighted tensions and, at points, afforded insights, particularly through conversations that developed when I shared images of the stitch journal with others, in material form or online.



Figure 4: the stitch journal in February 2019

The stitch journal also offered a creative mode of reflecting on making through doing, offering the opportunity to ‘exteriorise what would normally be implicit in the making’ (Gray & Burnett, 2007, p. 22). It offered what might be considered a *craftful* approach to reflective investigation, in that I engaged in the act of sewing, incorporating the inevitable saliva, grease and skin (Rippin & Vachhani, 2018) in a manual manipulation of materials that does not privilege the written word ; instead, it offered an embodied record of the non-linear development of my research practice – sometimes progressing, sometimes falling behind, sometimes elaborate, and sometimes banal, making playful use of metaphor in my choice of imagery. The stitch journal began as an aside to the main research intention, of interrogating the experience of making in shared spaces alongside others. As explained above in the section on analysis, the cyclical way in which I approached this, through repeated interrogation and reflection, meant that more peripheral aspects of the research, such as this ‘stitch journal’, waxed and waned in their significance to the central thesis of the project. This aspect of the research has therefore remained in a liminal space whereby it offered opportunity for

reflection on the wider project, provided a form of reprieve from writing, and also helped to develop my identity as a maker observing my own creative progression (Danek, 2023).

Reflections via written journal and voicenotes

The research journal (Brown, 2021) offers a way of thinking about decisions made, and decisions to be made. While it can be used in a very structured way within a portfolio of methods, such as in healthcare research, in this instance the reflective space enabled me to unpick thoughts through writing, or capture decisions made and understandings reached about the research while at one remove from it.

In this section I have set out the methods in approximate order of their deployment within my fieldwork; however, as this research model is iterative, and thus necessarily messy (Mellor, 2001), I drew on different methods at different stages as befitted the demands of the research. Some of these demands derived from the social context of being a researcher functioning within a community – for instance the need for discretion within a class environment, which I managed through the use of rough jottings in-situ – while elsewhere, the use of voice notes or the stitch journal enabled different approaches to reflection, with the voice notes capturing an immediacy of thought while the stitch journal facilitated a necessary distance through the processes of producing material interpretation.

Ethics

In the previous section I outlined the methods I employ in the pursuit of my research, of which the primary activity is embedded fieldwork alongside other participants.

Research undertaken alongside (or with) other people, necessarily demands careful ethical navigation (Creswell, 2014). The other participants in my research are fellow participants in informal leisure activities: they might be in the making spaces to develop new skills, to develop their practice, for social or wellbeing reasons, but their primary motivations for participation are not related to helping me with my research. It is therefore important that I fully declare my dual role as both researcher and participant. While models of ethnographic research exist where the researcher remains covert, which is to say that they have not declared themselves to the population among whom they are embedded, this approach is not necessary, and indeed would not be appropriate, in the context of my research.

Having applied for and received ethical approval from the University of Leeds Arts, Humanities and Cultures Ethics Committee, I ran a pilot study over two days at Leeds Print Workshop. When this was developed into the full study, along with ethical approval, I had conversations with managers at both of my proposed field sites; here, I explained my research and sought permission from the people running each site. I introduced myself at the start of each course, explaining my research and why I was taking the approach of working among people. It was important to explain what a PhD is, rather than assuming that this was a familiar concept. I used participant consent forms to confirm that participants, including makers, tutors, and technicians, were happy with their decision to participate; the forms offered the opportunity to remain

anonymous and to withdraw from participation at any stage. If people stated that they did not want to participate, I followed this up with a conversation to confirm that for the purposes of my research, they would be effectively invisible, even though we would continue to work alongside one another in the space. I also allowed myself to be led by the needs of participants; for instance, one participant noted that the consent forms I had printed on white paper were difficult for dyslexic people to read, and suggested pale green as a more helpful option. Although the majority of participants did not express a preference for having their details pseudonymised, I have elected to do this as a way of accommodating those who *did* request this as an aspect of their participation in my research.

These ethical considerations draw out two aspects from the literature review: the notion of *permission*, from the Making Space section of the Literature Review, and a sense of the maker *performing* in the shared making space, from the Making Known section of the same chapter. In Making Space, I use the notion of *permission* to consider ways in which the making space affords the participant opportunities to do things that might be difficult outside a dedicated space, for instance making a mess, or using specific tools and processes – what I term the *permission space*. However, there is also a sense in which permission entails acknowledging rules and being ‘allowed’ to do things, and it is in this sense that my involvement in this space involves a form of conditionality, whereby through agreeing to participate in my research, the group give me a form of *de facto* permission to share the space with them, which brings with it obligations towards certain behaviours. I have declared my dual role as both participant and researcher; this has created a power imbalance in which I am observing

others as well as myself, so, while the other participants are prepared to accommodate my request, I feel a pressure to ensure that my performance does not impinge on their experiences. As an example of this, while I request permission to take photographs at the point where I explain my research and seek consent from the other participants, I find myself focusing predominantly on documenting my own work; at moments where I am keen to record other participants' activity, I seek permission verbally once again, in the moment.

If we are to think of the shared making space as a performance space, as discussed elsewhere in the thesis, then this serves to break the fourth wall, allowing other participants to engage informally with the topic of my research. However, despite having introduced my position, or declared myself at the start of each new course, I find that some participants are suspicious and continue to avoid conversation with me, even as they talk to others. However uncomfortable this might feel on a social level, I must ensure that I remain conscious of my dual role as both participant and researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), and remain sensitive to the experiences of other participants, who have signed up to the courses as they are keen to participate in a creative leisure experience, rather than to facilitate somebody else's research.

The research has been approved by the Arts, Humanities and Cultures Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the University of Leeds; an application was submitted for a pilot project in August 2018, and the approval granted at that stage was extended via email communication for the main study. These documents can be found in Appendix 3.

An entangled approach to data analysis

Even though I spend my fieldwork period reflecting on data and possible themes as I gather it, I start the post-fieldwork analysis with a high degree of trepidation. I have all sorts of data: field notes, photographs, interview transcripts, reflective observations, and artefacts produced in the field. How best to categorise them, in order to draw forth meaning? Tanggaard (2013) notes that while the inexperienced researcher might start by following what they perceive as the rules, an inevitable messiness accompanying relations and interactions obliges the researcher to dispel notions of revealing a single elegant interpretation, and to instead reach for improvisational techniques (see Hallam and Ingold (2007) for more on this). This sense of iterative messiness, in which I try various approaches, describes my experience as I work through the process of data analysis.

As is consistent with research undertaken within an ethnographic framework, I maintain a reflective approach throughout the process, from fieldwork through to analysis and writing; while much of the data analysis takes place after the conclusion of the fieldwork, I have already begun the process of reading through and reflecting as the pile of field notes began to pile up, as per Atkinson (Atkinson, 2013). The ethnographic process of immersion within a field site (or sites) is necessarily driven by ongoing data gathering and in-the-moment reflection on that data, which is one reason for writing up field notes soon after each session spent in a field site, at least in part so the researcher can carry initial observations back into the next fieldwork session (Emerson, 1995, 2011) (other reasons including the simple fact of capturing observations while they are still fresh in the mind, and what I think of as *processual*

efficiency, by which I mean doing the work as it happens rather than leaving it in a pile to be addressed later, with the attendant risk of forgetting some key detail).

The process begins with a draft of the literature review, a set of research questions, and a pile of field notes, photographs, artefacts and voice notes. The literature relating to the subject of my research is drawn from several disciplines, but as I draw the review into sections, it becomes apparent that there are five broad headings in relation to the experience of learning to make, alongside others and alone, in shared spaces and at home: space, time, the process of coming to know, the role of play and error, and connections with others. These five headings, together with their sub-headings, offer what appears to be the most logical place to start with analysing the data. I subsequently develop the literature review further in a second draft, which provides a deeper level of interrogation that both enriches the literature review itself, and again leads to further thinking and further writing, as per the abductive process of creation of an ethnography (Atkinson, 2013), in which reading, writing and reflection are entwined in a spiral of sense-making. This initial description indicates the iterative, messy nature of my analytic processes, which I will expand upon below.

I begin to feed data into the NVivo qualitative data analysis program, in order to categorise, or *code* it into a series of discrete groups; the intention behind this is to look at what I have gathered with a view to gathering it into themes, as per the strategies of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process begins with using the five headings of my Literature Review to categorise data into the areas of *making space*, *making time*, *making knowledge*, *making mess* or *making connections*, and the

sub-headings for each chapter. However, it soon becomes apparent that this broad-brush approach is not providing the granularity I am seeking – in short, the headings feel insufficiently specific to be able to see any key ideas in detail, as it feels more like there are many small moments of observation that must be threaded back together to build a whole story of the situation, rather than applying this top-down approach that hacks the data into broad chunks – to draw an analogy using craft materials, the top-down approach feels like carving from a large lump of stone, chiselling away to gradually reveal a form, whereas the more I look at the data, the more it feels like what I am seeing is mosaic tiles to be assembled into any one of a number of final forms, but which must first be sorted into tiles of similar colour and shape. I begin again, reading through every note and adding node descriptions that feel appropriate as a way of describing what I am reading. This results in a very long string of nodes in NVivo – those mosaic tiles from which I can build the assertions that will form the base of my findings chapters. The process feels laborious and uncertain; I note at one stage that ‘the one useful thing it’s done is to allow me to crawl through the data, holding pieces up to the light,’ (*research journal*, 20/08/20), or rather, that through using this tool I am once again able to review the entirety of what I have gathered, reflecting as I work my way through it. Both Atkinson (2015) and Brinkmann (2014) are very scathing about the process of coding, with Brinkmann observing that it is ‘effectively a positivist quasi-scientific attempt to reduce data to a chart of recurring words’, and Atkinson arguing that this mechanised process of feeding data into a computer goes against what ethnography should be (Atkinson, 2015). As an inexperienced ethnographic researcher, I am swayed by a naïve belief that the data will somehow behave itself and that there is some trick to finding order within it; as my frustration grows, I slowly come to realise

that there are no shortcuts, that the mess is where the richest content lies, and that Atkinson's exhortations to sit with this discomfort are borne of long experience:

... rather than a smooth transition from research design, to analysis, to theory-building, I experience much more frequently the silent cry of "How on earth do I *make* something of this?", given that my data always seem incomplete, the analysis patchy, and the ideas sketchy. (Atkinson, 2013, p. 57)

When I stare at lists of codes on a screen, and even when I have an idea of copying and pasting these lists into another program, so I can move them around into clumps in another on-screen space, there is a substantial disconnect between this and what I know to be the lived experience of engaging with craft practices, where I manually manipulate materials and am able to bring them to life in what Makela (2016) terms serendipitous processes (relating to the interaction between the maker and the materials that offer space for surprising juxtapositions and unexpected outcomes). The process of analysing the data feels increasingly removed from my experience of generating the data, and this feels significant; I am, after all, a maker, and in other contexts (such as when sewing), it is through tactile engagement with materials that I am able to find ways of making sense. I decide to print out all the headings, cut them into strips, attach them to dressmaking pins, then proceed to shuffle them round on two large pinboards (*Figs 5-6*). This is effectively the same process of analysis whereby I am seeking to make some sort of 'sense' of the lists of words by gathering them into overarching themes, but this embodied approach (Leigh & Brown, 2021) enables me to live with the data, to stare at it or glance at it without opening a program on an already-crowded computer screen. I can unpin and re-pin, and notice what might

otherwise have been discarded as insignificant, in ways that I might have missed had my content remained within the confines of the screen.

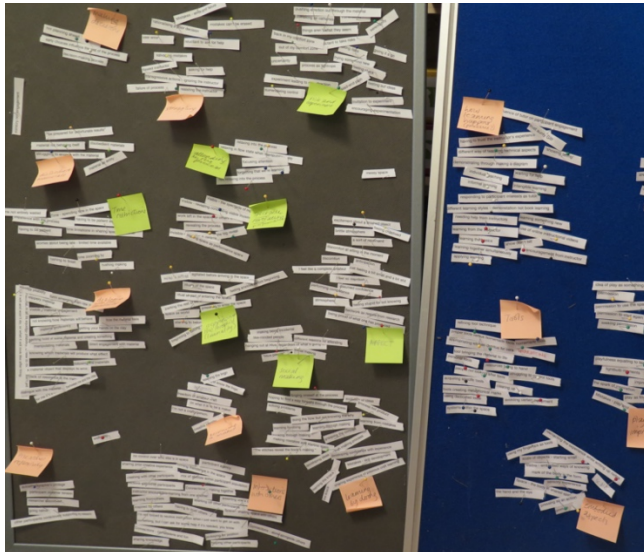


Figure 5 the pinboards full of nodes

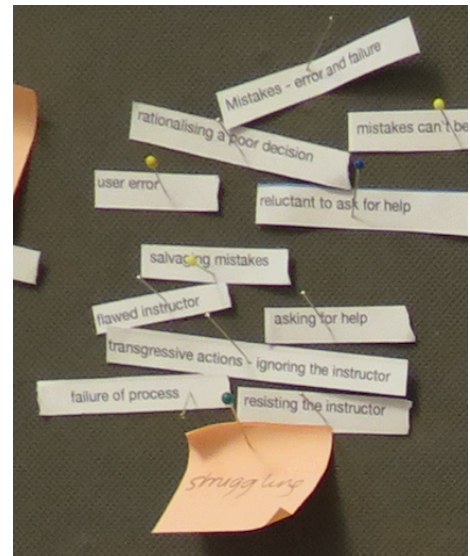


Figure 6 nodes gathered under the theme of 'struggling'

Through engaging with this embodied process of data manipulation, I find myself much closer to Brinkmann's abductive processes in which the researcher attempts to understand a situation through a process of enquiry, using sense-making concepts or theories to resolve what he (and pragmatists including Dewey) refers to as *breakdowns* in understanding (Brinkmann, 2014). The sense-making is then tested in search of a resolution to the breakdown, and on the process goes, in a manner akin to challenges presented through the experience of developing craft skills: this is a process of repeated enquiry, of testing outcomes, and of building on that knowledge, or returning to the materials (in this case the data) to resolve this query or address a new aspect of the issue.

In the Literature Review section on Making Known, I discussed how Ingold describes processes of 'following the materials' in learning craft skills, and it is in this sense that I am able to work with the data, particularly in noting moments of resistance – what he terms knots in need of untangling (Ingold, 2015) - or rather, those points of data that do not drop neatly into easily-defined categories, but which warrant further interrogation. This is a process of analysing themes but it does not adhere to Thematic Analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in that I am not attempting to identify latent and manifest themes, but rather, I am engaging in a spiralling process of 'coming to know' through coding, reading, writing, in a repeated process of untangling. This is akin to Tanggaard's theory of troubling methods (Tanggaard, 2013), in which data is explored for strings of ideas, and Brinkmann's abductive approach (Brinkmann, 2014). Through this sitting with these knots and unpicking them, for example thinking through ideas on pla as it is experienced within the making space and making process, I am able to draw forth the data that becomes the findings; however, to extend the craft analogy, the final form can only be found through stitching and then unpicking and restitching, or through moulding a form from clay, recognising that it does not fulfil its intention, folding it back into the waste bin, then starting again, this time armed with more knowledge. The experience of the novice becoming an ethnographic researcher through the process of doctoral study, of edging forwards and doubling back until the researcher has *come to know* some aspect of the research, is thereby directly comparable with the ways in which a newcomer to a particular craft engages with the often-haphazard processes of material enskilment.

As I look at my list of codes on the pinboards and sort them into thematically similar groups, for instance, *play*, or *resistance*, I find that by working back and forth and across the data, its interpretation, and its relationship with the literature, some of the knots begin to give way and I can start to thread the lines of enquiry into some sort of interwoven lines of movement, rather than static connections (after Ingold, 2015).

I initially create two Findings chapters from the themes found in the data: one focuses on the space and time of making, and the other on the experience of learning to make. However, as I write, and rewrite these chapters, something is jarring; much as the craftsman learns to follow the hunch that tells them that this piece of work will not resolve itself as they intend, and after reflecting further on the literature review and its conclusions, I find myself returning to the data once again, recategorizing it into three chapters so that I can more successfully capture the improvisatory experience and shifting creative identity of the newcomer to particular craft practices in a third chapter. The literature review thus informs the structure of the findings chapters, but to repeat it would not appropriately reflect the findings, which are not initially formed along clear lines but which must be constructed, examined, dismantled and then rebuilt in different form. Wegener describes the usefulness of allowing oneself to 'get lost in the landscape of research' (Wegener, 2016, p. 64) and to be prepared to sit with uncertainty, drawing on Lather's notions of 'lovely knowledge' and 'difficult knowledge', in which

Lovely knowledge reinforces what we think we want, while difficult knowledge includes breakdowns and learning to allow loss and feelings of lostness to become the very force of creativity. We are forced to act and think *differently*.

(Lather, 2007, p. 13)

When I revisit the literature for the second draft of the literature review, I am able to draw forth key themes relating to the non-linear processes of becoming enskilled (Brown, Greig, Ferraro, 2017; Patchett & Mann, 2017; Ingold, 2018) This back-and-forth experience of data analysis and interpretation, with its resistances and breakdowns, mirrors the messiness that embodies the experience of learning craft, with all its false starts, uncertainty, and moments in which breakthroughs are made.

Conclusion

In this section I have explained the methodology underpinning the research. I have explained how the ethnographic approach I am using links to the underpinning social constructivist epistemology, in that I am working among my research population in order to understand the social construction of the subject. I have addressed the question of whether this is an autoethnography, and have determined that it sits more accurately alongside existing examples of craft ethnography. The aspects of the methodology that are of particular significance for the findings chapters, which come next, are in the methods, specifically in my engagement within the making environment alongside others, and in what I term the entangled approach I adopt in relation to the data analysis. These messy (Mellor, 2001) processes of abductive discovery can be seen to mirror the untidy back-and-forth processes of amateur craft learning, which I explore in the next three chapters.

Findings and discussion

Introduction

Having explored the literature, I now move on to looking at the findings of my research. The Literature Review was divided into five sections, on Space, Time, (making) Known, Mess and Connections, as a way of framing my enquiry into how people learn amateur craft in open-access making spaces; as explained in the methodology chapter, in these findings chapters, I do not replicate but instead draw from across the five areas, applying insights from my fieldwork to consider how people learn alongside others (or alone), how we learn tools and materials, the role played by the facilities (whether in a dedicated making space or at home), and how we move from instruction towards creative experimentation. The route through my responses to these research questions is not always neat, but in this way, it echoes the making process, where messy edges and uncertainty are almost an inevitability.

The findings and discussion chapters are divided into three sections, which approximately relate to the processual experience of learning amateur craft within the open access making space. I begin with a chapter focusing on the space, time and social aspects of learning alongside others in such spaces; this chapter also effectively sets the scene for the next two chapters. This is followed by a chapter examining the experience of starting to develop craft skills within the spaces. The third chapter considers the experience of becoming what I term *craftful*, by which I mean the processes whereby the maker has developed some skills but must now address the

complexities of starting to develop their own creative voice through their making activities.

A who's who of research participants

The fieldwork for this research involved participating in amateur craft courses alongside other people; making observations about these people and their experiences was a key part of my research design, as a means of responding to my research question about how people learn amateur craft skills alongside others. I used participant consent forms to obtain permission from other users of the space. While most of the field site populations did not request anonymity, I have chosen to pseudonymise all participants in order to address this issue for those people who chose not to be identified by name. Of course, there are limitations to this approach, in that the field sites are clearly identified, and the staff members are recognisable, but identifying details that could easily reveal participants' identities have been removed. I provide the guide below to help the reader to understand the roles of the various participants in my research. This is not an exhaustive list of participants; rather, it is restricted to those people I have mentioned in this thesis.

n.b. I have included a more detailed list of participants, including approximate ages and genders, in Appendix 2.

Participants at Hive Bradford

Frances – ceramics tutor

Bob – ceramics tutor

Louise – tutor for one-to-one wheel-throwing course

Harriet – course participant

Paul - course participant

Nick - course participant

May - course participant

Irina – course participant

Pauline - course participant

Rebecca – course participant

Lauren – course participant

Ruth – regular user, also does courses

Karen – regular user, has a kiln at home

Brenda – regular user

Ann – regular user

Phil – regular user

Fletcher – occasional course participant and regular user

Barbara – course participant and regular user

Participants at Leeds Print Workshop

Ellen – screen printing tutor

Jane – lino printmaking tutor

Jeff – highly experienced printmaking tutor

Sian – Leeds Print Workshop cooperative member, assistant on printmaking course

Rob – Leeds Print Workshop cooperative member, duty technician during some of my drop-in sessions

Ginny – course participant

Rachel - course participant

Joy - course participant

Jim - course participant

Chapter 4: Establishing the conditions for making: space, time and social context

Introduction

My overarching research question asks how people learn amateur craft in open access making spaces, and one of the four sub-questions asks about the role played by the facilities in the maker's development. It is with these questions in mind that I begin this chapter. In the literature review I identified that the making space offers multiple affordances for the maker, from serving as a repository of both tools and knowledge (Sheridan, Halverson, Litts, Brahms, Jacobs-Priebe, Owens, & Rantisi, 2014), as a site for social interaction (Davies, 2017; Gauntlett, 2018), and as a platform for creative activity (Gauntlett, *ibid.*). In considering space (and time) as necessary resources for the maker, I focus here on how the site where making occurs functions as a world into which the maker must enter by crossing a threshold. This space is a site of creative potential, but its temporal and physical rules and boundaries constrain the maker. I investigate how the maker navigates and exploits these constraints, both when working alongside others and when working independently.

The space as world - the boundaried space and time of participation on a course

Securing dedicated space and time for leisure activities can be difficult. Some pastimes are harder to interrupt – for instance, going out for a run, or spending time in a shed with a firmly closed door (the dedicated 'project space and project time' of Jackson's (2013) committed home makers) – whereas activities without strict temporal

boundaries that might also take place in a communal space within the home, such as knitting, are more easily disrupted. Stalp (2006) suggests that these activities can also be divided along gender lines, with men more easily able to make themselves 'unavailable' to all except their leisure. The space and time offered by a dedicated making space, whether via participating in a course or when using the space on a drop-in basis, can therefore offer multiple opportunities for the maker, both in what it includes – an allocation of uninterrupted time, and access to facilities equipped for mess, for instance – and what it excludes, such as the demands of the rest of life. The space, too, affords new possibilities. It can be considered conceptually – the community making space as a site of creative potential – and in a more literal interpretation that considers the physical form it takes, as a workshop offering the maker access to production facilities. In this section I consider how this space and time is experienced in practice, in order to begin to understand the role played by making facilities in the maker's experience of learning amateur crafts.

It is useful to consider the notion of flow, as coined by Csikszentmihalyi (2002), defined as focus on an engaging task to the point where one is unaware of the passage of time, in relation to the craft practice of this research. On one hand the informal craft course, with its focus on creating in a relaxed environment, can offer an opportunity to immerse oneself in practice, setting external distractions aside for an hour or two, but conversely, the knowledge that this time is limited can cause the practitioner to remain at odds with their practice, with half an eye always on the workshop clock, watching for the end of the session. However, experience from my fieldwork indicates that even this ringfenced time is soon compromised. When I enter the making space for a session

as part of a course, I expect to have approximately two hours of making time ahead of me. Two hours sounds like plenty of time: I'm away from the distractions of home, in an environment set up exclusively for creative activity. However, I quickly realise during the first printmaking course that the time soon slips out of my hands: the tutor demonstrates the entire process to the group before we get started on making our own work, so what began as two hours quickly becomes just over an hour. This time is further eroded by the necessity of setting up our individual workspaces, queuing for equipment, and clearing up after ourselves. Within courses in the print space for example, participants' time is managed by tutors – we are given clear time allocations to complete tasks and to begin winding up our activity. But as courses progress, more of the time becomes our own, to use as we wish, with only a sudden flurry towards the end of the session as we jostle for space at the sink. Time is further constrained by the inconsistencies of materials – or, more accurately, a novice lack of comprehension of the ways in which materials do and don't dry. Each misjudgement consequently adjusts the maker's timetable for the session, with a subsequent impact on productivity, as described in the excerpt below, from my time in the ceramics workshop.

I'd hoped to be ready to apply the slip to my plate within this session, but I've underestimated once again how much time everything takes. I want this plate to be a lovely thing, rather than the slapdash efforts I seem to be turning out in the name of participating in the sessions, and so I have to take the time to tidy it up and make it as neat as my ability will permit. I'll have to come back in the week to do the slip.

Field notes, ceramics, 02/07/2019

As Lehmann (2009) observes, the material imposes temporal obligations: in the example above, I see that clay is a slow material, where drying time must be factored in between each stage of whatever process I am undertaking. There are opportunities to effectively speed up time, using a hairdryer to alter the tactility of clay, but the maker must ultimately move at the speed of the material. In a similar way, some of the inks used in the printmaking workshop are oil-based so must be left for three days to dry, even if a cobalt drying agent has been added to speed up the process. Time consequently seems to wax and wane – it races by when the work is particularly satisfying, but slows to a crawl when waiting for materials to dry so the next step can be taken, or when queuing for shared equipment such as printing presses or the single sink in the ceramics space.

In contrast to the discrete blocks of time imposed by the timetable of the making space, any creative work I undertake at home is, in theory, temporally unfettered: I could allow my making to sprawl across an afternoon, or, in contrast, could pick up some sewing in a five-minute window of free time. However, if the making space is a dedicated non-domestic space where I can go to shut out the obligations of the world, there is a clear contrast with my home, where I am not afforded the luxury of a specific ‘project space’ (Jackson, 2013) - I do not have a shed or studio to which I can retreat, and instead must navigate, or learn to filter out, the demands of other members of the household. My family are used to seeing me commandeer the valuable household territory of the dining table to cut out fabric or to use a sewing machine to stitch garments, but the daily stitch journal embroidery that I begin alongside my research makes new and different demands of both domestic time and space. The embroidery

involves commitment to a daily practice where I embroider or applique (the act of stitching pieces of fabric onto a backing, to create pictorial effects) a 5cm square on a large sheet of linen fabric, creating imagery that describes some aspect of that day (see Fig 7). In temporal terms, I must find a few minutes every day to concentrate on this task, and spatially, while one might conceive of the act of embroidering at home as a neat, contained activity requiring only a well-lit space and a small basket containing thread, a thimble and scissors, the reality for me involves an ever-expanding array of embroidery threads, and a growing pile of felt scraps that seem to spread across the living room, despite my best intentions. The stitch journal is referenced throughout the Findings chapters; for more detailed images, see <http://www.claredanek.me/stitch-journal>.



Figure 7 The embroidered daily 'stitch journal'

As the squares accrue on the piece of cloth, there is no ticking clock to watch, mindful of a meter running down (as in the printmaking space, where drop-in users are charged by the hour), but instead the demands of the household impose a different form of tariff in the form of ongoing domestic obligations (Stalp, 2006) – these might take the form of the need to clear away work so that the dining table can be used for a meal, or

to engage in conversation that disrupts my focus, because the communal domestic space is what Hawkins (2017) terms *porous*, with no tangible boundaries placed around my activities. The domestic tariff is paid in attention: what can I focus on, and what can be interrupted?

Whatever I am working on at home is inevitably mediated through and compromised by these constrained circumstances; it will begin to take on traces of its location within the household (Rippin & Vachhani, 2019), from overlooked crumbs on the table to the inevitable cat hair. The temporal and spatial bounds of the home making context prove to be elastic as the project develops, in that the work I am creating is highly portable; I can transport the tools and materials of its production easily, and so I unwittingly reinforce the transient nature of this pastime, folding it into snatched opportunities that contrast directly with the temporal and spatial commitments required of the messier activities I undertake in the ceramics and printmaking spaces. Jackson (2013) notes that dedicated making spaces (in his research, the honed home workshops of experienced makers) offer a space aside from distractions – a space that is *other* (Foucault, 1984). In siting one's making within the home, whether through choice or obligation, it is clear that Jackson's (2013) notions of the making space as clearly delineated *other* become problematic; in my research, rather than the space, it is the *maker* who remains. Here I present a new conception of the dedicated making space as a *permission space*, where the maker is enabled to exploit this spatial and temporally defined context in order to engage in creative activity; this *permission* offers a form of freedom, but as I will describe below, we begin to see that it is easily compromised by external circumstances. Not only is it *other*; it is also *extra*.

The notion of this space as its own 'world' can be experienced both physically and conceptually: During an early fieldwork session in the print space, when the group are all quietly busy with our trying out new print techniques, I note that that we are '... forgetting the world outside the windows – the world is this room and all of us in it.' (*field notes, printmaking, 25/11/2018*). The making spaces of my research share a common feature of a large central table surrounded by chairs, with equipment placed around the edges of the space. While Leeds Print Workshop has large shuttered windows to one side, facing out to a street at the edge of Leeds city centre, the only windows in the ceramics space are high up, letting in light but not affording a view of anything but sky. I will discuss how these windows facilitate a sense of performing for an audience in the section on 'performance' later in this chapter; however, at one point I arrive for an evening course at the print space to find that the shutters have remained closed, producing the effect on the space inside of being cocooned under the fluorescent strip lights. I observe that, 'arriving at the workshop and being familiar with the space makes it feel somehow like a sanctuary, especially while the shutters are down' (*Field notes, printmaking, 16/03/2019*). In direct contrast to working at home, immersion in the separate making space can not only distort our perception of time but also distort perceptions of the world outside the space.

This sense of the workshop as a sanctuary or a cocoon extends the notion that this is a space where the user is shielded from outside concerns; the image of the cocoon suggests that the protective shell conceals acts of creation, while to think about a sanctuary is to conjure up ideas of both space and time in which the harried individual can relax, knowing they are safe. However, this security is temporary, as the user must

step back into the world after their allotted time, whether on a course or having used the workshop in a drop-in capacity.

The shared making space offers somewhere to separate from the world – a space in which to be ‘otherwise’ (Woodyer, 2012, p. 322), albeit with compromises in having to navigate round and negotiate with other users of the space. When making at home, the compromises take the form of more elastic temporal and spatial boundaries, with the risk of interruption by those not involved in the activity (namely other human or animal household members). Choosing to locate one’s identity within the external space offers a clear position, functioning as a statement of intent to the world – and to the self? - that the maker is serious about the activity being undertaken, in a way that working within the home might not, not least because the making within the domestic context is largely invisible unless the maker chooses to share their processes and outputs via social media. Entering a space outside the home also theoretically enables me to try out an identity as a maker, safe in the knowledge that this identity will not be constantly impinged upon by other, more established domestic identities. There is, however, the question of the dual identity of the participant-researcher to acknowledge: just as we all carry our whole selves with us and choose which facets to expose in which environments, in the shared making space I am compelled to declare my status and thus highlight an aspect of my identity that, in any other informal making space, I might have chosen to keep concealed. I discuss this aspect of the ethical considerations of my ethnographic research design in the Methodology chapter.

In this section I have explored some of the ways in which the making space offers a clearly delineated spatial and temporal environment for the maker to engage in creative activity, with the caveat that these opportunities also present constraints, in particular in the form of a need to keep an eye on the clock. I have also considered how the dedicated space offers a way for the maker to perform a discrete identity. In the next section I extend these themes through thinking about the role played by these blocks of time given over to making within the wider context of daily life, as they apply to the maker. Does time spent making offer a taste of freedom - a chance to try out being a less constrained version of oneself? In investigating this aspect, I seek to understand more about the uses and significance of specifically delineated leisure time for the maker.

Creating time aside from the rest of life

Time spent engaging in amateur creativity can be regarded as a form of escape or release (Cohen & Taylor, 1978; Jackson, 2013; Knott, 2015), but as Jackson (*ibid.*) notes, 'Amateur making also exists in a temporal space that is left over after other obligations have either been fulfilled or consciously deferred' (p. 188). As discussed above, the space in which creativity takes place can offer a bounded 'sanctuary', albeit one imbued with as many constraints as affordances; time engaged in making offers similar opportunities and compromises. In the literature review I investigated ways in which subversions and escape routes are constructed and routinised through amateur leisure; 'making time' offers the potential for self-actualisation, but is compromised by its commodified aspects. This section will explore these experiences.

As discussed in the literature review, some scholars make a clear delineation between casual and serious leisure, with Stebbins (2001) in particular noting the proximity of serious leisure to more conventional employment, with its focus, structure, sense of purpose and time commitment. In contrast, the time aside of the informal craft courses intended largely as introduction to particular crafts, as explored in my research, is redolent of Cohen & Taylor's (1978) 'free spaces' in which the individual is able to relax, having momentarily shrugged off the constraints of life commitments, such as work or family. The opportunity that craft offers for time away from the rest of life is distilled, in the case of the craft courses undertaken for my research, into one-day introductory courses, or weekly two hour courses extending over a period of several weeks. This means that even the longest course only offers twenty hours to the participant, but each brief slot is a chance to set the rest of life aside. If the previous section introduced the notion of a physical *permission space* where users can try out creative ideas, then this time can similarly be considered as a temporal aspect to this, bounded, as it is, by the constraints of the course.

What separates the one-day experience from the spa day, the day of 'pampering'; is this not just another form of self-care? Despite a determination towards the autotelic nature of this form of craft participation (Shove, Trentmann, Wilk, 2009) – that is, creative activity purely of and for itself – its extrinsic aspects cannot be avoided: an opportunity to relax, to make friends, to engage in a new way of thinking about things. Particularly with the one-day craft sessions offered by both my research sites, the participant is not obliged to commit: this is a moment out of time.

One of the other participants tells me that she was gifted the day by her family as a Christmas present, “like a spa day” except she doesn’t like those. By the end of the session, in which all we’ve thought about is the process in front of us, I feel as if I’ve been able to put some of my ordinary-life concerns aside, if only for the day.

I know it wasn’t me who’d been given the course as Christmas present, but the day really felt like a gift.

(Field notes, one-day bookbinding course, 16 March 2019)

During the sessions I undertake that are based on this one-day model (specifically, bookbinding, zine-making, introduction to letterpress in the printmaking workshop, and an afternoon introduction to the potter’s wheel in the pottery studio), the teaching style is very mimetic: the tutor demonstrates the activity, then the student(s) attempt to repeat the actions, with guidance from the tutor. The activities are designed to provide a beginning-to-end experience so that participants can emerge, clutching evidence of the day’s activity (or, in the case of the wheel session, with pots left in the making space, drying to leather hard, ready for firing); however, particularly in the case of the wheel throwing, I find that while I have just about managed to produce some objects, the teaching I have received and the learning I have undertaken are insufficiently embedded, so that I am not prepared to attempt to use the wheel again, despite there being many other opportunities during my time in the space. This draws out questions about the need for repeated experience in order to embed learning, which I will explore more in the next chapter; in the context of this chapter, however, and the research question about how participants learn tools and materials, such brief

engagements are perhaps firmly located within the realm of commodified 'experience days' rather than as a serious – or substantial - introduction to the craft.

In contrast to time spent in the making spaces on the courses that form my research, the embroidered stitch journal I begin to create at home, described earlier in the chapter, offers a source of respite from the research – whether the research is in the form of the long hours spent at the computer, or the complexities of attempting to participate fully in the craft courses while striving to remain sufficiently objective to be able to make observations for field notes (the perpetual tension of the ethnographer (Atkinson, 2013)). The stitching can be said to be starting outside life, but the nature of its structure, involving a daily commitment to practice, means that it quickly grows to become a more work-like task, wobbling in the liminal space between leisure and the labour of the PhD (Rossing & Scott, 2016). In contrast with the neatly delineated making time as happens during the timeslots of the courses, what began as home-based respite soon becomes sometimes-uncomfortable obligation, with an attendant sensation that it is consuming time that could be better spent on less burdensome leisure activities. Here, the hobby or escape starts to take on characteristics of routine and obligation, and moves towards the focus of Stebbins' (2001) serious leisure, as I cross over an unseen and, at the time, unnoticed threshold into a long-term commitment of time and energy to this project. Here, the time set aside from the rest of life is seen to be porous in a way that activity in the separate making space is not.

On compromise, and things not being where they were left: the constraints of commodified space and time

As described in the previous section, dedicated making spaces can offer the maker spatial and material opportunities that might not be available in the home. However, these opportunities are not without a cost: the maker shares this space with others, necessitating compromises over communal equipment and resources, and any work produced is thus mediated through the limitations of the space. In this section I identify and reflect on the effect of these constraints.

In theory the dedicated making space can enable the maker to spread out and to safely make a mess in a suitable environment. The large tables, wipe-clean facilities and hard floors of my research sites suggest room to spread out, with no worries about spilling or staining – these are spaces set up for messy creativity (*Figs 8 & 9*).



Figure 8 The pottery room at Hive



Figure 9 the main room at Leeds Print Workshop

In practice, however, this space is limited: the obligation to make courses financially viable necessitates the organisation signing up sufficient participants to break even, so that when everyone is working round a central table, space becomes more constrained, confined to a square space each, with elbows tucked in as at a crowded dinner table. The Men's Sheds movement, which encourages older men to spend time in workshop environments to address isolation and depression, describes participants working 'shoulder to shoulder' instead of face-to-face (Men's Sheds Association, 2021); this observation is about how conversation can be easier when we are not so directly confronted, but within the making spaces of my research, the limited space can easily lead to feelings of frustration and resentment if others encroach upon our allocated area. Large pieces of work also take up valuable tabletop space. In both the ceramics space and the print space I find myself creating small pieces, always thinking of them as practice, but perhaps there is some merit in my approach: later on in the fieldwork, when I come to make a larger print I discover that the press will only just accommodate it. I am unsure whether the small scale of my work is about the spatial constraints of group working in the space, or whether it is more to do with being uncertain about my skills as a newcomer to this practice. The uncertainty I feel here reflects, to some degree, the liminal nature of the making space, in which the maker undergoes a sort of transformation, but there is also an inescapable aspect of difficulty both in reconciling my dual role as both researcher and maker, and the urge to not want to draw attention to myself (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). It is not just my identity as a researcher that is in question here, but also my identity as a maker, and in moments where I falter, caught between the facts of my presence as researcher and some need to prove my creative

competence, this tension causes me to retreat back what I perceive as safe ground by, in effect, trying to shrink my presence within the space.

This sense of the need for careful navigation of the space extends to considerations about how makers work in relation to others, and, more specifically, who has a stake in the space. There are risks involved in leaving work in a space where it is outside the maker's control, which speak to ideas about how the shared real estate of the space is viewed both by practitioners and by those running the space. In leaving their work on a drying rack or a shelf, the maker places their trust in other users of the space, whether these people are fellow group members, managers of the space, or invisible others who have no relationship to or obligation towards the work in question. Work produced in an individual space, such as a shed or sole-use studio, is, in theory, more likely to stay where it was left, but for the shared workshop user, leaving work on a communal shelf or rack after a session requires the maker to place a certain level of trust in other users. However proud the maker is of a piece of work, there is a chance that it could be misplaced or broken between one session and the next.

In printmaking, and with lino printing in particular, the moment the press is rolled back and the covers lifted is known among printmakers as 'the reveal'. Prior to this, work is concealed within the press as paper meets inked, carved linoleum. Unfortunately, work can also be concealed in drawers when the session is complete, and it is in this situation that I find myself at the start of the second of two linocutting sessions in the print space, with some of my prints not in the group drawer... A couple of the other group members help me to look, but they can't find them, and Jeff, today's technician, also can't find them after

rummaging in the Unclaimed Work drawer. I'm really frustrated, but try to convince myself that it is one of the challenges of working in a shared space, and get on with making more prints to print over, choosing paper that will let the ink dry quickly. When I go back a week after the course to collect my prints, the lost prints have turned up, but the course has finished and it is now too late to print over them.

Field notes, printmaking, 09/12/2018

In the example above, there is no point in expressing my exasperation too vocally – after all, it won't make the prints magically appear – but when the same thing happens in the ceramics space a few months later, I find myself pushing harder, demanding that the staff check the kilns for a set of ostensibly nondescript tiles I'd made to test glazes. I ask staff on two separate courses, both of whom assure me that work rarely goes missing, and search the work-in-progress shelves, but the tiles still take another week to turn up, mistaken by a course colleague for her own, and after I have made a new set of tiles. A couple of weeks later I spot a sign stuck to a shelf in the area where finished work awaits collection, in which a member of staff requests that a piece of work removed (perhaps accidentally, perhaps deliberately) is returned, with no questions asked (*fig 10*). Both of these examples demonstrate the fragile status of work left in the space: areas for storing work – work-in-progress shelves, drying racks – are communal spaces, and are thus not wholly reliable receptacles for the maker's creations.

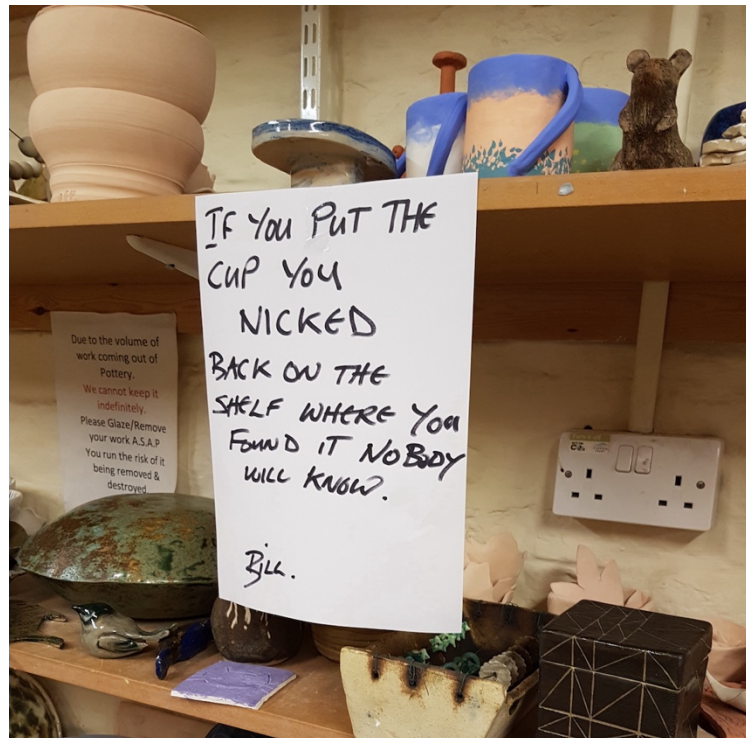


Figure 10 Note placed on the shelves at Hive where users can collect finished work

This reinforces the notion that this space is temporary; the user is reminded that that however familiar the space might feel, it is a shared, semi-public space rather than, for instance, the private space of the dedicated artist's studio. While users can participate in the community, becoming familiar faces, the space remains a resource without dedicated spaces where work can be left out to continue the following day, as can happen with the private space of the dedicated workroom or studio (Stalp, 2006; Jackson, 2013).

The complexities of working round other users reinforces Ott's (2018) conception of the shared workshop space as contingent, requiring constant negotiation as well as navigation. This negotiation is most visible in the obligation to share equipment that, due to the improvised nature of the making spaces of my research, requires users to

work together to accommodate limited resources. There is also a responsibility towards these resources that is both tacit and explicit; while the 'rules' of the space might have been stated by the tutor at the outset, unspoken power negotiations take place during and in particular at the end of sessions over fair distribution of support for other users. Examples of this include how there is only one sink in the ceramics space, so at the end of every session there is a queue to wash equipment. In the print space, the area where we wash screens is confined, so again we must queue. We also queue to use the printing presses, helping one another out by pausing to retrieve another piece of paper for the person printing their work, instead of pressing forward in pursuit of our own needs. As each course progresses and participants come to know one another better, there are more instances of offering to wash one another's equipment, or to help out in other ways. Both spaces employ dedicated technicians who will clean the background of the space, for instance mopping floors or cleaning the washdown area in the printmaking studio, but the participants must clean their work areas and tools, with varying degrees of competence.

This is one of the complexities of the shared space, that inks might be mislabelled, equipment not cleaned thoroughly or put back in the wrong place. With your own space, you know what things are and where things are. Here, it's harder to be certain, and while there's a need to trust others so that the space can work, it's also hard to trust those same others to work to the same standards.

(Field notes, 'Make your Mark' screen print session, March 2019)

While this demonstrates the frustration of having to trust others within this shared space, it also demonstrates the necessity of working alongside rather than with others,

as access to tools and resources is negotiated. Through navigating the activities that support the making process, and by showing that they are a team player, the maker takes a step further into the community.

In learning new processes within the shared space, there will inevitably be moments when the novice makes a mistake that is observed by the tutor and can thus be rectified – this might involve the tutor demonstrating how to use a tool, or catching the inexperienced maker on the brink of making an error that could be injurious for the object, the maker, or the wider making space. The open nature of the shared spaces of my research, where everyone works round a large table, also enables more experienced members of the community to spot novice errors:

We're halfway through the ten-week glazing course and I'm using one of the numerous plaster moulds stacked up in the pottery room to make a bowl. It feels like a cheat's way of making something – roll out some clay, press it into the mould, use the hairdryer to dry the clay out a little and then lift it away from the mould. For once I'm in my own world, focusing on tidying up the edges of the bowl before I extract it. When I reach for a metal knife from the box of tools in the middle of the table, Karen, who is sitting opposite me, spots what I'm doing, and says, "Don't use a knife for that – you risk scoring the mould! Get one of the plastic or wooden knives and do it that way." Karen has been using the ceramics space for seven years now, and while she has a studio and kiln at home, she likes to spend time with others, and to learn new techniques – such as glazing. She seems to be immersed in her own work, laying strips of clay across one another to create an open bowl, but she's still watching others, keeping an

informal eye on those of us with less experience. She's softly spoken, and her admonishment is gentle; I'm grateful that she's spotted the error. I select a plastic knife and begin to slice away at the terracotta.

Field notes, glazing course, 03/06/19

In the instance above it is another user who steers me away from an error; at other points reprimands are delivered by staff: Bob, the ceramics tutor, chastises the evening ceramics group for not clearing up the space properly, or, in the print space, Sian, the print technician, warns me away from continuing with a screen print process that will clog a screen. These two examples relate specifically to the work that staff will have to undertake later to resolve the student's failure: after the group have left the ceramics space, Bob will have to spend time cleaning the space properly, and similarly, the print workshop team will have to undertake the expensive and time-consuming process of chemically stripping screen printing screens in order to clean them properly. These reprimands are not personal, but instead encourage makers to consider participation in the space as part of a tacit contract: users of the space must leave things as they would like to find them, in this shared space where all participants are all ultimately short-term rental users of the equipment.

The notion of being a rental user of the space draws attention to a significant aspect of these spaces in contrast to the process of working in one's own space, whether that is at home or in a dedicated studio: in the shared making space, users encounter the making process in a manner akin to any other serviced experience. The user pays for their time in the space, whether directly or via enhanced payment for materials (for instance, the *weigh-and-pay* process in place at Hive that covers the cost of clay and

for two firings), and, in return, receives not only the opportunity to access the space and its resources, but also deflects the obligation to engage in the more complex or less pleasant underpinnings of the making process - stacking the kiln, recycling almost-unusable clay back into use, or chemically stripping screen printing screens – and the menial work of the space, such as mopping floors or clearing clay out of the pottery room’s sink filtration system. For the novice participant, while this serviced experience facilitates their progression into the activity, it can be argued that the experience is consequently not fully authentic, in that the practitioner is left with knowledge gaps, without clear means of resolving them. In terms of the space itself, it is a quasi-public space more akin to a village hall than a hotel room: the maker is working in view of others rather than in private, but in a space that where the only traces of them that will remain after their session are the pieces of work on drying racks, awaiting collection.

Connections and challenges of working alongside others

A community making space can be defined as offering space, time, and physical resources to its users, but arguably the most significant aspect of these spaces, marking them out from, for instance, the shed at the bottom of the garden, is the opportunity (or obligation) to work alongside others. Craft workshops are depicted in much literature as hives of activity where users plot carefully choreographed moves round one another (see, for instance, O’Connor, 2007); Ott, 2018; Sennett, 2009), but the spaces described in extant literature are more likely to be professional – or at least spaces where the newcomer is learning alongside seasoned professionals, even in an apparent drop-in facility (in the case of O’Connor’s glassblowing education (2007,

2016)). My research focuses more on the first steps taken in a community making space, where participants arrive – and linger - with different motivations and levels of previous experience, and, in line with the research question about how people learn alongside others, it is this unpractised, sometimes clumsy dance that I explore here. The underlying ethos of my research spaces, and their accessibility, influences the participant makeup: Hive, where I am learning ceramics, was originally set up as a community development space, using arts and crafts as a vehicle for wellbeing; it is generally only open during the daytime, throughout the week, and users of the space are often outside work, whether through retirement or through impaired mental or physical health. The range of activities on offer at Hive extends the sense that it is as much a community centre as a creative learning space and workshop; in addition to ceramics, woodwork and fibre arts facilities, there are courses focusing on wellbeing, and a café area where members can meet and hang out. In contrast, Leeds Print Workshop is an artist-led co-operative only open three days per week, where the focus is purely on various forms of printmaking; the courses offered here give participants a taste of printing, and for those keen to continue, the courses offer a way of recruiting new members. Payments from the courses provide a significant contribution to funding the running costs of the workshop, but a bolstered membership enhances the profile of the workshop as an art organisation. There is a gallery space next door to the workroom, but nowhere to really linger.

For many of the participants on the courses I undertake in both spaces, there is seemingly no specific intention to develop mastery of the form. In conversation and through interviews, I learn that at Hive, many participants are beginners, or last used clay many years before. They are often making for the sake of making, as a by-product

of participating in the community. At Leeds Print Workshop, my coursemates might be practised in other art forms but most are new to the forms introduced during our courses; participants are looking for ways back into their creative practice, or are seeking to learn a specific new skill. A desire for social interaction in a different environment characterises people's motivations for participation: from conversations during sessions and subsequent interviews at Hive, Barbara tells me that she is lonely and wants to get out of the house, Ruth says she is creative but lonely at home and wants to try something new, while Paul wants to do something creative with his hands, and also wants to meet new people. Nobody seems to see this as a gateway to a more serious focus – not at this stage anyway. While Hive and Leeds Print Workshop have slightly different underpinning ethos', the result is the same: that participants on these short craft courses are, for the most part, joining in as a social opportunity, to do something creative, or to learn something new. The nature of an open-access space means that there is no certainty about who no way of knowing who one might be sharing the space with – as I discussed above, the spaces have unacknowledged social identities which attract different sorts of people, but this intangible aspect of organisational identity will only become apparent to the participant once they are actively engaging in the space. Working alongside others, even in this leisure context, is inevitably not always a positive experience: Hackney, Maughan and Desmarais (2016), for instance, acknowledge what they term productive tensions in bringing together a group of crafters from different backgrounds, who might have nothing in common apart from an interest in the crafting activity. I experience some of these tensions as I move further into my fieldwork and become more familiar with the spaces, as I describe next.

When I sign up for a second ceramics course, I know that some of my coursemates from the first sessions will also be participating, but when I arrive for the first session of the new block, I find that some of the rapport that had built up previously has now evaporated as May now has a friend alongside her; they giggle together, and I am reminded of navigating playground cliques. The new friend seems suspicious of me; she is part of a group, all working from the ceramics space, who have recently held an exhibition of their work, in a new departure for the space. When I mention something about exhibitions, Ruth, the new woman, pounces, determined to quiz me about my previous experience, and it feels as if I've upset a pecking order of whose existence I was unaware. We size one another up like amateur boxers, dancing around one another for three or four weeks, until finally the impasse is broken as we help one another during a session on the technicalities of making ceramic glazes. If we think about Lave and Wenger (1991)'s model of the individual becoming accepted into the community of practice, this is a process of transitioning from the outside towards the middle, often involving the individual proving their right to occupy their position, before then being accepted into a more central ring of community. In the way that Ruth and I engage in brittle conversation, needing to prove our credentials, it seems we must prove to one another that we are no threat, but that we have both earned our right to be in the space. Related to this, in another example of the discomfort of being a participant/researcher, I feel a heightened sense that I must make myself small and make light of my research activities, for fear that people (like Ruth!) will judge me and my furtively-scribbled notes. I have to somehow prove that I can be a full participant in the community, with all the vulnerability that this might entail, and must acknowledge

that while I am observing others, I must also be prepared to expose my shortcomings (Lehmann, 2012; Atkinson & Morriss, 2017).

Within the printmaking space, a participant on an experimental screen-printing course presents a different identity challenge – Ginny, like Ruth, is in the space with a friend, but Ginny treats the experience as if it's personal tuition for her alone rather than a course involving other participants. This manifests as talking over the tutor, and disregarding rules about time, working past the point where we are supposed to start clearing up. The consequence of the latter is that other members of the group end up pitching in to help with washing equipment and wiping down surfaces so that we can finish at the intended time. In common with many of the rest of the group, Ginny is using the course as a resource, to gain new skills, but it is notable that she shows little interest in anybody else's work, and treats the space and resources as her own, in contrast to other participants' behaviour. In this context, it is as if she is attempting to place herself in the community of practice as a fully-formed member, without having acknowledged the transitional steps, or introductory processes (also considered as rites of passage (Turner, 1969)) required. These steps could take the form of engaging with others' work, or helping someone else with clearing up, neither of which is a directly-requested act, but both of which offer subtle means of bonding within the group. In contrast, my early interactions with Ruth in the ceramics space seem to be more about her demonstrating her familiarity with and stake on the space, as an already-established member of its community.

These interactions offer two examples of less convivial interactions with other participants: the participant who is part of an established group or network, seemingly wrongfooted by the arrival of a newcomer perceived as a potential rival, and with it the

consequent shuffling of the social order, and the participant determined to reinforce and perhaps to extend their identity as a creative practitioner, for whom the presence of other participants serves only as a foil rather than an opportunity for connection. Ruth in the ceramics space is prepared to relax into her position, once she has finally ascertained that I present no threat, and will eventually offer specific opportunities to connect through revealing the aspects of ceramics that she finds challenging, praising my work, and so on, but Ginny in the print space continues to resist engagement, determined to exploit the space for her own ends throughout the course. This is a logical strategy on one level, as learning the skill proposed by the five-week screen-printing course is clearly her objective, but her resistance to camaraderie is conspicuously jarring for the rest of the group, as if she has chosen to disregard some unwritten rules of engagement or expected behaviours (Goffman, 1959).

In the previous section I introduced the idea of the making space as a *permission space*, where makers could use delineated space and time for creative activity. In thinking about the interactions between users, particularly for someone new to the space, the notion of permission becomes more about power relations within the shared space (Hackney, Maughan, Desmarais, 2016): who is in charge? Who is invited in, and who remains outside? The situation is more complex than appearances might suggest, and draws on nuanced aspects such as the identity of the spaces themselves, where one face might fit but another doesn't, and the interactions between participants. There is no way of knowing who will be in the space, or which mix of participants will join a course; power relations are therefore in subtle but constant flux

as moments of tension and fusion between participants bloom and fade, sometimes within the space of a session and sometimes over a period of weeks or months.

The social world of the making space - the club that isn't a club

The spaces in this study do not solely perform the function of providing resources for making; they are also spaces with discrete identities, where participants can seek out social connection (Davies, 2018). This speaks to ideas about how community is both performed and produced (Gee, 2004; Gibson, 2019; Jackson, 2020). In this section I explore these characteristics and develop the concept of the making space as a *club that is not a club*.

During my introduction to the ceramics space, Frances, the ceramics tutor, mentions how many people using the space are what she terms 'Hive people'; she encompasses both staff and users of the space in this definition, suggesting that its characteristics include a willingness to be flexible and to *muck in*, helping out when required. When drawn on this, she explains that people come to the centre to do a course in one area, will then return to do other courses across the space, and might then stay on as an independent practitioner or volunteer. She suggests a bit more than this, about people who felt lost and have found wider support here, citing her own experience as an example: she has been a tutor for several years, but her first encounter with the space was through working with ceramics to manage mental health problems. Later, Phil, one of the regular users that Frances had described as a 'Hive person', tells me specifically that, 'Hive saved my life' (*interview, 09/07/19*). He explains that he had been depressed, living in his car, and acclimatising to life as a wheelchair user when he

began to attend courses in the space. He has attended many ceramics sessions, both as a course participant and as a drop-in user, and is currently learning to knit in another area within the space. Frances explains that participants will follow tutors across from one discipline to another and Fletcher, a long-term but erratic attendee in the space, tells me how he will sign up to whatever course is on offer. For him, the specifics of the course are not as important as the opportunity to spend time in this familiar space where he is accepted without judgement. Bob, another of the tutors, describes what he perceives as the uniqueness of Hive, in the combination of its multidisciplinary and its sense of being a welcoming space for all. I bump into a Hive board member on a course, who, like Bob, believes that the organisation is unique, and seems surprised when I mention two broadly similar spaces locally (albeit not run on exactly the same terms). For these people, the space has taken on an identity larger than its core purpose. If we use Gibson's (1979) theory of affordances to consider the making space in terms of what it enables, in this example the space can be considered not only as affording the potential for practical making, or even the social interactions offered at a clubhouse, but also the opportunity to find sanctuary: a space where people come to find a form of salvation, and where they feel safe within its walls. Many users will pass through the space without developing this relationship with it, but for those that find this connection, the urge to linger appears to be strong. Smith (2019) suggests the craft workshop in which novices develop skills as a space in which personal transformation can occur – the *therapeutic taskscape* - but this does not fully encompass the sense of welcome offered at Hive. In this space the participant population is a mix of hobbyists, enthusiasts, and those participating as a means of addressing mental health issues, social isolation or other motivations that are not directly linked to engagement with

craft practices, but the opportunity to be a familiar face embedded within a craft or informal creative community is a further motivation that has received little scholarly attention thus far.

Leeds Print Workshop, by contrast, is not this space. When I undertake research in the space in 2019, it has been running for three years; though the management team tell me that there is an aspiration to be a social printing space where printmakers can hang out, the reality is that dropping in isn't so easy, despite its location in a very visible space on the edge of the city centre. The space is configured as a working space, with no informal seating, so while printmakers might call in to collect work, or to buy supplies, the temptation to hang out is rendered problematic by the setup of the space. Though this might appear to be accidental, I notice during open-access sessions that some of the people calling into the space are wanting T-shirts or flyers printed, which is not a service that the workshop offers. The workshop team explain to these passers-by that they can print their own flyers, but only after undertaking a course; the conversation that ensues functions as a subtle means of filtering those who might want to engage further with the workshop, and others purely in search of a commercial operation to meet their immediate printing demand. The lack of opportunity to linger if one is not directly engaged in printmaking activity thus subtly feeds into notions of who is welcome, and who is not.

In the case of my research, participants spending time in the ceramics space are drawn together by the premise of the activities on offer, but participation as a member can involve minimal engagement with the making process, or with others – several makers

using the space during drop-in sessions wear headphones while getting on with their own work, in an act that cocoons them further into the focused space of their own practice, and away from the wider room. Similarly, descriptions of Men's Sheds' (Men's Sheds Association, 2021) refer to the significance of being *alongside* others in a space where, just as there is no obligation to talk to others, there is also no obligation to participate in woodwork activity – the premise of the space is that it enables people, in this case older men, to have a space in which to spend time socially without having to be sociable. Davies (2018) describes the 'mundane engagement' of users 'hanging out' in the makerspace, with no intention of actually making anything. In all three of these examples, a significant motivation for participation is social contact, or to be in what could be considered a third place (Oldenburg, 1999) that is neither home nor work – a space that can be considered as a clubhouse. Hanging out in a space can enable a person to become part of a group and to adopt that group's purpose as part of their identity; for instance, the men spending time alongside Crawford (2009) in a motorcycle workshop might not be getting their hands dirty, but through hanging out in this space they are able to engage in conversation with like-minded individuals, joining in with camaraderie largely made up of context-specific jokes (see the section on *Learning the Lingo* in the next chapter), and aligning themselves with the values and identity of the space. Likewise, Knott (2015) considers the experience of participants in a model railway group, coming together regularly under the auspices of developing a layout for a railway and meanwhile spending time with like-minded companions, in what is as much a social opportunity as a hobby club. The opportunity to undertake craft activity legitimises the time spent; it can be considered purposeful in a way that,

for instance, a purely social activity such as going to the pub might not, even if, in practice, the attendee does not engage in much making when in the space.

For the shared making space to be considered as a site of social making, it follows that the maker must navigate not only the complexities of tools and materials, but also other users of the space. Participants size one another up, finding points of connection, and newcomers must find a space within these established hierarchies. If the making space is considered as a form of community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where participants move from the edge of the community to the centre via the acquisition of skill (Martin, 2021), and elsewhere Collins (2018) notes ‘the importance of access to expertise that is situated within a shared-landscape-of-making’ (p. 184), within the making spaces of my research there is also an aspect of becoming a ‘familiar face’ as the maker acquires what can be considered as the social capital of shared experience. An example of this is when Bob is explaining the rules of the space to a mixed group of participants in an evening ceramics class; some are familiar with the space whereas others are new to both the space and to ceramics. Phil, who has spent several years in the space, interjects to support or refute Bob’s points, and it seems that Bob is prepared to tolerate this, as their social bond is already established. A hierarchy of participants can thus be considered in this way – that it is not so much the more skilled members who sit higher up in the hierarchy, but instead, those who are more experienced in the space, for instance Phil or Karen, who have both used the ceramics space for several years. Hierarchical positioning in this context is not so much about technical proficiency but about community familiarity.

One of the unspoken informal rituals that support the blurred lines of this third place (Oldenburg, 1999) is the tea (or coffee) break. This can seem like a commonplace British ritual but the nuances of its performance offer valuable insights into both power dynamics between participants and the hierarchies of the space in which the ritual is situated. Within the print space, it is acceptable to have cups of tea on the tables as we work. The tea is a taken-for-granted part of the making process: if you make a hot drink for yourself, you offer everyone a brew. I find myself noticing who does – and who doesn't – volunteer to make the tea, and wonder whether this is some unspoken reinforcement of social hierarchies; once again, I'm reminded of my position as neither fully inside nor fully outside the experience, but constantly destabilised, fluttering in the liminal space of the participant researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In the ceramics space, however, food and drink must be kept out of the pottery rooms due to the toxicity of some of the materials; instead, the building has a dedicated space where users can prepare a drink for themselves or eat a packed lunch. This moment offers an opportunity for other users of Hive to interact with those of us on the pottery course, and conversations sprawl far from ceramics. In this way, participants are able to size one another up and place one another within wider life situations; within the daytime courses at Hive there is a tacit understanding that while we are at work in the pottery rooms, we will either work in companionable silence or talk about and around the work we are making. In contrast, when I participate in an evening ceramics class, at the end of the course the group gathers in the tea space to share snacks and a drink as a group, in recognition of a sense that we have forged connections through this transformative experience, using it as bridging capital (Jackson, 2020), and that we are now about to scatter. The participant population is younger and more outspoken than

on other courses, and there has been more informal conversation across the room. Participants have revealed more about their lives: grumbles about the working day, shared points of connection over raising toddlers, or photos of pets proudly displayed on smartphone screens. This camaraderie has an effect of forging potential for more emboldened communication about our ceramic pieces; this could be praise for pieces we all deem successful, to communal hilarity as one group member produces an eggcup better suited to an ostrich egg. The tutor, prickly with us at the start of the course and at times chastising us like schoolchildren, seems energised by these exchanges, and the end-of-course gathering for snacks and sangria is his suggestion.

A couple of months later I attend an open-access session in the pottery room, and am surprised to find that Brenda, the most experienced (and most outspoken) participant in the room, is in charge of deciding that a tea break will happen at a particular time. As self-appointed senior participant, she steers the topic of conversation during the break, effectively nominating herself as *de facto* leader of the group. As a newcomer I am unaware of this structure so challenge her on a point during the discussion; a frost descends on the conversation, as I am clearly not yet sufficiently well-established within the group to attempt to disrupt the social order (Banfield, 2016). Navigating established hierarchies is difficult for the newcomer to a drop-in session, who has not yet established even the loose bonds required to feel comfortable outside the focused atmosphere of the pottery room. The long-established weekly drop-in session at the ceramics space has enabled bonds to form between frequent attendees, who sit round a large table, chatting while they work; here, I sense that acceptance into the group is about regular attendance and becoming a familiar face, rather than, for instance,

ceramic competence. On another occasion, when Brenda isn't present, the group floats through for tea, and floats back to the pottery room, with participants drifting in and out of conversation. The contrast here suggests that notions of the space as a neutral environment where all participants are equal space are, at best, problematic. For those participants for whom making work is not the motivator for spending time in the space, the tea break also functions as an opportunity for procrastination, though Fletcher, who has signed up to the ceramics course as a time-filler, is chided by the tutor for wandering off for tea breaks that take up at least half of the allotted session time. This gentle tapping back into line disrupts the notion of this making space as a third place (Oldenburg, 1999) that is neither work nor home – a space to simply exploit social opportunities by hanging out with other makers, without having to engage in the act of making (Davies, 2018). Through subtle (or not so subtle) management of participants, the gatekeepers of the space are able to reinforce its primary purpose, once again asserting power structures.

While the community of practice can be defined as a space characterised by increments of belonging, in which agents, connected by a shared interest or context, enter the community as a peripheral actor, moving towards the centre of the community as time passes or they become more experienced, this model has been widely critiqued as being too broadly applied (e.g. Martin, 2021). More usefully, Gee (2004) instead presents a definition of what he terms an 'affinity space', in which the 'affinity' is for the interest or experience that draws participants together; his example applies this to online computer gaming communities, but the model also aligns with the making spaces of my research. The key characteristics of his model that apply to

these spaces are that the activity is a significant draw for participation, there is no delineation between less and more experienced participants, both individual and distributed knowledge (that which is found in others, and also in tools and other mediating devices) is encouraged, tacit knowledge is also encouraged – in that not all knowledge is verbally transmitted – and, lastly, that participation within the group is fluid, and does not require consistent attendance. In the section above on the space and time of the making space, I introduced the notion of the making space as a *permission space*, in that it is not only an ‘affinity space’ but one where boundaries both enable and constrict users; here, I consider that participation in these spaces provides entrance to a *club that is not a club*. There is a membership process, shared interests, social aspects, but participation, particularly in drop-in sessions, is fluid, with some users drawn to the space for this aspect alone, while others are keen to align themselves with the ethos of the space but are not particularly concerned with participating, so are unlikely to ever actually show up in the space to carry out any printmaking activity (as described in an informal conversation with one of the Leeds Print Workshop cooperative members, who run the space). Gee observes that,

there are so many ways and degrees of being a member in some communities of practice that it is not clear that membership is a truly helpful notion.

(Gee, 2004, p. 214)

Membership is clearly not the same as belonging, if we consider membership to be participation, and belonging to involve being a familiar face in the space, several rungs further up the status ladder than the uncertain newcomer. The neophyte must remain in the liminal space of uncomfortable participation while they learn both tangible and ephemeral ‘rules’ of engagement, but the line over which they must step in order to

become a familiar face is in a constant state of flux, largely due to the ever-shifting social dynamics of these informally-structured spaces.

For some participants, time spent in the space is a consciously fleeting endeavour, as described earlier in the chapter in the section on 'Time outside the rest of life': the participant on a short course will spend a day being creative, either alone or with others, and will come out at the end with a craft object, some memories, and potentially no further involvement with the space, though this experience, and the longer courses, might spark a more extensive interest in the subject. However, one of the Leeds Print Workshop cooperative members observes that only approximately one in ten course participants decides to become a member of the workshop, able to use the facilities on a drop-in basis, and a still smaller number actually take the step to working independently in the space. Jeff explains that that the setup of the space is quite deliberate: course participants effectively subsidise the space as a drop-in facility for independent users. The seemingly low conversion of course attendees to full members is not viewed as a concern, so long as the courses, which are competitively-priced and attract participants from over a hundred miles away, continue to be well-attended (*source: informal conversation with Jeff, tutor at Leeds Print Workshop, November 2019*). A number of possible conclusions can be drawn from this: that participants on short courses are seeking a contained, commodified experience (as described earlier in the section on *The Space as World*); that participants are seeking specific learning, rather than longer-term engagement within a community (with all that entails, from financial outlay for membership fees, to the likelihood of interaction with other printmakers, to being tethered to a specific geographic location for one's

making); and that engaging with the space as part of that community requires a degree of competence, and confidence that inexperienced practitioners do not yet possess. For the participants who *do* decide to participate in the space as more committed users, rather than choosing to work in the privacy of a domestic space, the next section investigates the various opportunities and discomforts presented through exposure within the shared space.

The performances of the making space

In thinking about the open-access workshop as a sort of club, as described above, we can see that it functions as a space of both production and performance, in which not only are makers engaging in their creative practice, but they are also both on show to, and observing, others. In this section I argue that that working alongside others in these spaces necessitates a form of quasi-public practice, whereby the maker's successes and failures are exposed to the participant community during the production process (and also through the work produced by the maker remaining visible in the space while they are not present). As the maker performs, so are they also witness to the performances of others, both in the act of making and in the opportunity to inspect work in the maker's absence. In contrast, working alone at home enables the maker to conceal and reveal processes and products in highly controlled ways, though this, too, can present its own limitations. Below, I focus specifically on performance and exposure as aspects of the making process.

Harriet has been working on her mugs for several weeks. Her approach is careful and considered, in contrast with my slapdash methods. I think I am spending as much time watching her progress as I am getting on with my own work.

The mugs are finally ready. The handles have been formed, dried, the vessels scored and slip applied to the ends of the handles. The handles are attached, and then begins a conversation between Harriet and Frances about how long to wait before decorating the mugs with coloured slip.

I'm busy making a pinch pot when Harriet brings the tub of slip over to where we're sitting, sharing one of the large tables. The pale grey liquid offers no clues as to its final colour, and even the description written on the lid reveals no more – I am not yet up to speed with the colours of the various oxides that go into the thin clay and water suspension. The others are working around the table but we all pause to watch this moment. Frances reminds Harriet that if this goes wrong, it can't be salvaged – the handles cannot be reattached, and the mugs will be slip-infused so must be discarded. The rest of us hold a collective breath as Harriet wedges a hand into one of the mugs and pushes it into the slip bucket, holding it in the viscous fluid. A moment too brief and the vessels will not be sufficiently covered; a moment too long, and the slip will pull the handle away. She lifts the mug out, checks that it's fully covered, then sets it down and repeats the process with the other one. We exhale. The handles remain in place – so far, so good. She cleans the lip of each mug, then sets them down on a board for the slip to dry fully. I go back to fashioning my pinch pot, a mindful/mindless round and round of pinching and turning.

A few minutes later I look up to survey the scene in front of me: across the table, Nick and Jill are working on slab-formed dishes, and, in the centre of the table, the slip-covered mugs dry on a slab of wood. The handles are unfurled in front of the mugs, seemingly also to dry, and it takes me a moment to realise that this is not how they should look. There is no way of handling this moment with discretion – I ask Harriet, “are your mugs supposed to look like that?” and she looks over, pauses, and sighs. Frances inspects them, and is matter-of-fact: the slip might be too heavy, the handles might not have been sufficiently firmly attached. Harriet doesn’t hesitate, and carries the mugs straight over to the mixed clay recycling bucket, saying that she hopes that at least all her work will reappear as marbled traces in others’ pieces.

Field notes, ceramics, 18/03/2019

This example from the ceramics space demonstrates the two foci of this section: the *performance* of making in front of others in the shared space, and the *exposure* experienced as a person attempts a new manoeuvre, in this case the slip-dipping. I am an observer in this context, but I am complicit in Harriet’s performance.

In what can be considered a ritual aspect of the performance of becoming part of the community (Turner, 1969), we don aprons – a sort of costume - for making. In the print workshop, these are identical functional black cotton items with a Leeds Print Workshop logo and a pocket in the front, which confers the status of being an insider in this ‘club’; however, the situation at Hive is more nuanced. Hanging on a hook at one end of the ceramics space is a selection of vinyl aprons, donated over the years, which

we must wear while in the ceramics space. Many have lost a tie from one side so are rendered useless; each week there is a scrabble for the functional aprons, but Harriet, another participant on the slab-building course, has declared informal ownership of one particular green apron, as everything she wears is green. Even during sessions when she doesn't show up, I find myself rifling past her apron in search of another one that will fasten. In this way, we begin to subtly stake our claims on the space, regardless of the potential for another user to have the same relationship with this apron. When I first arrived in the space, I discovered that Harriet had more experience than me – albeit one term of ten weeks – but this conferred a status of increased competence on her. When her requests to use the green apron became verbalised, this indicated its significance for her, whereas as long as the apron I selected had both ties intact so could be tied, I had no further demands of it. However, Harriet has a calm, focused air, and later, when I participate in what I believe will be a challenging one-to-one wheel throwing session, I find myself picking out the green apron, perhaps hoping that it will channel that serenity for me.

While the structure of the ceramics space does not permit users to be seen by anyone other than those with whom one shares the space, at the print workshop, large windows facing out onto the street offer passers-by the opportunity to peer in; this can be unnerving, particularly for participants working next to these windows. At one point I look up from inking a lino print and am surprised to see a family staring back at me as they observe the activity within the room (*Fig 11*).



Figure 11 Leeds Print Workshop viewed from the street, showing the large windows

The performance is not only in relation to others in (and outside) the space; it can also take the form of performance of the making processes themselves. When I make a first attempt at using the potter's wheel, I observe that I am performing my perception of the processes in lieu of experiential knowledge:

[I am] trying to enact every image I've ever seen of a person throwing a pot on the wheel... I feel I've tried to perform actions that I've witnessed in others, rather than fully engaging in trying to follow the clay. (Field notes, 07/05/2019)

Caught between determination to *perform* this role, and focused engagement, I find that this attempt is not a success. In the earlier example it is not certain whether Harriet, immersed in dipping her mugs, is aware that we are observing her. While the maker's thought processes remain private, the physical processes of making offer a form of spectacle (Lehmann, 2012), particularly in relation to the bodily, gestural performance of using the wheel, wedging up (kneading) clay, or using a printing press; however, the maker is also able to unwittingly use their body to obscure their actions.

Within the making spaces of my research, participants both wittingly and unwittingly find ways to conceal themselves: the potter's wheel is sited in a corner of the ceramics room, so that anyone using it places their body between their work and the room, shielding what they are doing. In the print space, when I attempt a lino print for the first time outside a class environment, I feel nervous about the process. The printing press I'm using has a panel that must be lifted up to place the print block and the paper down; the location of the press perpendicular to a side wall of the space means that in raising this panel, I create a shield that protects my work from the wider room, and thereby allows me to resist the gaze of others in the space.

If participants in the making space can be considered as *performing* activities (following Goffman (1959)) in front of others, it follows that there is a sense of risk – exposure – to our actions. Chandler and Knott (2016) refer to the making process as a 'spectacle', and in the shared workshop we are on display in the space, which only really becomes apparent at points of heightened tension, such as at moments of triumph or conspicuous failure. There is a moment in printmaking when the work, previously concealed within the press or under an inked screen, is revealed to the maker and also to anyone standing around the press; during an introduction to letterpress processes, I observe that 'our work is revealed to others as we reveal it to ourselves' (Fig 12). This vulnerability extends beyond the maker's presence in the space, as our work acts as a representation of ourselves as it waits on drying racks and on shelves, which serve the function of an informal gallery for other makers to inspect our work.

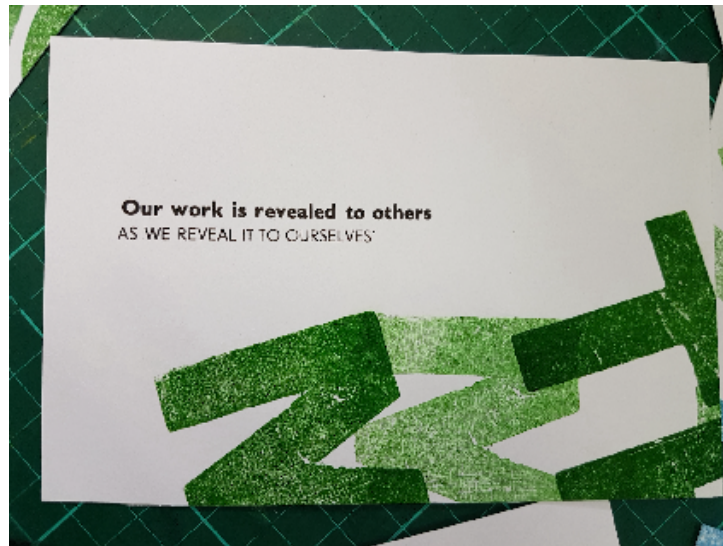


Figure 12 'Our work is revealed to others as we reveal it to ourselves'

postcard printed during Letterpress Taster Session, April 2019

Independent use of the making space requires the maker to undergo an induction process. This is not so much about induction into the community of the space (Turner, 1969; Smith, 2019) so much as about ensuring the maker is sufficiently competent to be able to adhere to health and safety rules. I have introduced the experience of stepping into the space as an independent user earlier in this chapter; however, there is a performative aspect of this experience that I draw out here. One Saturday morning I am busy printing a layer of a lino print, exchanging occasional chatter with Rob, the technician on duty, when I unwittingly become part of his induction process for others:

Two people arrive for induction when I'm halfway through printing, and it occurs to me that I'm now the person I saw using the space when I came to talk to Kirstie [one of the Print workshop co-operative] last year – there's nothing to mark me out from any other user of the space, wearing a Leeds Print Workshop apron and getting on with lino printing... [...]

Field notes, printmaking, 23/06/2019

This realisation causes me to step outside my bubble of concentration, suddenly aware of myself performing printmaking for this audience. I am still new to the processes, treading carefully for fear of making a mistake, and, to extend Ryle's (1949) observations about tacit knowledge and the difference between knowing *that* a thing works, and *how* a thing works (which I explore more extensively in the next chapter), my new identity is not yet tacit – it is a conscious performance, dramatized to demonstrate its veracity (Goffman, 1959) when I participate in an informal exchange with Rob the technician to somehow further prove my belonging in the space.

It is not clear precisely when the performance stops, but it continues beyond the point when I hang up my apron and step back over the threshold of the making space, out into the world. I note, after a particularly messy printmaking session, that,

I have to go into Leeds after the session. I'm very aware that despite having cleaned my hands, I still have ink stains around my fingernails, and am clutching two 12" square pieces of dark grey lino under my arm. I feel like a Printmaker with a capital P. (Field notes, 23/06/2019)

Similarly, after a session using the potter's wheel, 'I find that despite wearing an apron, I have clay on my jumper, on my jeans, in my hair, up my arms, on my face' (*Field notes, ceramics, 14/06/2019*). My newfound persona is carried away to the world outside the making space, with physical traces of the experience displayed in the form of ink-stained hands, or, less subtly, an entirely dust-covered appearance. In this way, my participation extends from what O'Connor (2016) describes as 'intercorporeal', as when I sit with the wheel-throwing tutor and receive direct tuition, to 'intracorporeal', where

I have bodily accumulated the traces of the materials of making, and can only discard them – or shrug off the costume – through vigorous washing.

For the maker working at home, there is no equivalent to this sense of exposure in the shared space; the only way to share work-in-progress with others is to undertake the deliberate process of sharing either in a social group, in person or online (Mayne, 2020). As with Lehmann's (2012) description of how craft process videos conveniently edit out the boring, repetitive, dull aspects of making, so, too, the home maker can choose to only show the polished finished product, or simply show nothing. I choose to document a moment of failure in my home making processes through my stitch journal: I use my established dressmaking skills to make a top and trousers, and while the trousers come together quickly, the top is a disaster, with every attempt at resolution seeming to make more of a mess. I then make an embroidery of the top and trousers for the stitch journal, and again, the stitched outline representing the trousers presents no issues, but when stitching the top, the thread becomes tangled and impossible to unpick. I decide to share an image of the reverse of this stitching - which shows a mess of thread - on social media, but this feels somehow transgressive in a way that a piece of work ruined in the making space would not (*Figs 13 & 14*) – I am deliberately drawing attention to the error, albeit in a slightly oblique way. The decision to subvert the expected success demonstrates a surprising way of staking a claim to competence, in that through sharing this error I present an awareness that it is somehow unusual, or a glitch; I am implying that I am sufficiently experienced in this craft to be prepared to risk vulnerability in this moment, albeit in a carefully measured

capacity. Had this been work created in the making space, where false starts and failures are expected, it would not be so noteworthy.



*Figure 13 'right' side of embroidery,
showing stitched top and trousers*



*Figure 14 'wrong' side of embroidery,
showing huge knot of thread*

Conclusion

The making space can be considered as a temporary space – the participant is neither fully immersed in the experience, or fully on the outside. The activity taking place within the space – whether the maker is attending a course, or participating in a drop-in session - can stop at any time. At any moment the maker can cease to play the game: when undertaking a course, there is no significant commitment, and no obligation to work through a series of steps in order to attain a qualification. At Hive, even for those who have signed up as members of the space to participate in drop-in sessions, there is no obligation to engage in making practices; the maker can simply hang out. The making space thus functions as a sort of suspended space – a liminal, or to be more precise, liminoid (Turner, 1974) space of creative possibility. In presenting the making

space as liminoid, I draw attention to its playful potential and its location outside the mainstream as an informal (yet *work-like*) space in which to try things out (ibid., pp. 85-86).

This notion of temporariness is perpetuated by the idea of the post-course drop-in participant being a rental user of the space, paying by the hour to use the facilities. The maker is also, at this early stage of participation, borrowing an identity, along with the shared aprons and uncertainty about what happens to their creations while they are not in the space. The learning experience can be purchased in blocks of time, foregrounding the position that this is not, in fact, a free space (Cohen & Taylor, 1978). The supposed liberation to be found through creative engagement is thus shaped into neatly structured blocks: the *permission spaces* I have discussed previously can thus be seen to offer both opportunity and carefully controlled constraints. Through the presentation of such spaces as rental spaces, the maker is borrowing space and time, in a commodified conception of making.

In working alongside others the maker is seen to be working in a quasi-public context, as a performance: when work succeeds, or if it fails, this is witnessed by other people in both spaces. This can offer opportunities for sharing ideas and knowledge, but also exposes vulnerabilities, and means that the nervous beginner must share vulnerabilities. I note how this contrasts with making at home, where errors are more easily concealed and must be deliberately presented for attention. In considering the research question about how makers learning alongside others, it is noteworthy here that I observe my fellow makers choosing to position themselves within the space in ways that conceal their work or processes – behind the screen of a printing press, at a

wheel with their back to the room, or choosing to use a workspace that faces a wall rather than a central table.

The social arrangements at Hive in particular are suggestive of a *club that isn't a club*: there are complex power dynamics to be navigated in understanding social roles and hierarchies, and in identifying real and de facto gatekeepers. At Hive in particular, an important observation is that this status is not necessarily linked to competence, but, rather, to being a familiar face. For the newcomer, such matters are only made apparent having already crossed the threshold into the workshop space; the sense of a 'permission space' is thus created through the need for the novice to navigate and find space within the existing social structure. A further point on the social interactions of the space is that I have illustrated how the space offers valuable opportunities for connection, and that this is not demonstrated as being an explicit aspect of the space's offer, but rather, is tacitly acknowledged.

In the next chapter I build on this understanding of the space, time and social context of the making experience, turning attention to the ways in which we learn and are taught the tools and materials of craft practices.

Chapter 5: Processes of Engagement and Enskilment: getting to grips with tools, materials and processes

Introduction

Having explored the space, time and social context in which first steps in amateur making are taken in the previous chapter, drawing out the notion of the ‘permission space’ and the fluidity of time in relation to the process, I now move on to thinking about the process of learning to make – how we are taught, how we learn to use tools and materials, and how we come to understand processes. In this chapter I consider how the maker moves towards becoming *skilful* – that is, accruing experiential competence through engagement with the tools and processes of making. I focus on the affordances presented by the resources at hand, be they human, technological or spatial, and how the maker uses these resources as they progress towards competence. Through examining these aspects, I specifically respond to the research questions about how we learn alongside others, how we learn tools and materials, and the role played by the facilities. This chapter begins with the first steps in engaging with the processes, moving through the teaching experience, finding the knack, and learning the language specific to craft practice. This structure is intended to mirror the gradual process of moving further into the community of craft practice, as described through Lave and Wenger’s work on communities of practice whereby the newcomer on the outside moves through layers of experience to end up as the old timer in the centre (Lave & Wenger, 1991). While this model is problematic in other ways in its application to my research, mostly notably in its suggestion that the process of learning

making has a clear linearity, it nevertheless serves as a useful framework in this context.

Getting my hands dirty: taking the first steps in the craft workshop

While a craft enthusiast enrolled on an informal course might be excited about participating in an unfamiliar creative activity, the reality of engaging with materials can present unexpected challenges. Not only must the newcomer navigate the space in which the activity takes place, but they must also reconcile their preconceptions with the messy reality of engagement, first getting to grips with tools and materials before they can begin to manipulate them successfully. In this section I consider how the beginner navigates material thresholds, encountering both potential and discomfort in this liminal space.

Engaging with new tools and materials requires that the maker aligns their preconceptions with feedback from sensory engagement. In my first encounter with the clay, described in the paragraphs below, I find that it is far softer than I had expected, and I must quickly adjust my perceptions. There is a necessity to engage and to succumb to the material before endeavouring to do more, but I find it difficult to manipulate the material to do what I want it to do, and this difficulty feels uncomfortable. Malafouris (2014) describes the agentive power of materials, but in my example, the novice is not yet attuned to how the materials will behave and so the interaction is not yet at a stage where this power can be acknowledged.

The instructor, Frances, rolls out some clay using two thin wooden strips, a piece of cloth, and a rolling pin, and shows us how we might make a basic bowl by cutting a wedge out of the clay and overlapping the remainder. She then rummages in a box of grubby fabrics, pulling out some lace, which she places over the rolled-out clay, moving the roller over the surface again so that the pattern is embossed onto the clay. This is to demonstrate how we could add texture to the surface of the clay. It turns out that this is the extent of the group teaching for the session. I spend most of the rest of the lesson watching others for clues, and fumbling my way forward, displaying the naivete of the beginner who does not yet know enough to be able to perform any sort of competence (Goffman, 1959). I pull a bag of dark brown clay from the bag sitting on the 'wedging up' table - not that I yet know what wedging up entails - and slice off a lump with a cheese wire. It is cold and slightly damp to the touch, yielding under pressure. I haven't handled clay since I was at secondary school, almost thirty years previously, and have only the slimmest recollection of its feel in my hands. I look round the table, unsure what to do or where to start. Frances, our tutor for the session, has assured me that the course will be fine for the complete ceramics novice that I consider myself to be; some of the group are getting on, kneading and pressing, rolling out and gathering moulds from the shelves, while others sit staring quietly at the clay, looking as bewildered as I feel. What to do with it? Will I be able to successfully manipulate this material or will it confound me? As I watch the other participants, I think about what I might make. At this stage I am cautious about anything more than the most rudimentary experimentation; I settle on making a box, as it seems like a simple form. My notes say that,

the material, in all its squidgy pliability, is new to me – I don't yet know what it will and won't do, or what it will look like after firing. Perhaps it's akin to being handed a pencil and a sheet of paper, and being asked to draw. I know that the pencil can make marks on the paper, but to transform those marks into a thing is another matter entirely.

(field notes, January 2019)

The clay is floppier than I'd imagined; it doesn't behave itself, squidging between my fingers exactly when I don't want it to, and acquiring accidental fingernail marks that seem impossible to remove. I find myself getting increasingly irritated with it. I look up from the mess in front of me to see the others getting on with their bowls and shapes, with little apparent struggle. I have no meaningful experience to draw on, and it seems we are being encouraged to feel a way through the processes; Frances's teaching approach is to show us some basics and then solve problems with each of us individually. The pieces I cut to make my box aren't neat, or careful: I'm beginning to resent the clay. It won't let me conceal my messiness, but instead exposes every nick and glitch. I have an idea that I might use one of the rubber kidneys in the tool boxes in the centre of the communal table to smooth it all out, and that the box will be a bit better after that, but for now, I score hatched marks on the base, and on the edges of each side. I find myself thinking that I really don't like this, that it's useful as research fieldwork but no more, and that in future when I'm thinking about amateur craft I'll be sticking to the familiar ground of sewing.

(adapted from field notes, January 2019)

In considering this fumbled approach, where I employ trial and error techniques to manipulate unfamiliar materials into a preconceived form, I consider that I am engaging in those ‘convoluted, inefficient and superfluous’ processes of amateur craft practice described by Knott (2015, p. 86). As he observes, there is no need to produce an output: I am not obliged to produce artefacts as part of a work role or even as part of an educational project involving assessment, so I could very easily squash my frustrating creation into a ball at the end of the session, sliding it into the clay bin and leaving with only the memory of the processes I have attempted. However, the fact that I have signed up to undertake this course, running over several weeks, means that I am more likely to turn up the next week to try again (I am also compelled to return by the added pressure of the course functioning as part of my doctoral fieldwork, rather than simply as a leisure activity in its own right). Even if this trial and error errs more on the side of error than success, the space, and the format of the course, affords me the permission to do this.

In the Literature Review, in the section on Making Known, I discuss the roles of performance and visibility. In thinking about the home maker taking first steps with new processes, the obvious contrast with the making outlined above is that the home experience is concealed from view; while there are fewer opportunities for mimetic learning (unless, for instance, one is being taught by another member of the household), if I were to try something at home that did not turn out as intended, there are no witnesses to observe me setting the materials aside with no intention to resume the activity, and as the activity does not take place at a set time each week, nobody would notice that I do not turn up the next week to try again. Participation in the

making space thus both provides and requests a form of accountability for the maker, which can function as part of its appeal: the experience is boundaried both by the timeslot of the course and the confines of the space, the activity is witnessed (whether directly or indirectly), and, in the case of a multi-week course, there is an implicit suggestion that the maker can, or will, return the following week.

At this stage, I am still firmly located on the threshold of the activity. Early successes spur me on by offering some insight into how materials behave, though at this point the maker cannot know what they do not yet know; Barrett and Bolt (2010) note of this exploratory uncertainty that we must come to know the world materially before we can know it theoretically. We can use comparison with other experiences of engagement with materials - in my case, I am also able to recall early frustrations with other art forms and to know that with, for instance, embroidery, persistence has enabled me to *come good* – and this can provide a degree of confidence in this less familiar context, that failure is unlikely to be absolute and that it will be worth turning up for the next session. On a course in the shared learning environment there also is an expectation that we will trust the tutor as they guide us through the weeks, though as I discover, in these informal contexts, there is little consistency in approach; in the next section I explore how the use of these different teaching styles affects how we learn.

The processes of teaching and learning

Craft skills can be developed via direct engagement with materials, testing, and practical application – that is, *through engagement* – and also through *transmission* from others, for instance through tuition from knowledge-holder to knowledge-seeker,

or via observation of a craft activity being performed. In this section I consider the ways in which knowledge is imparted, accrued, understood and unpicked in amateur craft learning.

Within the courses I attend, many, if not all, of the participant community are *dabblers*, or even *dilettantes* – trying out the activity without commitment to further study. We are not operating within a formal learning context, and consequently participants use the time of the course to find their own way through engagement with tools and materials. Numerous accounts of craft learning present the learner as apprentice to a master (e.g. Marchand (2010), Patchett (2016), Gowlland (2019), Martin, (2021)), receiving very direct instruction, but in the informal making space, participants are not apprentices; while instruction in basic techniques is important, we are not being trained to become *craftspeople* (with the attendant notions of precise master-to-pupil apprenticeship and a clearly mapped journey towards expertise), but rather, to achieve simple outcomes such as the creation of a basic print or a simple ceramic vessel, in an informal environment, achieving personal aims through a sometimes haphazard approach. These personal aims do not always include increased proficiency in the craft at hand, but perhaps instead relate to social interaction or simply the opportunity to experiment with materials. The nature of the learning undertaken in my research, where skills are taught in a friendly manner in short blocks of weekly sessions, means that there is a tension between considering the experience as engaging in a frivolous ‘pastime’ (Adorno, 1969, 1991) or ‘learning a skill’ (Dreyfus, 2004). For some participants, in the space to try something new as a pleasurable way to pass time, the relationship with learning (and the commitment to producing an end result) is different

than for participants who are there to learn specific skills, in order to perhaps develop an existing creative practice. In the context of my research, I see more of the 'leisure' makers in the ceramics space, even on more specialist courses relating to glazing and Raku firing, and more self-declared artists seeking to return to or develop aspects of practice in the print space – even if, with a little probing, it transpires that there is little to differentiate between the two groups in practice. It is not clear whether this positioning is partly to do with the ceramics space being a community space, with a diverse participant population, some of whom are undertaking the ceramics course as that just happens to be what's available as a social activity with the specifics of the making activity being somewhat incidental; in contrast, the printmaking space has a resident population of established, experienced printmakers whose work is visible on the walls of the space, and alongside whom the aspirational novice could choose to align her or himself in hope that some prowess might be absorbed.

Across both of my research spaces, the tutors perform their competence in front of the group in different ways; in the print space, this takes the form of mimetic learning, in which the tutor demonstrates a technique then the group repeats it, with the tutor on hand to correct errors. The approach in the ceramics space is more freeform, with an initial demonstration during the first week of each course, and the tutors then channelling their expertise into resolving each participant's particular issue: for instance, Frances shows me how to level off the top of a cylindrical vessel by turning it

over and rubbing it on a wet board, or Bob sits with me and starts to demonstrate how to trim the edge of a plate using a huge rasp, handing over to me to carry on:

'I suggest how somebody can use the clay and then – because most people have an idea of what they want to do, I'm more like helping them to find their result. Rather than actually "teach teach" (sic), yeah?'

Interview with Bob, ceramics, 09/07/19

Sennett observes of this practice that 'show, don't tell occurs in workshops when the master demonstrates proper procedure through action: his or her display becomes the guide. Yet this kind of miming contains a wrinkle' (2009, p. 181). The wrinkle, as Sennett describes it, is that we are not privy to the master's prior errors – we are witnessing their refined technique, and aren't seeing the journey towards refinement. Jane, our tutor for the introductory printmaking course, unintentionally foregrounds this glitch and its attendant capacity for error at various points, such as when she warns us of the dangers of dropping heavy weights (used to add extra pressure to a repurposed printing press) which risk crushing our toes, then does exactly that, narrowly missing one of her own feet. In a manner akin to a YouTube craft process video being edited to conceal the maker's failures and errors (Lehmann, 2012), we also do not see all the discarded prints or failed projects on our tutors' journeys to competence. Frances, in the pottery space, emphasises these tutorial limitations in observing that,

'I'm no expert in teaching, but I'm fairly confident in clay, and I'm willing to – well somebody's got to lead everybody, I'll be the leader. But we'll all find out together.'

Interview with Frances, ceramics, 18/03/2019

Statements like this, with its implication that Frances is one of our peers who has stepped forward to lead the class, rather than being the teacher, attempt to distort the power differential between teacher and pupil. In this instance, the claim is made by the more powerful actor in the transaction; instead of diluting the power differential, it instead reinforces it, as the pupils (that is, the course participants) understand that we lack knowledge and so Frances, who holds the knowledge that we seek, *is* the expert here, regardless of whether or not she is comfortable with this label. There is also an aspect whereby all participants are aware that most of us are paying to receive this knowledge, and one person is being paid to share it; try as we might, these facts cannot be ignored entirely.

In this context, Frances downplaying her competence also provokes some uncertainty in me, in that it causes me to question whether I can trust her teaching: how do I know that she really knows what she's doing? On another course in the ceramics space, Bob establishes his credentials in three ways: through telling us about his experience of spending twenty years as a production potter; through demonstrating the techniques he wants us to learn in a manner that reveals no hesitancy or uncertainty; and also through technical understanding of our challenges, and how to resolve them. The tutors in the print space convey similar authority, which they present through clues dropped into conversation such as evidence of years of practice or forthcoming exhibitions, or through the same assured demonstration and ability to rectify our faltering progress as Bob has shown in the ceramics space. While my two research sites differ in various aspects, in this regard they (largely) share a commonality, that participants receive tuition from experienced practitioners: we see that we are in safe hands. A self-run craft group might present different educational dynamics and flatter

hierarchical structures, such as people taking turns to share their expertise, but here, the structure is clearly established: the tutor is the expert who holds the knowledge, with the students receiving the knowledge, and in these two spaces this dynamic is firmly embedded, regardless of the extent to which the tutor endeavours to position the learning as a two-way experience, as happens in an interview with Frances in the ceramics space.

Even within this hierarchical model in which the tutor is 'master', the tutors in a space adopt different approaches. Some of this can be ascribed to the format of a course: in a one-to-one session, instruction will necessarily be more structured than in a group context where a tutor is supporting numerous students. In the ceramics space, Bob offers some group instruction at the start of the course, then works with students to achieve their personal outcomes; he allows us to feel our way through engaging with materials before stepping in to resolve issues by delivering teaching specific to that issue. In contrast, when Louise delivers a one-to-one wheel throwing session with me, it takes the form of a very direct very supervised master/pupil exchange where a clear format is followed: Louise demonstrates, then I copy, in a structure designed to fill a two-and-a-half-hour session. The two approaches result in very different feelings about the learning experience: with Bob letting us figure out processes and materials for ourselves, there is opportunity to resolve issues rather than relying on the teacher being there to ask, 'is this right?' In contrast, however, although experiential learning can enable the learner to develop their own judgement, without explicit instruction they are less likely to understand what they should be feeling for in the material, or the purpose underlying their actions, as I demonstrate in the examples below.

My first attempt to use the wheel is not planned. The pottery room at Hive is not set up to focus on wheel-throwing, and consequently the single wheel sits in the corner for most of each taught session, neglected except as an extra work surface when drying work. Until this point everybody has skirted round it, with some unspoken sense that it is out of bounds. However, during an evening course, Nick, one of the participants tells Bob, the tutor, that he would like to have a go on the wheel. I assume Bob will be unable to provide tuition as there are so many people requiring varying levels of support in the room, but Nick tells him that he's done his research, by his measure, through watching some YouTube tutorials; he feels that he has an idea of what's involved.

Nick gets himself settled at the wheel and produces a sort of bowl, with a great deal of concentration, but then Bob comes over to show him a couple of tips. Bob prepares half a dozen balls of clay, and tells Nick he needs a bowl of water to hand. The first movement is to centre the ball of clay on the wheel. The second movement is to push the thumb into the clay. Nick sees me watching so he asks if I'd like a go. I take his place, feeling as if I'm trying to enact every image I've ever seen of a person throwing a pot on the wheel. The reality is of a lump of mud fighting to get out of my hands, not wanting to stay anywhere near the centre, not wanting to be refined and elegant, but instead wanting to coat my hands in a thick, unctuous layer of clay. This is filthy work. I have another go with another ball of clay, with no more success. I feel like my hands are pulling at the clay, trying to keep it in the right place. There is no sense of being relaxed – make no mistake, this is a fight. The wheel is controlled by a

pedal under my right foot; I've been sewing for years and can control my sewing machine's needle with great precision, but connecting what is happening under my hands with controlling the wheel by moving my right foot, seems impossible. I scrape the mess off the wheel and leave Nick to it, heading back to my place round the central table. I feel as if I've been spat out of a centrifuge.

Field notes, evening ceramics class, May 2019

This is a very informal introduction where we rely on feeling our way through the experience, and attempting to marry up the haptic sensation with perceptions developed through observing others. Nick is attempting to replicate the actions that he has seen on screen, but the image presented on screen does not tell the whole story: it might not detail the preparation and clearing up that are essential parts of the process, and the spectacle of observation can only offer the outsider's view, rather than conveying the sensation of feeling the materials in one's hands (Lehmann, 2012). The watcher does not know how many takes it has taken to create this video, and while they are able to slow down, speed up, replay the video multiple times, this only reiterates its status as a simulacrum of lived experience rather than the real deal. Similarly, when I observe Nick, I do not have prior material or kinaesthetic knowledge on which I can draw in order to understand his experience: I am relying on a peripheral perspective. I also have no tool-awareness (Ingold, 2011, p. 56) in this situation – I do not know whether the wheel should spin fast or slow. I don't know what I'm feeling for – there is no haptic context (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 53). The process is messy, in both the learning, and the material now coating the wheel and its housing. Some of my struggle is drawn from the sense of how the mechanism is controlled by my right foot. On one

level it is directly comparable to using a sewing machine, a tool I am familiar with, even though in that instance my foot works seemingly independently of my hands, which are focusing on feeding the material through the machine, removing pins, attending to issues; this activity that involves both hands, sight, and total focus, feels totally different, as the material in my hands is unfamiliar in this context. The main outcome of my experiment is that the thing that I thought might be intuitive does not feel intuitive at all. This encounter is much like my perception of the elegance of the screen printing process, and the ease of the required movements, which is swiftly debunked in the act. From these experiments, I conclude that while it is possible to watch others and to mimic their movements, in order to successfully perform the task there is a necessity to understand *why* these particular actions are required. The teacher is able to articulate this understanding either verbally or through demonstration, so that the learner becomes able to link the sensations at their fingertips with an understanding of their purpose.

The next stage of my relationship with the wheel is to book a one-to-one session with a local potter who delivers these courses at Hive. These courses are marketed as gift experiences with a necessary outcome, similar to the one-day courses at the print workshop, as discussed in the previous Findings chapter. The experience of learning directly in a one-to-one context is very different to the group sessions: I am here to learn a particular skill, with knowledge transmitted via observation and instruction. The style of teaching is very different to what has come before: I am alone beneath the tutor's gaze, with no opportunity to look across to other makers for clues. The transfer of knowledge here is in a master-apprentice format, with the master demonstrating

and the apprentice mimicking the bodily positions, in an example of a specific context described by Pallasmaa (2009, p. 15):

Learning a skill is not primarily founded on verbal teaching but rather on the transference of the skill from the muscles of the teacher directly to the muscles of the apprentice through the act of sensory perception and bodily mimesis.

I feel a sense of seriousness in this session that I have not previously encountered during my fieldwork; it might be related to the one-to-one nature of the session, or perhaps the solemn demeanour of the tutor. Here, the session is about structure, focus, and achieving a specific outcome by the end of the session. This is not an opportunity to say 'what happens if' and to fumble forward, as when I tried to use the wheel during the previous session; here, I am obliged, through mimetic understanding, to follow the particular set of actions required to form the vessel. This is an intense situation with no warm-up or lead in – we have just two hours in which I must adopt the position of apprentice to the master (Gowlland, 2019). The session starts with Louise demonstrating as I watch. Her actions seem effortless, starting with a lump of clay flung decisively onto the plate of the wheel, then, as the wheel spins, she draws the clay up between her hands, back down, up and then down. Her actions are so habituated that the bowl she produces seems like the obvious conclusion to the synergetic relationship between her hands and the material. In this context, I perceive that I am watching an expert, whose actions I will then mimic, as she offers close observation and instruction. I make the following field notes after the session, written in a way that endeavours to capture the intensity of the experience, the instruction from Louise, and the thoughts that spin through my head during the process:

First I centre the ball of clay on the wheel, trying to get it as close to the middle as possible. I must then 'centre' it as it spins, with actions that are about smoothing it, drawing it up, pressing it down, drawing it up, pressing it down, and then pressing into the middle with a thumb to start the process of making a vessel.

The clay fights back.

It will just about behave itself when it is in a broadly round shape, but I find that clasping my hands together to pull it upwards, trying to remember to keep pulling towards me, means that it becomes unstable very quickly. The wobble beneath my hands is pronounced. Refocus. Try again. Try to relax but also retain the tension that will hold it in place. This is a fight. A lot of the time at Hive people talk about how 'the clay will show you the way' but here, if I leave it, it will have hurled itself across the room. Push down, hold my hands around it, make the triangle. "Elbows down!", barks Louise. One hand over the other, cupping it, pulling it towards me, start to move my hands up, pulling the clay up. There's the wobble. Hold it, go with it, bring it up. Make sure there's water. Always water. Bring it up, hold it there, manage the wobble. Can I take it down? Press down with the palm of my hand, keep my movements confident. "Bring it down. Take it up again, don't lose all the clay at the bottom. Keep the speed up! Bring it up again, don't let it wobble! Water! Is it ready yet? Can I take it down? Can I plunge my thumb in? Yes, but be confident. Push the thumb in – water! Keep watering or it'll dry up!" And I slow the wheel, get some water, feel the clay dragging and then loosening as the water meets it. Push the thumb down and then across. Down and across. Louise says, "Think about a flat base. Hold

the fingers. You're not moving the hand, the clay is moving on the wheel. Don't move the hand! Alright, now bring up the hand, keeping everything even – keep your thumb the same distance from your fingers. Don't let it wobble! You're not squeezing here, you're holding it. The clay is doing the work".

Field notes, Wheel session, June 2019

The session is partly successful in that I come away with four vessels, of which one has collapsed inelegantly, destabilised on the wheel at the last minute, as if exhausted from the fight. I choose to put them on the drying shelf for firing anyway, as physical examples of my learning. The immediate sensation, though, is in muscles that ache from holding myself in position. In relation to the teaching, I note that I am not yet attuned to the shape that Louise has told me I must adopt, where the elbows and hands form a triangle, so I hold myself tense, rather than coming to this position with a controlled looseness borne of familiarity with the necessary kinaesthetic knowledge. I feel as if I have been *instructed* but because I have taken such direct instruction, I come away uncertain about how much I have actually learned. Louise tells me that she was taught incorrectly and then had to learn again; in sharing this vulnerability she reinforces her credentials as teacher, demonstrating that she understands the processes through both practice and through taking apart and re-learning the necessary actions. As discussed in the Literature Review in the section on Making Known, there is nowhere here for the novice to conceal an error – every action is visible to the master. It is notable that I choose to avoid the wheel for the remainder of my time in the ceramics workshop: it is not so much the practice as this encounter with the teaching of it that has derailed me.

Through this extended account I demonstrate that though we can have processes demonstrated to us by a more experienced practitioner, or even by sideways observation of a fellow participant engaged in the activity we hope to learn, it is through direct engagement with tools and materials that we begin to build up a *schema* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 2012) for onward progress. As I observed in the Literature Review chapter on Making Known, Ryle (1949) noted that the acquisition of tacit knowledge involved the shift from the theoretical (knowing *that*) to the practical (knowing *how*); to apply this to my experience, I acknowledge that, in this position of guided making where we are never far from the safety of an instructor's advice, I am not yet in the position of knowing *why* I must do things in a particular order. The instructors give us information about the necessary steps to take, but it only really becomes comprehensible when the action is enacted in its correct context; at this point I have become more able to understand either the positive consequences of performing the correct action, or the problems that occur when I do not, through engagement in the process of experiential learning whereby I have encountered issues and guessed at how to resolve them.

Having examined aspects of experiential learning, both within the shared making space and while alone, I now move on to considering the complexities and challenges that arise through the obligation for the pupil to trust the wisdom of the master.

Trusting the master: on uncertainty, and feeling a way through

The learning in the informal making environments of my research is largely strategic, with learners accruing sufficient knowledge to be able to achieve their desired

outcomes: this might be as simple as making a single colour print or ceramic object, or it might involve the acquisition of subsequent layers of knowledge in order to produce more complex outcomes. Turner (1969) describes how the novice – or as he terms them the ‘threshold person’ – is in a state of uncertainty, so must trust the instructor, but within this process of largely-experiential learning, how can participants know that we can rely on our tutors’ knowledge?

In a conversation at Hive, my fellow participant Harriet observes that,

‘You’re effectively working blind – you see a thing that you’d like to try but you don’t know whether it’s really easy to do or really difficult. You’re trusting Frances when she tells you that that slip [which looks grey] will be blue.’
Ceramics fieldwork, 04/02/2019.

In this example, Harriet, who has participated in a previous course, acknowledges that we are both novices, and also acknowledges an aspect of community in our shared lack of knowledge. We do not yet have control over the choices we might make about our work; similarly, in the introduction to printmaking class at Leeds Print Workshop, we are provided with a limited palette of three colours to choose from, which effectively constrains us. We are thus fed carefully selected pieces of information until we are able to begin to piece the information together. Juelsbo (2016) presents these material constraints as a form of affordance: in his example, a photographer using an analogue (film) camera and black and white film is effectively constrained by the limitations of the device, but this limitation enables him to push the potential of this medium, without being distracted by colour, or possibilities that a digital camera might enable, such as the opportunity to take near-endless photographs. In the print space, the limited palette here forces us to think about the effects of their juxtaposition and what

happens when they are layered over one another. This approach to teaching whereby the learner is given blocks of information that accrue to form a more complete understanding, this constraint enables the maker to extend the potential of the narrow field of opportunity, interrogating and starting to understand the possibilities before them rather than being distracted by a wide spectrum of options.

If we are to think of the making workshop as a liminal space where work shifts in and out of visibility, the glazing and firing processes in the ceramics workshop perfectly embody this, with work hidden under glazes, concealed in the kiln, and then revealed again at the end of the firing process; similarly, in teaching us about these processes, the tutor chooses to conceal and reveal information in ways that are outside the control of the student. We dunk work that starts as bare bisque-fired clay into buckets of opaque glazing matter, or hold the work in awkward manual configurations as we pour the matter over it, masking any surface decoration. We must trust that the combination of minerals that make up the glaze will do what they say, turning the object blue or green or matte or shiny; this is the point where, along with much of the group, I begin to struggle to understand the processes involved. Frances draws a diagram (*Figure 15*) to illustrate how the various combinations of glazing and firing might work. In the image below, s/e/b refer to temperatures for firing objects in the kiln: 's' being stoneware, the hottest, 'e' being earthenware, and 'b' being bisque firing (the first firing, which transforms the clay into a fixed form). It seems different layers can be fired at different temperatures, which adds to our confusion – nothing is as it seems.

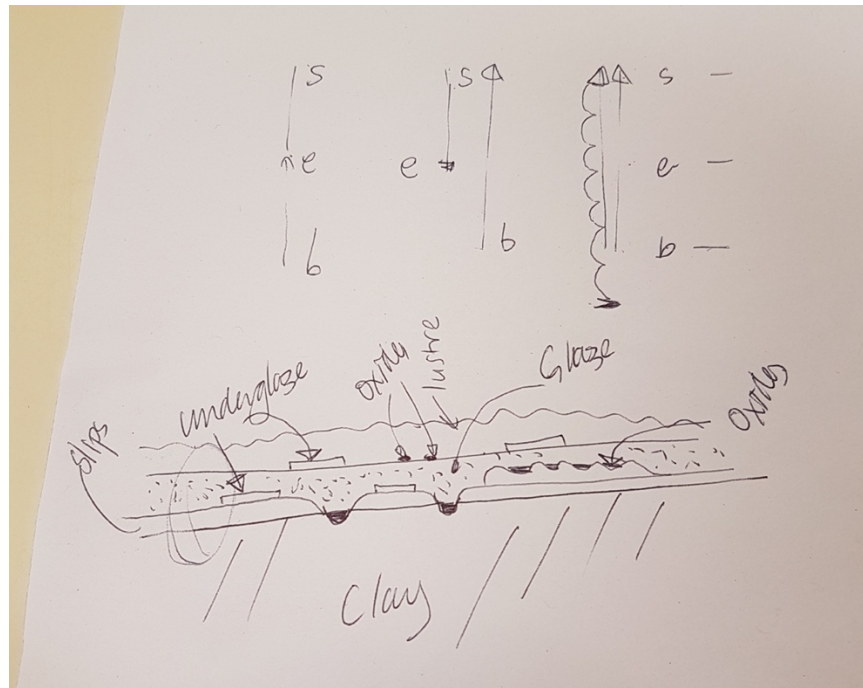


Figure 15 Frances's diagram of the layers of ceramic material and their firing

Frances had reminded us earlier in the course that 'because glazing is about chemical reactions, red and yellow won't make orange, and blue and yellow won't make green' (*Ceramics fieldwork*, 25/02/2019); now, not only can we not trust the colour theory we might have understood at a rudimentary level since blending felt tips in childhood, but nor can we rely on what we might have thought of as straightforward procedures for layering or heating. I'm reminded of the moment when two participants in the first course put underglaze on an unfired pot – at that point this was, we were told, not the right order, but this is contradicted when we later learn that the ceramicist can manipulate the order of application to create different effects; this knowledge is effectively being unknotted and retied (Ingold, 2015) in a different configuration. This phenomenon is explored as an aspect of Meyer & Land's *Threshold Concepts* (2005), in which the student is taught a particular idea at one stage, and then when the student has learned more, the veracity of the idea is subsequently disproved; it has functioned

as a stepping stone to a higher level of knowledge. For the student, obliged to trust the tutor, this seeming *volte face* can be difficult to reconcile, unless it can be fitted into a more developed framework of understanding, accessible to the more experienced student but, as yet, out of bounds to the novice.

Early attempts to experiment, in intentional or unwitting defiance of tutorial input, can be considered as forms of improvisation, of which I contend that there are two clear stages in the informal craft learning journey: in this first stage, the newcomer's approach to risk is based in ignorance, in that they are prepared to try things because they have no prior knowledge of what we can think of as accepted protocol, or what Banfield (2016) notes as 'a sense of how things should be done' (p. 466). If the newcomer does choose to follow instructions, they do not yet have sufficient knowledge of environment and its affordances, in this case the materials and how they will interact, so must either trust the tutor or take an uninformed risk. The risk is not necessarily apparent at this stage, as we do not yet know what we do not know. The tutor is placed in the role of master, transmitting knowledge to the student, but must also watch for what we can consider as unruliness, because as the inexperienced maker does not yet understand the rules, they also do not yet understand the consequences of *not understanding* the rules. There is potential for serendipitous outcomes, but there are just as likely to be negative consequences ranging from minor frustrations – from an unsalvageable piece of work through to broken equipment or dangerous chemical combinations. In this context, the learner accepting, or succumbing to, the power held by the tutor can lead to positive material outcomes, though there is the possibility of a level of social discomfort in this informal

environment where such imposed constraints might feel unwelcome, particularly for the maker who simply wants to play.

Thus far I have considered the experiences of learning to make by focusing predominantly on the comparisons and contrasts between the experiential and taught aspects of learning in the informal making space. My relationship with tools changed rapidly during the course of my fieldwork; the next section will explore the shifts in understanding that took place.

The developing relationship with tools

A few weeks into my fieldwork experiences, I notice that I am starting to refine my choice of tools, drawing information from sensory feedback. One of my research questions asks how we learn tools and materials, and in this section I explore how my perception of tools and their use begins to shift, even over the time of a short course. I also consider the different ways in which each of the fieldwork sites makes tools and equipment accessible to participants.

The tool remains an *object* until an opportunity for its application is presented –

Heidegger describes this as the tool being ‘ready-to-hand’ (Heidegger, 1962, p. 98).

There are several tools in the centre of the ceramics workshop table whose purpose isn’t apparent until I try a particular technique, for instance a very large grater/file, whose presence holds no purpose for me until I find that it is exactly the thing for levelling out the edge of a vessel while one turns it on a small tabletop hand-propelled banding wheel. Through the interaction between the tool and the material, the

transformation – what Ingold (2010) and Malafouris (2014) refer to as material engagement – happens, and with each interaction I accrue more knowledge of how this interaction can be refined to develop the object on which I am working. I encounter what can be thought of as this *object-to-tool revelation* repeatedly within both the ceramics and printmaking workshops, as I become more familiar with different aspects of both processes; it is as if a shape is brought into focus as its application is revealed. This relationship between tool and skill switches back and forth throughout my time in the workshops: at points, it is through trying something out with a specific tool that I understand its affordances, and at other times, it is in wanting to achieve a particular outcome that I try out the tool. Whichever leads, it is reasonable to note that the potential of many of the workshop tools can only be more fully revealed at the stage when I have accrued sufficient competence – and confidence – to be able to apply them in a manner that most fully exploits their more obvious affordances.

When working on linocuts during an introductory course in the printmaking space, participants each work with a box of modular ‘student’ tools, where a selection of blades fit into a short wooden handle (*fig 16*).



Figure 16 the basic lino-cutting tools

Once assembled, the tool feels cumbersome in my hand, and the blades don't feel very sharp. I have a dim memory from schooldays of the satisfaction of a long strip of lino peeling away without snapping or juddering, evidence of lingering tacit knowledge, but these tools seem reluctant even to bite at the surface of the lino, so I reach instead for the better tools our course leader has placed in the middle of the table. These consist of a long metal shaft with a blade at one end and a semi-rounded, semi-flattened wooden head at the other; the head is designed to fit into the hand with the index finger extending down the shaft to control the tip of the blade. When I push down the superior tool bites effortlessly into the lino; I find I can follow my pencil marks precisely, peeling away curling threads. I am able to exert much finer control over the new tool, as the blade feels more like a pen – an extension of my index finger, as per Merleau-Ponty's analogy about how the blind man's cane ceases to be a cane and instead *becomes* his fingertip, functioning as an extended point of engagement with

the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 2012, p. 144). It seems several of the others have made the same observation about the basic tools we'd begun with, so we must negotiate the use of these much sharper tools. This involves some patience and necessitates watching others more closely than feels comfortable, to be able to pounce on the *v-blade* or the *big u-blade* the moment they stop using it. The carving tools become akin to the printing presses, of which there are only two, which compels the ten participants on the course to queue for our turn as we negotiate these shared resources, and to perform more patience than we might actually feel when someone has an issue that requires them to re-ink a piece of lino or otherwise linger over the equipment.

It is notable that this scrabble for equipment does not happen at any point other than with the lino tools; when I attend a screen printing course, everybody has access to their own screen and squeegee, with none better than any other. Similarly, in the ceramics space, such scrabbling is not present, though this could easily be attributed to the fact that, as a long-established community-led space operating on a very slim budget, many of the tools are repurposed or otherwise simple devices. It is important to note that all the communal tools belong to the space, rather than the individual maker, whether in the printmaking space or the ceramics space, and consequently the maker must mould their practice round what is available, rather than demanding the tools that fit their creative vision. We must learn to work with what is there, whatever its quality or potential, before we can begin to work out what specific equipment will aid our own progress.

The changing relationship with tools does not only involve understanding how they work, getting a feel for different tools in the hand, and navigating sharing them; it is also about beginning to gather an awareness of the maker's relationship to tools as relating to the maker's identity. The specific selection of tools a maker chooses to gather for her or himself starts to tell a story about the sort of things the maker is intending to make.

When I am rummaging amongst the assortment of available tools in the ceramics space, some deliberately designed for pottery and some appropriated from elsewhere (old forks, paintbrushes whose bristles have worn down to leave only stubble, plastic loyalty cards, wooden spoons, a lightbulb) in order to try out some mark-making on clay, Frances brings over her toolbox (*fig 18*). I am initially uncertain about whether she simply wants to show me how a toolbox might develop along with a practitioner's interest, but I soon realise that she is allowing me to use these items, and that this is a moment at which a threshold is crossed: I am being invited into a more experienced practitioner's private space. I see that her toolbox contains some ceramic-specific tools, such as the looped devices for carving away at clay, or pointed wooden tools for marking or indenting; however, it also contains an array of tools repurposed from elsewhere. Paint scrapers, baking tools, a potato peeler, cogs, buttons, and other ephemera. Each has a purpose for Frances, often discovered, she tells me, through playful experimentation, in which a surprising object can become a tool with particular purpose for her. As I look through the box, I try out a few items, using buttons and cogs to make impressions in clay in a way that suits my working style; in this way, I create a new relationship with these tools, repurposing these already-repurposed objects to my own needs.



Figure 17 Frances's toolbox

Later, I talk to another participant on the course who tells me that, having unexpectedly found an affinity for ceramics in the previous twelve months, she had received a set of pottery tools for Christmas. She says that while these tools are not sophisticated or expensive, this means that she's a *potter* now – the acquisition of a set of tools that are hers, brought to each session, and tailored to her specific creative needs, provides a means of bolstering her identity as a maker. It also means that she no longer needs to compromise in this aspect of using the shared space. In a similar way, Frances's identity as a maker is reinforced through the presentation of this box, whose contents have been refined over several years to facilitate and respond to the nuances of her specific creative processes. The developing toolbox described here can be viewed as a metaphor for a developing toolbox of skills as the maker begins to make

more refined choices in the pursuit of more intentional outcomes. There is also a risk aspect to the experienced maker opening up their toolbox to the neophyte; the choice of equipment is carefully honed and can be as individual as a fingerprint. Within my own making practice at home, I see how the bend in an originally straight needle demonstrates its many hours of use held between my fingers, and my old sewing machine has long since revealed all of its secrets and idiosyncrasies: these tools have been honed to my needs, and in turn I have honed my making to work with their nuances. In contrast, the workshop tools, shared between many hands, will always remain somehow impersonal and *other*, despite becoming more familiar with repeated use.

There are marked differences between the ceramic space and the printmaking space in terms of which tools are available to course participants. The ways in which constraint and permission are enacted are highly space-specific. At Hive, the ceramics space, we are encouraged to explore the space and to try out devices such as the plaster moulds into which rolled-out clay can be pressed to make both functional and decorative objects; the only items very clearly out of bounds are the kilns, housed in metal cages, which require greater knowledge than will be imparted to beginners over the twenty hours of a course. In contrast, the printmaking space is more explicitly boundaried, in that each printmaking technique brings its own complexities and its own tools, for instance the enormous vacuum-sealed lightbox for screen prints, or the boxes of minuscule type for letterpress printing. It is unclear what would happen if a participant was to try out equipment for which they had not been trained, but the implied delineation between tasks, and the constant presence of a print technician, means this

transgression is not an option. In this aspect, a contrast between these two ostensibly open access spaces becomes clear: Hive, the ceramics space, is primarily a community arts space, where participation is the primary objective, whereas Leeds Print Workshop is a practitioner-led space, offering introductory courses at least in part as a way of funding its overheads, but predominantly targeted at experienced printmakers. With this difference in mind, the different boundaries for being able to try things out become more comprehensible: Hive functions more as a play space, where experimental interactions between participant, tools and materials are invited as a way of *seeing what happens*, while at on the courses I attend at Leeds Print Workshop, the participant is channelled along a specifically delineated and carefully structured path, encouraged to experiment only within very clearly defined parameters. I investigate the ways in which these different approaches lead in to grasping techniques as I focus in on tool manipulation in the next section.

Finding the knack – the uses of tacit knowledge

If we are to think of craft, in its purest term, as ‘making something well through hand skill’ (Adamson, 2013, p. xxiii), then the moment of grasping the necessary actions in order to perform the creative process is an important step in being able to step away from the instructional context and towards independent practice. Learning to use the equipment involved in making sometimes requires a *knack*, a particular bodily approach to manipulating tools or materials to achieve the desired outcome. When I describe the knack, I intend it as shorthand for efficiently performing a task that requires tacit knowledge of process, material and intended outcome – what Martin (2021) refers to as the ‘feel’ for an activity. This might be a tiny gesture, such as the

little *jerk* action that a printmaker must make with a screen-printing squeegee after drawing ink across a screen in order to prevent ink sliding back down the screen, or knowing how to tackle the tricky pin in the defunct heat press. However, it might also be an approach to a particular task that requires the bodily knowing borne of practice. In the example below, from the printmaking space, the tutor demonstrates a distinct bodily movement necessary to perform the full task of screen printing successfully. The squeegee is the rubber-edged blade used to drag ink across a screen of fine mesh, forcing a blended mix of ink and screen-printing medium through those areas of the screen that have not been masked off by a stencil. The pressure enacted upon the squeegee must be consistent, otherwise there is a risk of creating blotchy prints, or of ‘clogging’ the screen with ink.

As Ellen demonstrates the actions of creating a screen print, she shows us how to hold the squeegee, saying, ‘imagine you’ve broken your wrists’. It’s important to hold it at 45 degrees to make sure the ink makes it through the screen. I find this quite difficult at first, and Sian (the assistant) gets me to change the angle at which I hold the squeegee, while she watches me. Sian talks about the squeegee jerk back being tacit knowledge, like when you can feel that the ink/medium mix is right: ‘You just know’.

Field notes, screen printing, March 2019

The notion of *just knowing* requires the maker to know what it is they are feeling *for*; we can watch the tutor, and understand that there is a pattern of actions to enact, but understanding *why* we must do this, and what the correct sensation or set of moves

feels like, elevates our practice through enabling us to locate the action within a wider schema.

This knowledge can be thought of as an embedded form of muscle memory, as in the adage about how returning to a learned-then-neglected series of motor actions is like riding a bicycle – once learned, impossible to forget. For example, I find that despite having not used a lino-cutting tool for many years, it takes only moments to remember how hard I can press with it while carving a design into the lino surface. As previous experience comes back to me through the feel of the material peeling away under the tip of the blade, I stop gouging so deeply and am able to refine my gouging to produce more controlled mark making. However, when learning to throw pots on a wheel, I cannot draw so easily on links to previous experience; I find myself in the position of Polanyi's (1966) example of learning to drive a car, where the novice driver finds the idea of being able to perform multiple tasks in a moving vehicle seemingly impossible, but the experienced driver performs these actions unconsciously. Similarly, when using a sewing machine, I can operate the foot pedal that drives the machine, guide the fabric under the machine's needle, remove pins from the fabric, and make countless tiny manipulations, resolving issues as they arise; however, when I began sewing, I remember how the machine seemed to be an entity outside my control. I find this when attempting to throw pots for the first time, in my efforts to control the wheel's speed with my right foot while also managing the clay between my hands. The accelerator is always under my right foot, whether in a car, using a sewing machine, or using a potter's wheel, but whereas with the sewing machine or when driving a car I am able to use it unconsciously, with the potter's wheel I must consider my actions

very consciously, that seemingly transferrable delicate touch from my right foot on a throttle, or treadle, or power lever, having evaporated in this unfamiliar context. This notion of struggling to transfer knowledge from one context to another is described as a key 'threshold concept' by Meyer and Land (2005), which, once grasped, is hard to unlearn; this instance of knowing something theoretically but struggling to put it into practice can also be thought of as what they term 'troublesome' knowledge, another of the five threshold concepts. If this knowledge is hard to grasp, how, then, can it be understood and applied? Ingold (2015) and Martin (2021) both note the importance of 'tool sensitivity', whereby the maker is not only able to understand the tool's use theoretically, but also becomes able to understand it practically, through refinement of movement. Above, in the section on the changing relationship with tools, I described the difference between using a more basic set of lino cutting tools and a superior set; there, the difference could be felt by an inexperienced user, simply through the structure of the tools, and the response they produced in interaction with the material. In what I describe here, the tool remains consistent, but the user is able to produce an increasingly refined response through attending to haptic feedback.

In considering whether it is possible to identify the moment of transition from *not grasping the action* to *grasping the action*, we must consider the temporal aspect: the idea that the necessary actions click into place implies the sudden revelation of a Eureka moment rather than a repetitive process of refining bodily interactions with tools and materials until a point of maximum efficiency is reached. By grasping the knack of particular actions within the performance of a craft, the novice begins to acquire the skills necessary for independent practice – to go it alone. This can therefore

be thought of as a form of liminality, a threshold across which the maker can pass on a journey of enskilment – but it is important to note that while this perceptual shift (Martin, 2021) can deliver greater efficiency for the maker, it might never actually arrive. As I describe below, while haptic inefficiency might slow the maker in the performance of their craft, it presents as a *hurdle* – which can be overcome - rather than a *barrier*, which cannot.

The examples above relate specifically to learning from, with, and alongside others in a shared space; how, though, might the maker grasp a knack in a self-directed context? Even when learning via, for instance, YouTube videos, the learning transaction is only half complete: the learner can observe the expert, rewinding the video and even playing back at slower speed, or by rereading the same instructions in a book, but there is nobody on hand to observe and to correct an error or an inefficiency. The learner can thus struggle to understand the nuance of the pattern of actions required, perhaps substituting their own approximation. For as long as this approximation serves the maker in the fulfilment of their aims, there is no issue – it is arguably only when the actions are observed by more experienced practitioners that inefficiencies might be noted. An example of this is in my approach to knitting. Using the English style, the knitter feeds yarn in from the right hand, with the yarn wound round the index and little fingers in part as a way of tensioning it. The index finger can then function in an almost piston-like manner to push the yarn round the needle, forming each loop that, in repetition, becomes a row of knitted stitches. However, I am self-taught and my approach involves pinching the yarn between thumb and forefinger and carrying it round the needle to form each stitch. The end result is the same – the row of knitted

stitches – but my movements are inefficient and can eventually lead to wrist strain. I could, in theory, retrain myself but as these movements have become embedded over countless performances of the same faulty gestures, they are now difficult to unravel, despite their inefficiency. The error here is akin to Sennett’s ‘wrinkle’ (Sennett, 2009), described above in the section on Teaching and Learning, in that it is now embedded in my practice. These self-created methods can also be thought of as *improvisations*, the role of which I will explore more extensively in the next chapter. I contend that in addition to the manual inefficiency of these problematic gestures, they can also present a social impediment: while working in private, the maker can conceal their sloppy – or self-developed - techniques, but in front of others, approaches that deviate from expectation or what is considered correct can act as means of positioning the maker as less competent or further outside a community of practice, regardless of the quality of their crafted output. However, this self-consciousness can also demonstrate the limitations presented by those contexts in which there is a perceived *right* and *wrong* way of approaching craft practice. In suggesting that seemingly inelegant approaches are somehow lesser, problematic social and creative hierarchies are reinforced.

This focus is on what can be termed the language of gesture, but there are also other layers of language to consider; these, relating both to the established vocabulary of craft practice and what we might think of as the specific nuances or dialects pertaining to particular social and spatial contexts, are examined next.

Learning the language of craft practice

Craft is rich in specific language to describe both the materials and processes of practices. In this section I consider the extent to which translating this sometimes-cryptic terminology can enable the novice participant to engage more fully with both the activity and the specific workshop community within in which it is located.

I find myself repeatedly encountering unfamiliar language in both the ceramics and printmaking spaces – entirely new words, or terminology redeployed to provide context-specific meaning. *Wedging up, burnishing, grog; the baren, furniture, registration, chatter* – all terms that relate to specific tools or actions within the ceramics and printmaking spaces. These terms are often not explained explicitly: in the example below, I have confused two discrete activities with a name that only applies to one of them.

I have made a small cylindrical pot from white earthenware clay, and I have an idea about burnishing the outside. It quickly becomes apparent, as I tell Bob this, that I don't quite know what I mean by this term. He's a true pro though; he doesn't flinch, or mock, just sets me straight. I seem to have got confused between some idea of what Fletcher was doing last term – was that burnishing? – and what Karen was doing in the Raku session, patting the surface of a vessel with a wooden spoon or a spatula. I reach for a wooden spatula and Bob says no, that's for shaping the surface. He tells me that traditionally burnishing was done with a pebble, to give a highly polished surface to an unglazed piece – the polish remains even after firing – but that a lightbulb can also be used. [...] I get going with the burnishing, which is simply rubbing the lightbulb up and down

the surface of the leather-hard clay, and Bob says it's meditative so to sit quietly and relax into it. It doesn't take long for the shine to appear.

Field notes, Tuesday evening ceramics, May 2019 (for image see Fig 19)



Figure 18 The use of a lightbulb to burnish a clay vessel

I have made decisions about my practice through observing other participants working on their own projects, so in this instance the terminology has not been made explicit until the point where I ask how to perform the polishing and consequently reveal my confusion. Other terminology that I encounter is specific to the space and its instructors, such as when, in the print space, the instructor asks us to listen for a *sizzle* as we roll out ink for lino printing – the ink is rolled repeatedly across a small area of smooth surface, spreading thin layers, and when the roller – the *brayer* - is rolled over it to pick up ink to then apply to the lino surface, the tackiness of the accrued layers of

ink makes this sound. If there is no *sizzle*, the ink has not been rolled sufficiently, and will not distribute evenly onto the surface to be inked. It is only when I subsequently work in a different space that I start to be able to recognise which terminology is specific to a space, such as *sizzle* (where more generally the rolled ink is described as *tacky*), and which to the craft (e.g. *brayer*, a widely-accepted printmaking-specific term for an ink roller). Elsewhere, terminology demonstrates the specific materiality of the process: In understanding what is meant when someone says that clay needs to be *leather hard*, or what a *reduction print* is, material, linguistic and practical aspects of the practice are conflated. In this example *leather hard clay* is clay (the *material*) that has been manipulated and left to dry to a certain stage (the *practical*) at which point it is *leather hard*, a metaphor to describe its feel (the *language*) as it has similar tactile consistency to leather.

In another example, in the ceramics space, one of the storage cupboards is colloquially referred to as *Narnia* (Fig 20); within its depths lurk all manner of ceramics detritus, and even the staff are no longer sure what might be hiding at the back. This terminology, whose initial use in the context of this space is unclear, conjures images of a magical land concealed behind a wardrobe's doors; it simultaneously offers allusions to play and potential, while also hinting at uncertainty.

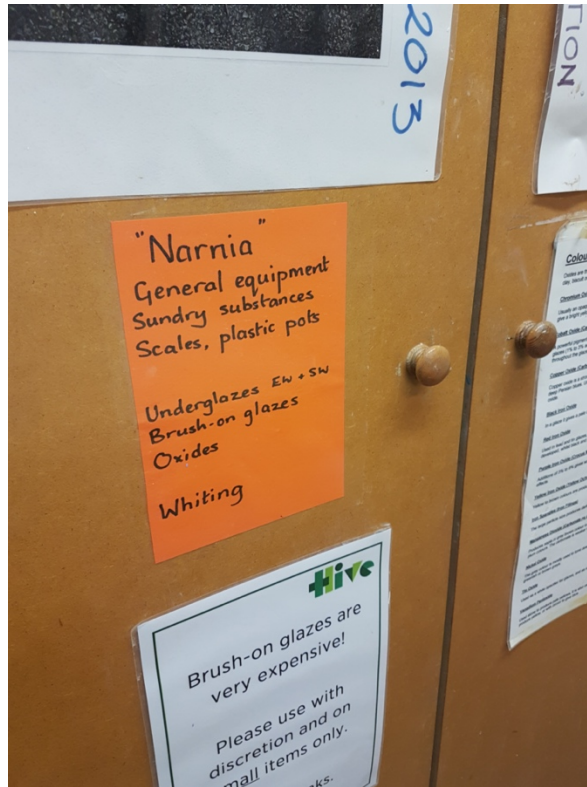


Figure 19 'Narnia' - the cupboard of delights in the glazing room at Hive

While learning the terminology is not essential to engaging in the activity, it offers routes into more complete participation (while simultaneously risking alienation for those who do not learn). In the example that opens this section, when I do not know the term for an action to smooth the surface of a clay vessel, I risk heading down the wrong path technically. Similarly, Martin (2016) describes an incident in a bicycle workshop where two participants are trying to fix a three-speed gear hub, but because they have not yet acquired the precise language to describe the parts of the hub, there is significant risk of confusion; after all, *thingumajig* could refer to any one of a number of parts, and could result in an erroneous repair. A distinction emerges whereby some language is intended to guide the maker, such as when we are encouraged to listen for the *sizzle*, or to perform the act of *burnishing*, but other terminology offers a means of

distinguishing between newcomers and more familiar practitioners – for instance, the nickname of *Narnia* in the ceramics space, which is met with a knowing nod by regular users, but which offers the potential for confusion and embarrassment for new users of the space.

We can consider the language of the space as not only verbal, carried through the words we use to communicate with one another, but also as being carried into the gestures and tools through which we communicate with materials. Of course, understanding the terminology does not automatically imply greater skill or experience: in the ceramics space, Frances has less hands-on experience but has a more ready grasp of the proper terminology, while Bob, who has worked as a production potter and pottery teacher for forty years, sometimes struggles to find the right word to describe a process. His knowledge lies in the performance of tacit knowledge rather than description: he is more likely to explain through demonstration than through verbal explanation. Bob's performance of his long-embedded skill, without recourse to the *correct* terminology, demonstrates that while access to precise vocabulary can help the maker from a theoretical perspective, specifically in being able to articulate processes verbally, it serves a different function than, and is not a substitute for, this performed demonstration. Bob's occasional omission of ceramics-specific terminology also offers a route in for new practitioners, in that it demonstrates that while the code, or *lingo*, might seem impenetrable, it is not an impediment for this teacher, who is not only able to demonstrate techniques, but who is also adept at readily interpreting and understanding our work in all its faltering and improvised presentations. The lack of linguistic readiness recalls Ryle's (1949) description of the

distinction between knowing *that* (the theoretical understanding) and knowing *how* (the practical), and also reminds us that the performance of an act can offer the clearest means of communicating the techniques involved in its delivery.

I find that in the making spaces, I am able to pick up terminology by asking staff and more experienced users; at home I do not have access to this knowledge, with the result that I must fumble my way forward, building on tacit knowledge drawn from prior experience. Decorative needlework is a new departure for me within the wider experience of sewing, so I find that as I start to increase in proficiency and refine my techniques, my ability to find the knowledge I need encounters barriers. This impediment is most explicit when purchasing equipment, where the knowledge that would be available if I was learning alongside others in a dedicated space, is conspicuously absent. I want to purchase some small, fine embroidery needles but find myself staring at a display rack, baffled by the selection. Do I need embroidery needles? Crewel needles? Between, whatever they might be? The result here is that I am led by prior experience, navigating the choice available by considering that I need a needle with a long eye (so I can guide two finer threads or one thicker thread through), and that will feel short between my fingertips, so I can guide it with precision. These needles are smaller and finer than any I have used previously; while I am still unsure how the sizing information on the packet works, I understand, through use, that the tool is suitable for the job I am asking of it. In this way, I am able to circumvent the need to know the correct language, but this knowledge gap will continue to cause me to stumble until I engage with learning the technicalities that underpin the language, instead of simply feeling my way through. In this regard there is a gap between Bob,

demonstrating his ceramics experience without recourse to precise terminology, and me with my lack of terminology *and* my lack of embedded knowledge, despite me possessing a degree of embodied knowledge in this particular context.

This terminology, whether craft- or space-specific, functions as a form of code, and the uncertainty I experience reinforces the status of the newcomer as inhabiting liminal territory where the ground is unstable and the potential for confusion is significant. Through starting to crack these codes, the maker is able to use more nuanced articulations of their intentions, and is able to move further into the making community (O'Connor, 2007; Lehmann, 2012; Martin, 2016; Davies, 2017). Of course, for some users of the space, this deeper level of knowledge is not important. They might be able to draw on terminology borrowed from activities involving similar techniques, such as when Irina is able to draw on her baking skills of manipulating pastry and icing when manipulating clay in the ceramics space, or the participant's engagement with the processes is only intended as an informal pastime, with community membership a short-lived experience.

While various accounts (e.g. Sennett, 2012; Ott, 2018) describe choreographed movements made by makers navigating around a shared making space, and O'Connor (2007) notes how glassblowers, well accustomed to working together, are able to anticipate each well-rehearsed move in the glassblowing process, manoeuvring with few words required, it is important to note that the practitioners in those contexts are not only experienced in their craft, but also highly familiar with one another as part of a team. The participant group drawn together on the beginners' making courses of my

research do not have this shared history or familiarity, so must rely more on verbal instruction and explanation in order to understand. It is useful for the novice to *learn* the terminology, even if that terminology can subsequently be set aside, as in the example above where Bob the ceramics tutor appears unable to articulate a term for a particular action, even as his hands perform that same action in the way they have countless times before. In this example the action has become tacit and the language to describe it is no longer required - except that in this group learning context, the action must be described verbally as well as being performed, so that novices can understand the *why* of the action as well as the processes of the action itself. Learning the name for the action is thus part of learning the craft. However, while knowledge of terminology is a way of moving into the community of practice, at this stage of informal craft practice, it can also present more of a barrier than a gateway into further participation. Intentions, objects and processes can be explained through description that makes them comprehensible, whether verbally or through gesture, but without having recourse to the precise linguistic tool, an opportunity opens up to improvise solutions that, in time, might become part of the vernacular of this particular group or organisation.

The language of a space is obviously not limited to instructive description and explanation – it can encompass other aspects relevant to the context of the space or the activity, such as critique of work or external communication of a particular creative style, as is seen among some artist collectives and studio groups. In the next section I consider the role of feedback – or its absence – as part of both the learning process and of participation in the community of practice.

Feeding back and the lack of structured critique

Unlike in more structured craft learning contexts (e.g. the fine woodworking studio of Marchand's (2010) research into tacit learning) the experiences of informal learning examined in my research offer no obvious mechanism for critical reflection – people make the thing they want to make, and whether it works or not, they move on and make another thing. There is no formal feedback structure, and this is a feature of these spaces that distinguishes them from more structured craft learning contexts such as apprenticeships. My creative background includes an undergraduate art school education, in which the group critique process was the most frequently used technique for responding to work. This process was intense and, at times, brutal, with peers using the opportunity to both establish and enforce social and intellectual hierarchies. The shared making spaces of my research theoretically offer potential to invite similarly open critique, in particular the ceramics space where there is more of a sense of a community of regulars, but in this informal learning context, constructive feedback is elusive and perhaps unnecessary – after all, for many users of the spaces, while the goals of participation can include camaraderie and material engagement, critical reflection is not a desired part of the social language. This is a distinct way in which both of my research spaces differ from sites of more formal instruction.

While Hive has a loose set of learning outcomes for each course, drawn from its connection to the Workers' Education Association (Workers' Education Association, 2024) curriculum, there is no formal assessment structure, and no tests to demonstrate competence. One of the ceramics tutors suggests that success is measured through participant enthusiasm:

The measure of success is the grin on the face. The going out happy with a pot. The “look what I’ve done” moment, and the absolute zinger is when somebody helps one of their peers. And we’re beginning to see that now with some of the class members who’ve just started. So that’s how success is made, for me.

Frances, interview, 18/03/19

The structure of the courses at Leeds Print Workshop is similarly loose: the tutor explains that participants will be learning a particular technique, but there is, again, no assessment, and no obligation to complete the proposed task or to finish with a specific creation. Fellow participants can offer feedback, but to express anything other than a positive reaction to a finished object would transgress an unwritten rule whereby the only person able to criticise a piece of work is the person who has made it, and this must immediately be countered by other participants refuting any negative observations (Field notes, ceramics classes, 02/07/19, 09/07/19). In this social making context, feedback performs a similar role to the likes and performative support displayed on social media such as Instagram; in that context, as here, there is a tacit understanding that unless critique is specifically invited, it is not welcome, and even if it is invited, it must be phrased carefully. Positive encouragement is a core part of the teaching model in both sites, as to dissuade the newcomer might risk alienation. The ceramics space positions itself as using arts and crafts for community development, so here, encouragement is everything, while in the print space, there is a similar motivation, though in that space, the drive is to encourage course participants to become members – to embed themselves further into the community both as makers and via membership fees. Positive feedback towards other makers can also offer participants a space at the table and offers a way in to being a more established face

within the space: at one point, after I have been developing a multi-layered lino print over several weeks during independent drop-in sessions, one of the staff team mentions that she thinks it is really successful, and even in this brief exchange I take a mental step forwards into being part of the print workshop.

Within the context of courses in both spaces, tutors and technicians are on hand to discuss the successes and failures of a particular piece of work; as described in the previous findings chapter, some participants explicitly use the staff as a resource during these sessions. However, when the course is over and the participant is taking first steps as an independent practitioner using the facilities, the relationship changes and opportunities to ask for advice or critique become less clear. In the print space, there is no guarantee that the technician on duty has knowledge of the print form one is using, and in the ceramics space, drop-in sessions do not have a staff member on hand. This situation of edging forward on uncertain ground suggests an explanation for the drop off in participation in the print space in particular, where only one in ten course participants become members of the space (*source: informal conversation with Jeff, tutor at Leeds Print Workshop, November 2019*). To find oneself suddenly destabilised risks quickly dismantling the confidence acquired when learning skills on courses alongside others. While it is possible to receive feedback on processes, for instance when inking isn't going well, or how to perform a particular technique, it is more difficult to ask a technician 'where have I gone wrong with composition' or 'how could I develop this?' If a participant is struggling, they must surrender to other users of the space for help, or, as when at home, turn to instructional books or the internet for advice. At home, routes to feedback are even less obvious: I can decide for myself that a piece of work has achieved what I intended of it, or I can show it to family members,

whose supportive responses only half-mask their lack of specialist subject knowledge. If I want more critique, I can share work online, but again, the tendency is for feedback to be positive, as to criticise the work of a social media acquaintance outside of a dedicated group context is somehow transgressive: as the old adage goes, 'if you can't say anything nice, say nothing'.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the only real measure of feedback available to the practitioner working at home or in informal spaces is in a form of trial-and-error – trying out a technique or idea to see if it works, and then building on this. This approach does not easily afford the maker the opportunity to frame their work within wider practice, and instead the maker in search of this contextualising must rely on deliberately seeking out new information, or hope for serendipitous conversations with like-minded practitioners, whether in the shared making environment or elsewhere. However, it is important to note that this framing is not necessarily a motivation for many participants, especially those participating in the activity as a leisure activity rather than as an extension of an existing creative practice, as might be sought out or expected by participants like me who have undertaken prior structured creative education. This distinction from more formal modes of craft learning marks a distinct boundary for the newcomer, but, as in so many other contexts, clear boundaries can sometimes offer a form of liberation for those contained within them. Here, while the lack of obligation to interrogate one's work can cause the eager maker to inhabit a liminal, unstructured state, it can also prove liberating in that it opens up opportunities to play and to improvise, which I discuss at length in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how the inexperienced maker takes steps towards enskilment, specifically considering aspects of embodiment and the sense of ‘feeling a way through’ the processes of learning, and how this is experienced in the shared making space.

I draw upon differences between experiential and instructed learning to show that while the maker can be shown how to perform an action, for instance throwing a pot on a wheel, or can have processes described, there is a necessity for the maker to engage experientially with the processes directly in order to fully comprehend them. This mode of learning is shown to be vital to the understanding of craft processes, and central to the experience of learning in both of my research sites. This demonstrates the importance of the underpinning understanding behind decision-making in learning: that the learner must understand *why* they are doing a thing, in order to develop. It is not enough to simply mimic the instructor, such as when I attempt to throw pots following instruction from a tutor; I must begin to build a bodily understanding and to know what I am feeling for, whether this is when inking lino or pressing two slabs of clay together.

This finding links to the acknowledgement that when working with craft processes, there is a ‘knack’ to be grasped. I employ a theory drawn from Threshold Concepts (Meyer & Land, 2005), more commonly applied in formal learning environments, which articulates how a thing cannot be known until it is known, at which point it cannot then be *unknown* – and that while whatever the contentious topic is can be taught to the

student, the onus is on the student to grasp the knowledge. This application is highly appropriate to the topic of craft learning in the relationship of the maker to craft processes, where, as I have described above, what is known can only be known theoretically until it becomes known via embodied means.

Participation within the making spaces enables makers to access equipment that is unfamiliar, or that they may not have at home. The changing relationship with tools functions a metaphor for our changing level of engagement with the craft, as when participants on the printmaking course are able to feel the difference between 'student' and superior carving tools; the tools thus begin to reveal their potential. This can also be seen in the example of the developing toolbox, through which the maker starts to shape their creative identity via careful selection of those tools that specifically relate to their own creative intentions. In this way, the changing relationship with tools is also seen to link to the maker's development from being instructed towards their own creative experimentation.

The findings also demonstrate that there is no need for participants to have a full grasp of a task before commencing. Practising in these informal learning spaces enables the maker to learn through experimentation, but there is also an aspect whereby participants using the space for purposes other than the craft learning itself are not obliged to develop skills; this presents implications for the teaching model. This foregrounds the important role of strategic learning in this context: the maker learns as much as they need to know in order to achieve their specific aims, rather than receiving a broader education in a particular craft practice.

Chapter 6: On becoming craftful

Introduction

Amateur craft is, by its nature, improvisatory and haphazard, and in this aspect it sits in distinct contrast to the notion of the apprenticeship, as discussed in the previous chapter in the section on teaching and learning. Here, unlike the carefully planned series of steps taken towards mastery that might be employed in an apprenticeship (Marchand, 2008), the practitioner accrues pieces of information from different courses and assembles them into a practice or a way of progressing.

The first findings chapter focused on the space and time of informal making in the shared space (and at home), framing the making space as a contested site of multiple physical and social affordances and limitations for the maker; the second chapter built on this, unpicking the nuanced process of learning craft skills whereby engagement with tools and materials must necessarily be framed within an often uncertain, socially situated context. This chapter further develops an understanding of role of play and improvisation in the journey made by the amateur maker towards becoming what I term *craftful* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). This term, which is drawn from Middle English and means that a thing is characterised by being skilful, has a second, now obsolete, meaning that describes cunning or guile. In the context of this research, I extend this to suggest a certain slipperiness in movement back and forth across contested territories, or exploiting situations to one's own ends. Through the use of this term I suggest that this is the space inhabited by our amateur maker as they progress further into the identity of being a maker: not so much claiming themselves as

an established maker, but able to draw on improvisatory methods to shift across boundaries in pursuit of their own creative (or social, or identity-based) needs. In the first half of this chapter I examine key processes through which making is experienced; I then move on to consider the experience of how we become *craftful* in this informal craft context. If pursuit of leisure activities enables us to move towards self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943) then how does this play out in the open access making space and at home?

Finding out through play

The theme of play comes up again and again during my time in the making spaces. In this section I consider what people mean when they talk about playing as part of the making process, and how play functions as part of the learning process in this informal context. Huizinga suggests four principles of play: that it is voluntary, that it is superfluous in that it can be paused at any time, that it requires participants to be prepared to *play along*, and that it is limited to particular times and spaces (Huizinga (1949, 2016) in Knott, 2015). These ideas map neatly to the function of the making space, in that it is an informal space where, despite there being conditions of membership, members are temporally and spatially constrained by opening hours and the limits of the space rather than by an obligation to attend (as in, for instance, a school learning environment); in addition, participants in the space must play along by adhering to both the explicit and tacit rules of the space. In my research, I locate play under the heading of learning by considering it as a process or a behaviour, aligned more closely with Tanggaard's (2014) conception of 'exploratory learning' as a key aspect of creative learning; I consider that Huizinga's definitions do not fully

encompass the levity and potential freedom of playful behaviours that I found in my research spaces, but instead demarcate the *conditions* for playful activity to occur, whether they be spatial, material or social. The space affords the opportunity for playful behaviour (Sicart, 2014).

Tanggaard (2014) suggests what she terms three ‘creative learning pathways’: prior creative experience, exploratory learning, and resistance from the material. It is the second of these, exploratory learning, that invites opportunities to play in the making space. As suggested in the example below, while some of my fellow course participants are able to embrace the idea of trying things out with no fixed outcome, other participants struggle to reconcile the idea of testing out materials with what they understand as ‘play’.

In a ceramics class, May is experimenting with various techniques of carving into a slab of clay, and when asked by Irina what she’s doing, she says ‘playing’.

The same question and answer comes up several times over the next few weeks, until finally Irina says, “Playing again, eh? I should bring you a jigsaw!”

Field notes, ceramics, 14/01/19

For May, play is an artistic process of engaging with materials to find out how they will behave; for example, later in the course, she scoops up a pile of thin clay strips discarded by another maker, seeing in them the potential to fashion a bird’s nest. Irina, an older participant who has shared evidence of previous creative competence via a Tupperware box full of exquisite sugar flowers, and who interprets many of the processes of slab-built ceramics through the lens of her proficiency at baking, seems perplexed by this. Later, another exchange between May and Irina reveals a deeper

uncertainty to Irina's questions; May says again that she is 'playing' with some clay as this particular variety is new to her, to which Irina asks whether she, too, is able to 'play'. Frances, the tutor, overhears this, and says that we're *all* playing. It is unclear whether this is an imperative, an observation, or a declaration of permission. Within the print space, I encounter similarly playful attitudes from participants on the experimental screen printing course: two participants tell me that they are there to play and to do what Ingold (2010, p. 94) terms 'following the materials', exploring the process to find out how they can use it to support and develop their existing creative practice. Ingold (*ibid.*) describes ways in which makers experiment to find ways of working *with* materials, redirecting actions so that instead of effectively cutting across the grain of an activity, the practitioner instead aligns themselves along the grain; in using this approach to materials and techniques to find out how they behave, May and the screen-printing participants are finding ways to 'go along with' (Ingold, 2007) this new medium.

If play in the making space is considered as a mode of Deweyian 'learning by doing' (Dewey, 1925), it can be framed as a means of experimentation without significant consequence – a form of *permission* to try things out. In this vein, Tanggaard (2014) uses the term 'fooling around' to describe the activities of apprentices who are using workshop resources to devise and resolve problems. In her example, fooling around is intended to describe how these makers, who are experienced in manipulating specific materials, adopt an experimental approach to problem solving; their fooling around is deliberate and takes place within tightly defined parameters. In contrast, the participants in my research might be using more haphazard approaches to testing

ideas, through trying out an elaborate technique, or squidging away at a lump of clay in order to see what might happen, or dabbling with materials as a means of legitimising the desire to pass time alongside others. We can consider both the makers in Tanggaard's example and the participants in my research as engaging in forms of play, and indeed their actions largely correspond with Huizinga's (1949, 2016) five characteristics of play – namely that it is voluntary; that it is different to *real life*; that it has fixed spatial and temporal boundaries; and that it is not useful (that is, profit-producing) – though Tanggaard's apprentices' structured investigations feel far from the informal experimentation taking place in the making spaces of my research.

In my descriptions of play in the making spaces above, it can be viewed as a low-risk approach to testing out new materials and ideas – the exploratory learning of Tanggaard's (2014) description. However, as Irina shows, this can seem like a perplexing strategy for the leisure learner. I keep coming up against the idea of playing with materials, but I find myself struggling to overcome the urge to create finished, identifiable objects – bowls, boxes, vases. In my early experiences in the ceramics space, I find myself wanting to create *things* – by which I mean purposeful, identifiable objects (Heidegger, 2010). In a study of a repair-focused making space, Collins (2018) notes that some participants consider playing to be wasted time, and that they perceive broken or failed work to be somehow less transgressive than the seeming frivolity of play, while choosing to overlook the necessary role of risk bound up within its definition (Caillois, 1961), and the wider sense in which experimentation is an intrinsic part of craftsmanship (Pye, 1968, 1995). This observation chimes with the discomfort I encounter in my attempts to simply play with material, without a fixed

outcome. As described above, I'm not alone in my confusion over the idea of playing: Perhaps Irina, like me, is determined to create outcomes rather than lingering within the process (Ingold, 2014) or, as she reveals at the end of the course, she is simply here to spend a couple of hours each week doing something creative that gets her out of the house. Of course, she might also be both. For me, within the space, within the limited time frame, and in front of others, playing can feel risky and like an indulgence, even though I can see from some of the others that through this process, the release from committing to a fixed outcome can afford the opportunity to try new techniques and to open up new ideas.

Elsewhere, the space becomes a laboratory where a hunch can be tested: if I use these parameters and these materials, what happens if I do this? Harriet is very definitely testing a hypothesis when she uses paper pattern templates, prepared at home, to make her mugs, whereas in contrast, when May's offcut clay strips become a ceramic birds' nest, she observes that she is 'feeling a way forward' through the material (interview, 18/03/2019). By saying that she is playing, she resists commitment to a particular outcome. In feeling a way through, *attuning* to the materials (as per Ingold's (2015) interpretation), this approach offers opportunities for 'trying on the experience' as the maker asks 'what happens if I do this?'; in doing so, we participate in a form of play – or as Tanggaard (2014) would have it, 'fooling around' - which allows us to manage the risk involved in trying new experiences. In declaring this as play, the maker can also manage social expectations through this suggestion of focus on experimental process, or lack of commitment to the outcome. The work created through play might be more readily given up to the clay recycling bin at the end of the session than that

work approached without caveats and intended for a specific outcome, but which still ends up in that same bin. However, it is only the latter that invites discreet glances between participants across the ceramics room. I read these glances as fellow participants expressing concern and sympathy for the maker whose work has not achieved expectations, such as when Harriet shrugs and prepares to discard her diligently-crafted but now crumpled mugs. In this way, in this informal making context, play permits an unfixeness and a back-and-forth fluidity that can liberate the maker socially as well as materially.

The levity of play can thus offer a route to convivial connections within the space: in being able to tease one another, we find ways to create bonds, though as we are all relative strangers, these bonds must be carefully navigated: at one point, Irina decides to rename May after a contentious political figure, which invites exchanged glances across the pottery room table until the rest of the group is sure that May, who had smiled but looked slightly horrified, hasn't taken offence at this. Later, in an evening ceramics class, Lauren, who is participating as a fun new thing to do with her friend, intends to make a simple face from a mould, but it does not go as planned:

She rolls out some [clay], presses it in, pulls it out – and an alien face with huge eyes stares back at her. Clearly this is hilarious, entirely unintended, but she is so unprecious about the process that after blinking back at it for a moment or two, she decides to cut the eyes out, which makes it even more sinister. We have a conversation about how she's going to position it somewhere in her flat to terrify her boyfriend, or maybe position it in the garden – someone suggests adding red LED eyes.

Field notes, Tuesday evening ceramics class, 02/07/2019

Straughan (2018) describes the use of humour during an experience of working with a coursemate as they struggle to separate a squirrel from its skin during a novice taxidermy session, noting that the banter serves to distract from the viscerality of the experience. Similarly, these moments where the group connect through laughter not only help to form and strengthen bonds, but also serve to diffuse tension, in particular those frustrations encountered when the work produced has not aligned with its maker's intentions.

In considering the making activities of my research as a form of play, with its inherent lack of critique, we can consider it as a form of liberation and a way of *trying things out*, towards attunement (Ingold, 2015). On this basis, the participant requires sufficient skills to be able to enjoy the process – to get what they need from the experience. For some, this might be continuing to gather proficiency, whereas for others, being able to participate in the class, to make an object to take home, is sufficient. Through describing their printmaking activity as play, Rachel and Joy on the screen printing course give themselves permission to step back from conclusions, and to try new things. This is, however, serious, focused play, within tight parameters and carrying a layer of risk, particularly for Rachel, who is attempting to create a complex multi-layered image with very little time to spare. This offers a glimpse of the tightrope between triumph and peril that play can offer us, that we might choose to describe as excitement: will the experiment work? Will we succeed in time for the end of the session or the end of the course? Caillois (1961) and Schechner (1993) remind us that there is a dark side to play, in which part of the pleasure lies in the potential for

imminent disaster. While the maker in this context is not in mortal danger, there is a noticeable sense of heightened emotion due to the proximity of failure, and this excitement can be performed in a number of ways, from Rachel's quiet focus, above, to more raucous (or glib) responses from struggling participants who use humour to mask their discomfort.

Playing also offers users a temporary space of freedom from obligation. It is a way of accruing experience to apply in different contexts later; by releasing themselves from the necessity to produce an object, makers are able to focus on trying out techniques. The conspicuous lack of critique described in the previous chapter theoretically enables participants to work without self-consciousness – though this is not always borne out in practice, as makers work in view of one another, and must also succumb to leaving work on show on drying racks and collection shelves. As discussed in the first Findings chapter, I consider the making spaces of my research as *permission spaces*, where the maker can exploit a constrained freedom to try things out. Playing can evoke ideas of a space where disorder is more likely to be tolerated, for example in the playground or a kindergarten, but where participants enter knowing the 'rules of engagement' (Juelsbo, 2016), where we can try things out and make a mess. Viewing the informal making experience through the lens of playing can also help the maker to adjust their relationship with mistakes or failure. It does not, however, so easily accommodate the frustrations that arise when tools, materials – or, indeed, creative inspiration - do not bend to the maker's will but instead remain stubbornly independent, as I explore in the next section.

Stuckness: the uses of resistance

The path to creative competence is not a linear one; the novice practitioner will experience hiccups and impasses, partly because they have not yet developed a mental library of practice – *pattern recognition* (Crawford, 2009) - upon which they can draw in identifying and resolving new challenges; they also lack the material and tool knowledge to be able to avert those small errors that, left unchecked, can soon become unsalvageable (Brown, Greig, Ferraro, 2017; Brown, 2021). Having considered in the previous section how play can be used in informal making contexts as a means of improvisation, noting that it can offer a means of diffusing tension at points of perceived failure or frustration, I now expand further on the ways in which the novice encounters problems, and how they resolve them. In this section I consider what the sociomateriality scholar Tanggaard (2014) refers to as *resistance*, and what the novice practitioner might more prosaically describe as *being stuck* – acknowledging that resistance can exist both as a behaviour on the part of the practitioner, and through an engagement with the processes of making, such as when material responds in unexpected ways.

There comes a point where, having spent several weeks engaged in activity in both the ceramics and printmaking spaces, producing images and objects with varying degrees of success, my progress slows and I am forced to acknowledge that I am *stuck*. In the ceramics space I find myself turning up to sessions with no particular plan, sitting down alongside the others and watching with increasing discomfort as they unwrap their projects from the plastic bags that stop the clay from drying out and becoming unworkable. I've become haunted by the idea that whatever I make is permanent; I

don't seem to be able to will myself to consciously try things out then discard them at that point before firing where clay can still be salvaged and recycled for other users. I feel myself caught between not wanting to squander the opportunity to make something, and my desire to sit back and observe the others – I am caught in the classic participant/observer trap of the ethnographer (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), but here it is a consequence of my uncertainty in manipulating the medium; I am more akin to Brown (2021), who draws parallels between the uncertainty she feels when manipulating ceramic materials, and her uncertainty about her doctoral research. I am at one remove, prodding at clay as an excuse to justify my presence in the space as I scan across the room, watching others while they focus on their work.

In this situation there are two forms of resistance at work: material, and creative. I have begun to understand how the material will behave when I manipulate it, and I have had some success with producing outputs over which I have exercised creative control and judgement. The problem is that I don't know what to make next. In this situation the maker is at an impasse, uncertain as to how to proceed. Ingold (2014) offers an explanation for this tension in describing the shift from thinking about the 'hylomorphic' – in which form (*hyle*) is imposed on matter (*morphe*) – towards a process of *going along*, in which the practitioner meets the material and works *with* it. Brown, Greig and Ferraro (2017) extend this by suggesting more explicitly that the hylomorphic approach is that of the beginner, and that the move towards *going along with* is a mark of developing proficiency. Within the stubborn transition phase, however, the inexperienced maker, immersed in the process, is unlikely to have this

objective insight about the progression of their engagement, and will instead simply experience frustration.

When I encounter challenges while engaging in more familiar craft activities, such as sewing or drawing, my internal library of prior experience means that I am able to find ways back in – for instance, staring at a piece of fabric might inspire a flash of inspiration, or catching a glimpse of something and wondering ‘What that would look like rendered in this or that form?’ However, with ceramics, and equally with screen printing, I find the material disobedient – it doesn’t seem to do what I want it to do, and I can’t get past this block. All I want to do is run away. I have not yet engaged sufficiently with the material to be able to discover its agency, revealed as active participant and respondent during a process of negotiation with me as maker (Aktaş & Mäkelä, 2019). Tanggaard’s (2014) situated model of creative learning presents material resistance as one of three cornerstones of creative learning (the other two being immersion in the topic of interest, and experimentation and enquiry). While initially I find myself struggling with the tactile properties of clay, this can be ascribed to the ignorance of the novice, who does not know how the material will behave. I contend that in this instance, the first encounter with this resistance is the point where the maker must begin to find their own way through, and to improvise.

The material itself can become resistant through manipulation, but this is not always clear to the inexperienced maker, who is not yet familiar with subtle changes that are immediately apparent to those with more tacit knowledge: for example, during a screen-printing session, Sian the print technician has to point out to me that the screen

printing medium, a faintly translucent gel-like fluid, has become grey and claggy. Not only will this produce poor quality prints, but there is also a risk that it will clog the screen. I have been attempting to work with something that will not give way. This notion of the material resisting the maker disrupts the Cartesian notion of a relationship in which the maker (the mind) exerts control over the material (matter) (Lehmann, 2009); perhaps this disruption is the tacit source of the frustration. I must learn how to work *with* the material, going along the grain (Ingold, 2011) rather than attempting to cut across it. Some of this is revealed through my own material engagement but at other points I rely on input from more experienced makers: at a couple of points during my ceramics fieldwork, other participants describe the necessity to 'let the clay show you the way' (fieldnotes, ceramics, 11/02/2019), having learned this through their own creative engagement.

The challenge of perceptual resistance

Thus far in this chapter I have considered the role of material resistance in the creative process. I now turn to the notion of perceptual resistance, by which I mean being unable to think past a creative blockage. As Tanggaard expresses it,

This means that the experience of being lost, of being disoriented, of being held back, or simply of being frustrated can prompt a creative opportunity to arise.

This is the opposite of believing that creativity is a question of harmonious self-realisation or a trouble-free search for creative opportunities.

(Tanggaard, 2014, p. 31)

At this stage it becomes apparent that two opposing forces must be navigated in order to progress: that while there is a need for order, and to know the rules, there is also a need to allow space for serendipity, through engaging with the mess of trying things out and seeing what happens. In order to continue, the inexperienced maker must first recognise and then resolve this dilemma – that is, they must first accept their position, and then find ways to move through the impasse (Glaveanu, 2016; Juelsbo, 2016; Tanggaard, 2016; Wegener, 2016).

At one point towards the end of the experimental screen printing course in the print space, when many participants have finished creating the prints we had been working on for the previous two sessions, the tutor encourages us to ‘just play’, but to play on command seems, in that moment, impossible. Though I have found the experience of screen printing less intuitive than other forms of printmaking, I have managed to create the prints I set out to make, and this request to take steps in a new direction, at this late stage of the course, has wrongfooted me. I am, in effect, being encouraged to sit with this discomfort, and in doing so, to find a way through this impasse. I find myself staring across at others’ industrious activity, aware that time is ticking by and that the session will soon be over, so time is at a premium. One of the tutors notices my ‘stuckness’ and encourages me to try scribbling on the screen print surface with some special wax pastels, which will work with the screen print medium to produce colourful one-off prints. There is a self-consciousness in my uncertainty, but as I get going, I start to make gestural marks with the crayons, realising that though I am using a new medium, I am able to link it to a familiar action, namely drawing, and through this combination of the familiar and the new, I take a step forwards (*Fig 21*).



Figure 20 scribbling on the printing screen with special wax crayons

This speaks to various themes within my research: the discomfort of self-consciousness as an inexperienced maker, particularly when working alongside others; a sense of pressure derived from working within commodified blocks of time; the destabilising experience of uncertainty, and the role of more experienced practitioners (in this case a tutor) in facilitating – or rather, *mobilising* - the participant's experience within the space. If we consider this discomfort through the lens of Threshold Concepts we see that grasping this 'troublesome knowledge' (Meyer & Land, 2005, p. 374) is a necessary stage in the learning process; here, not only are we encountering material that does not always do what we want it to, arguably because we are not yet sufficiently familiar with it, but we are also working with the edges of our existing knowledge. This point of resistance can also be considered as a form of mess in search of resolution. Tanggaard and Juelsbo (2016) suggest that we are seeking to bring order to this mess through drawing on the sociomaterial affordances available to us in this

situation; through learning to engage with the idea of developing the capacity to respond to the unexpected, that is, to go along with the world as it presents itself to us *processually* (Ingold, 2013), we are able to evolve creatively, moving through the impasse. Similarly, using Lather's (2007) notions of lovely knowledge and difficult knowledge, whereby the lovely is that which comes easily, and the difficult is where we struggle, engagement with the difficult knowledge impels us to try out new approaches, thereby opening ourselves up to the possibility of expanding our toolbox of creative techniques. I see this most noticeably in the ceramics workshop among participants who are trying new techniques, such as when Harriet experiments with applying handles to mugs, or when Paul folds different clays together to create a marbled effect. Participants progress to a point where they encounter an issue – a handle that fails to adhere, or different colours of clay not sufficiently well-distributed for the desired effect - and at this point the makers find themselves faltering. They must now seek out new ways of addressing this problem in order to continue , and in doing so, they add new skills to their mental repertoire.

Leisure learning enables the maker to pick things up, try them out, and discard that which does not fit one's schema; unlike with more formalised learning such as craft apprenticeships, there is no obligation to finish a course in order to attain a necessary qualification. In considering the role of resistance in developing creative identity, there is an aspect of the maker feeling that the process does not suit them, that it is something tried and then discarded; in one of the first printmaking sessions, Jim, who is participating at the behest of his partner, becomes more vocally dismissive of his work as the course progresses. His engagement is reluctant, and the obligation to

overcome obstacles provides an opportunity to admit that he has reached the end of his interest. Similarly, Twigger Holroyd (2017) describes a creative sewing class where a participant, challenged by the set task, declares that the class is 'not for him' because he is 'not creative'. Here, resistance to the material, and reluctance to play and to try things out, can mask other resistances: the reluctant participant accompanying a friend or partner on a course, the participant who feels that their face doesn't fit within the social dynamics of the space, or the participant whose expectations have not been met by a course. The subtle (and more overt) hierarchies and exposures of even the supposedly inclusive entry-level leisure making course can easily derail attendees, in particular those whose participation is already ambivalent. This encounter with resistance offers the maker a convenient exit point, at any stage of the course: within one of the ceramics courses, Pauline, who has seemed very engaged throughout the processes, tells me that it isn't what she thought it would be and that it isn't for her. This is something I see repeated across all the multi-session courses I undertake, where at least one course participant might come to one or two sessions but will then slip away, unannounced, and will not return. If an aspect of the craft learning experience is about the ongoing process of *becoming* (Hallam & Ingold, 2007; Gauntlett, 2023), it also follows that there is no fixed end point or conclusion, other than that which is arbitrarily imposed by the end of a course, and as such, the participant is thus able to retain agency over their own creative progression.

If the maker can exit the process at this stage, what is it that encourages them to carry on? As discussed in previous findings chapters, this form of amateur craft learning exists in a liminal space where the maker is beginning to acquire skills and experience.

At this stage they can easily choose to either continue or conclude their enquiry. The brevity of the courses examined in my research means that they necessarily offer only rudimentary instruction – so how does the maker move through the impasse? There is a sense of early successes spurring on the maker, such as when my first ceramic creation emerges from the kiln and looks far better than I'd hoped for. The maker can find pleasure in the process of manipulating materials, or a creative impulse to keep finding new problems to resolve. There are also possibilities for new social connections. However, none of this might be enough to hold the maker's attention: Paul, who had produced remarkable marbled clay vessels in his ten weeks on the ceramics course, says he won't be back next term as he has other draws on his time, and similarly Irina, who has enjoyed her ceramics classes, is choosing to get on with her gardening instead. Notions such as the sense of a move towards the centre of a community of practice, and the movement along an arc of skill development from novice to expert, both imply a unidirectional journey for the participant, towards deeper engagement. However, the very nature of amateur craft means that learning is strategic: the maker gathers the learning that they need in order to engage in the way that is meaningful for them, accessing the experience they are seeking (which could be creative engagement, social connection, or any one of myriad other motivations), and is not obliged to continue. This can be thought of as more akin to Ingold's (2015, p. 147) notion of 'in-between', which he describes as moment in between two points, with no fixed terminals, in contrast to his interpretation of 'between', which suggests a bridge between two points; the makers of my research are not on a predetermined learning pathway but are, instead, moving freely, dipping in and out of learning. Indeed, the amateur maker who has acquired new knowledge can double back to

revise or develop previous learning at any point (Brown, Greig, Ferraro, 2017), jumping to a previous point on an arc of skill development that we can envision as more of a messy tangle of thread, or a mesh (Ingold, 2015). If any sort of line exists, it is particular to the individual maker, and I contend that it is rarely straight.

What I have described above relates predominantly to the experience of participating in a craft course, but when working independently, the maker is not able to rely so readily on the scaffolding provided by tutors, technicians and fellow participants. A couple of months later I'm in the printmaking studio, making linocut prints independently of a course. The session has gone well; I note that,

Thinking about it this evening, whilst looking for more things to lino cut – I have a sense of feeling fearless, wading in, confident that because my first print worked, subsequent prints will also work. [But] What's going to happen when I overreach and come unstuck? Where will my motivation be then?

Field notes, printmaking drop-in, 23/04/2019

While this observation might suggest unnecessary caution about an as-yet unknown future, it echoes Ott's (2018) observation that through anticipating problems in order to navigate potential future resistance, the maker demonstrates a learning process in action. This is indicative of the creative practice shifting to a more sophisticated level of engagement. This aspect of resistance, in relation to creative practice, might take any one of a number of forms, which the maker cannot fully predict: a concealed bit of matter within a lump of clay that causes the firing process to go awry, a piece of thread seemingly possessed of independent agency and determined to tangle itself, a moment's inattention at a pivotal point of tool/linoleum connection. How might the

practitioner assemble a toolkit of practical and creative knowhow as they gather more experience of creative production? In the next section of this chapter, I examine the use of improvisation as a route to anticipating and working with points of creative and material resistance.

Improvisatory practices and contexts

Thus far this chapter has considered how amateur craft can be perceived as a form of play, and the experience of resistance as we begin to experiment with materials and processes. We can consider a broad definition of making as *transforming materials into an entity*; in thinking about the processes of making, Pye (1968, 1995) makes observations about what he terms the workmanship of certainty and of risk. In the workmanship of certainty, the making process is mechanised and the output is consistent, whereas the craftsman is engaging in the workmanship of risk, in which multiple factors can lead to inconsistent outputs. In line with the notion of the workmanship of risk, I now think about the role of improvisation as applied in the making process. In jazz musicianship, improvisation is considered as a process of building on what has come before (Nettl, 1974), and it is the same here: the maker engages with a set of materials, tools and skills, to work towards a finished output. Through exploring both intentional and unintentional forms of improvisation, I position it as an integral part of the creative learning process in this informal leisure making context.

Opportunities to test and experiment with processes are built into the creative disciplines of my research: the embroidered samplers created by generations of

women in particular as a means of practicing stitchwork (Parker, 2010), whose traces can be seen in my 'stitch journal' of small daily squares; test prints in the printmaking studio, which seem like lavish and extravagant wastes of paper until I realise that they permit the printmaker to refine the smallest details of a print until they are sufficiently satisfied to commit to creating a limited edition of final prints; the test tiles created in the ceramics studio in order for the ceramicist to learn how different glazes react with different clays, before committing to glazing a finished piece of work. The tile in particular functions as a transitional object, like an embroidery sampler or a sketched drawing – it is what Heidegger (1950, 2010) considers a 'thing' rather than an object, containing intent. It offers a bounded opportunity to try something out, without committing to embarking on the whole object, while also enabling the maker to build up a library of material information for future reference.

During a glazing course in the ceramics space, we are encouraged to make our own test tiles, with a nod to an idea that this will form the start of a 'library' serving a future practice. Those of us who have glazed things previously have found that because most of the glazes in their liquid form are the colour of pale dust, and are referred to by the equally opaque chemical names drawn from their constituent ingredients, the glazed tiles tied to the handle of each tub are the only reliable way to find out what is contained within. The test tiles feel like an obligation, something done because we're told to rather than because I want to. I pull tools out from the pots in the centre of the table, pressing into the leather-hard surface of my clay tiles, feeling a surly detachment from the process. I find it very hard to experiment, to relax into the process, and that is exactly what this calls for. I spend much of my time in the space feeling uncertain about

my actions, but in creating these tiles, I gradually find a playfulness in markmaking – using the tip of a scraping tool or repurposed baking equipment to create shallow repetitive marks. When I collect the fired tiles a couple of weeks later, I find them more intriguing than many of the other things I’ve made, prompting thoughts about how I might apply the markmaking and glaze combinations in other contexts. As discussed in the Literature Review section on Making Mess, insights emerge when we are prepared to risk engagement (Tanggaard, 2014). Terminology from the world of more tech-based makerspaces describes ‘rapid prototyping’ (Sandvik & Thestrup, 2017), in which versions of an idea are produced quickly, at relatively low cost, in order to generate and refine ideas for an end product whose manufacture would be more complex or expensive - 3-D printing technology is frequently used for this purpose. In the more low-tech environment of the community making space, the test tile or test print functions in a similar way, offering the chance to refine ideas with minimal risk (*Fig 22*).



Figure 21 Test tiles created in a glazing workshop at Hive

It is important to note that these objects - the test tiles, test prints, and sampler-style stitching exercises – are not considered as works in their own right, but rather, function as what can be considered as rehearsals for a final performance. They demonstrate both embodied ways of investigating materials and processes in themselves, and as means of exploring their potential as ways of conveying the maker’s ideas, existing in a liminal – and thus uncertain - space of possibility. Ingold (2013, 2014) describes how the ‘processual’ nature of creative improvisation involves movement both back and forth, with work revised, undone and unravelled, and in this regard, these testers enable this movement with little risk or commitment. In offering a way of trying things out without significant commitment, they offer the maker an early opportunity to avert

subsequent error – but such errors can offer the maker valuable insight and opportunity for serendipitous outcomes, as I discuss below.

There is much discussion of trial and error in the process of craft learning (O'Connor, 2007; Stalp & Winge, 2017; Brown, 2021). In the context of the rapid prototyping available in tech-based makerspaces, the analysis of failure enables the maker to refine the object without committing to the risk and expense of sending a problematic creation into an upscaled manufacturing process. Within the context of my research, however, where I am taking first steps in learning craft processes, failure is more likely to present as an unexpected conclusion to a process undertaken without full access to the necessary knowledge or skills. There is an irony that with more experience, the maker is arguably more likely to accept such failures as part of the process (see, for example, Korn, 2013), but for the inexperienced maker, this failure can be hard to reconcile as being just part of the process.

I make a small pot during a wheel-throwing session (as described in the second findings chapter), and, once it has been fired, had chosen to glaze it in what I hoped would be a greenish-yellow glaze. I arrive to collect it after the glaze firing, and am very surprised to find that instead of a smooth shiny surface, the glazing instead more closely resembles the bark of a birch tree, peeling away from the surface (*Fig 23*).



Figure 22 The 'shivered' pot

There are no tutors or technicians around to ask what has gone wrong, only a fellow course-member, now busy getting on with her own work. Neither of us are sufficiently experienced to understand what might have happened, and it is only later, when I share a picture on Facebook, that a potter friend is able to suggest that the glaze has *shivered* due to an incorrect mix. I then remember the conversations we'd had in class about the importance of stirring up the glazes so that ingredients distribute evenly throughout the liquid. I have had earlier successes with glazing, but this unexpected error causes a jarring in what I had thought would be a linear process of accruing competence; while it is frustrating, it also offers a tangible demonstration of what happens when instructions are overlooked or not fully understood. I consider this as a form of unintentional improvisation, in which I do not have full understanding of the ways in which the materials might behave. *Bodging* is a term used in green woodworking in relation to the turning of chair legs and similar (Knott, 2015); in other craft contexts, particularly in do-it-yourself home improvement projects undertaken by

those with less skill than determination; it can suggest a way of doing something that is half-done, or of poor quality. In that context, as with my shivered pot, the practitioner's level of knowledge is insufficient to be assured of a successful outcome. To return once again to Ryle's observation about the distinction between knowing *that* and knowing *how*, in this instance while we may know *that* a process happens (the theory), we have begun to learn *how* (the process), but we must now understand *why* a thing has happened. The theoretical understanding can only be underpinned through practice, and through failures such as this; as Brown (2021) observes, multiple instances of 'micro-learning' take place within the process of accruing craft skills.

The failures and errors necessarily exposed through the improvisation process are offered an extra layer of complexity through being performed within the shared environment of the making space. Elsewhere, I have discussed the moment at which the blankets and packing are pulled back from a print that has travelled through the printing press, and how the fresh print is revealed to others simultaneously to the printmaker (see the previous Findings chapter, and Danek, 2020). Below, I make similar observations of the glazing and kiln-firing processes, in which I must trust in whatever happens to the work I have created, even while it is concealed from me under layers of glaze or when undergoing the transformative process of firing:

...as I'm unable to see what's going on, and I have so little prior knowledge to which I can refer, I find it very hard to imagine what's going to happen in this transformation process.

Only by entering into the act can I begin to understand how complex it is.

A thought: can it be said to have gone wrong when I'm not sure what right looks like?

Field notes 18/07/2019

Ultimately, any outcome, whether the maker deems it to be a success or a failure, must give way to *carrying on*, as part of the process of craft practice (Ingold, 2014; Brown, Greig, Ferraro, 2017). The error might provide a serendipitous outcome, it might prompt a change of tack, or the maker could resolve to start again, determined to refine this particular process armed with new knowledge and a determination to stir the glaze more thoroughly, in blissful ignorance of the next potential derailment waiting further along the track.

In the example above, I describe how I am able to consult with another maker as we wonder what might have happened to my pot; this opportunity to connect with others is one of the key affordances of the shared making space. While other users of the space can offer technical observations and can guide the new user to particular tools and facilities, they also offer potential for a more significant role for the inexperienced maker, that of creative connection and social improvisation. One of my research questions asks how we learn alongside others, and while I have explored different aspects of this question in previous chapters, here, I consider the notion of social improvisation – by which I mean the ways in which connections between makers generate new ideas and processes.

In an interview with Frances, tutor in the ceramics space, and May, one of the participants, May observes that

You zing off each other, or think “wow, love that idea” and it’s not a case of pinching, it’s a case of taking the idea and developing something with it, or... somebody assisting me with something and showing me I can do it this way... [...] And also there’s the mental thing as well, of having people around you – things slip in and talks happen and... [trails off]

(interview with May, participant in ceramics classes, 18/03/2019)

Here, May highlights some of the positive aspects of working both alongside and with others. Some of this relies on conscious interaction, such as through demonstration of a technique or a conversation that sparks an idea, but there is also a less overt serendipitous aspect to the ways in which connections are made, whereby the maker might be inspired by conversations in which they are not directly involved, or sees a piece made by another maker who is not, at that moment, present in the space. I find myself looking at the shelves of work to be collected and wondering about how a piece has been made, and similarly, in the print space, creative inspiration is offered both through prints displayed on the studio walls, and in the array of prints – some successful, some less so – concealed within the mesh shelves of the drying racks. In contrast, when I work on craft activity at home, I do not have other people to ‘zing off’; I can seek out images in books or online, but these offers few clues as to how work is constructed, and does not offer the same shared opportunities for problem solving. When consulting a book, I am in effect not eavesdropping on an active conversation, but am arriving to hear it recounted later, and even when looking at creative content on social media, a conversation taking place through comments does not offer the same free range as the discussion that takes place in the room, where one participant might use words, gesture or demonstration to convey an idea (Collins, 2018).

The notion of improvisation as an integral part of the creative process is not limited to the materials and practices, but extends to the making spaces themselves. This can be considered as a form of forced improvisation, through necessity rather than creative curiosity – as Ott notes of a cordwainers' workshop,

... this limitation of resources is a motivation for resourcefulness, driving innovation through contingency. As a result, improvisation, the ability to draw on available material, cognitive, affective and social resources (Pina e Cunha et al. 1999), takes advantage of adapting an object for some other use than that which is (*sic*) was designed for.

(Ott, 2018, p. 205)

At the time of my fieldwork (2019), Leeds Print Workshop was housed in a disused restaurant space which had been repurposed to accommodate the requirements of the printmaking processes, in that, for example, the restaurant's pot washing area had been refitted with dedicated booths for rinsing down printing screens. The organisation has since relocated to purpose-built facilities elsewhere in Leeds. Similarly, Hive is housed on the ground floor of an old school, and is an improvised organisation, developing and adapting over the thirty five years of its existence, rather than having been planned and adequately resourced from the outset, which results in inadequate provision of some resources such as sinks. Since my fieldwork, Hive has been undergoing a significant process of rebuilding and refurbishment to improve its facilities. Both organisations rely on slim funding for overheads so equipment is borrowed or adapted (as discussed in the previous chapter where, as an example, I described a repurposed heat press in the printmaking space). Ott (*ibid.*) distinguishes

between primary tools, those devices that are very specifically of their craft (e.g. the potter's wheel for ceramics, or the printing press for printmaking) and secondary tools, which are found/repurposed objects. It is in these secondary objects that improvisatory *necessity* can also offer improvisatory *potential*, in enabling the maker to exploit new affordances in the execution of their work.

Despite a recent wave of dedicated makerspaces being constructed in educational and museum settings (e.g. Workshop at the Museum of Making (Derby Museums, 2024), or the Makerspace at the University of Leeds (University of Leeds, 2024)), the history of these informal making environments describes the use of *making do* with available resources to draw together the communal facility, as discussed in the Literature Review section on Making Space. I return to the fabric of these spaces here in thinking about this improvised context as an extension to the notion of a *permission space*. This idea can be applied in various ways: that the repurposed and sometimes care-worn nature of the space affords the maker the opportunity to try things out that might feel prohibitive in a more immaculate environment – namely, to experiment, or, simply, to make a mess. As an example, the accumulation of improvised tools offers ways in through transferred familiarity, such as the baking implements used as ceramics tools at Hive. In another example of the improvised nature of these organisations, a need to take care of fragile resources (such as the ancient Albion printing press, as described in the previous chapter) offers the potential to engender a sense of shared responsibility and thus develop camaraderie among users of the space. As discussed elsewhere within the findings chapters, this notion of permission is, of course, not only about opportunity, but also carries within it the implication of constraint: the awareness that one is using repurposed resources can potentially limit the maker's activities, as there

is an implied understanding that we are not working within a well-resourced context, but are, to an extent, making do. This is a key part of understanding and engaging in the experience of being part of the shared workshop, and it only increases once the maker steps outside the protected environment of the group course.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the role of improvisation as an aspect of craft learning, drawing specific attention to its use as a means of overcoming what I term perceptual resistance. I foreground the use of play as an important aspect of improvisatory learning, in which playful approaches can be seen to offer both social and material liberation, though playfulness can also be used to mask discomfort and uncertainty.

I show how the maker, having acquired some basic familiarity with tools and materials, must find ways to play with materials, and that this can lead to uncertainty, particularly as the maker continues to explore the affordances of materials. A tension is revealed whereby the maker must balance a desire to make finished objects with the opportunity to be found in more extensive engagement with processes. The line of development is shown to be particular to the individual maker, which has implications for both teaching processes within the spaces. In thinking about the ways in which we learn alongside others, I also demonstrate how there is camaraderie to be found in uncertainty, and how more experienced practitioners can help to mobilise the maker who is experiencing *stuckness*

The examination of improvisation draws attention to the use of error in the learning process. I show how there is an aspect of resistance in the experience of learning craft skills, in that the individual, unfamiliar with the environment and its workings, arrives as a discrete entity, wondering how they (or rather, *I*) can exert influence over material, and how, through a process of integration into the space in which the maker leans into the material environment, so the environment is seen to also yield to the maker. As the maker becomes more familiar with tools and processes, and starts to navigate the line between the *right* way to do things, and allowing for serendipitous outcomes, I present this creative tension as *perceptual resistance*, a form of the *troublesome knowledge* to be found at the edge of new learning; in the shared spaces of my research, this can present as a social discomfort that alienates the struggling maker.

In presenting the making space as providing opportunities to play and to experiment, I frame it as akin to Woodyer's (2012) 'ways to be "otherwise"' (p. 322) and Foucault's (1984) 'heterotopia' (p. 4), that is, a space *outside*, in that it is shown to be a liminal space laden with possibility.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This research began with the aim of examining the processes of developing craft skills in open access community making spaces, where the inexperienced maker could learn alongside others. There has been significant recent scholarly interest in more technology-focused makerspaces, which has drawn attention to innovation aspects and the potential for easy access to resources (Taylor, Wilson, Hurley, 2016), but has also drawn out more countercultural positioning, and, in particular, a predominantly male population that can present a barrier to participation by other users (Davies, 2017). In contrast, findings from the more analogue spaces of my research present a greater focus on use of tactile, embodied, material processes in engaging with tools and materials. In examining these spaces through an ethnographic lens, I think about what this tells us and how we might reposition the experiences of both learning in the space, and being a user of the space. In this concluding chapter, I first respond to the research questions I set out at the start of the thesis. Following this, I present my contribution to knowledge. I then discuss the implications of what I have found, followed by the limitations of the study, and conclude with recommendations for future research.

Responses to research questions

How do people learn alongside others?

In the second Findings chapter, *Engagement and Enskilment*, I develop an argument for the acknowledgement of strategic learning, in which makers dip in and out of learning on an ad hoc basis according to their particular needs, rather than adopting an

apprentice-style linear learning model. Participants are drawn together through a shared interest in the subject at hand, or because the making space serves their social needs, but each maker ostensibly works alone. I go on to demonstrate within the findings chapters that learning in the shared space necessarily involves negotiation, whether this is over tools, space, or the more complex territory of interpersonal engagement. The balance between focusing on one's own work and the obligation to interact with other group members can offer opportunities, such as when group members show me how to use the throwing wheel in the ceramics space, or can set up tensions such as when a participant on the screen printing course elects not to engage with collegial activities adjacent to the production of artwork – the mess of clearing up and putting away. Makers are always working in relation to one another, whether this is through direct engagement or in the position of being *alongside*, where an aspect of vulnerability is drawn out: participants are exposed to one another, permitting mimetic learning opportunities, but there is consequently nowhere to hide when things go wrong.

In considering processes of becoming within the spaces, the aspect of uncertainty stretches to include the highly conditional nature of participation, whereby makers can cease to attend courses at any time, and those who do finish the course have no obligation to continue to independent practice within either space. This lack of obligation to commit offers the maker the freedom to pursue their own creative direction, returning to the community to gather new experience, but in turn, a transient participant population can stymie potential for the longer-term development of a community of practice. The development of such a community requires that its

members grow to trust one another, as discussed in the second findings chapter; such trust is both harder to develop, and more easily disrupted, if the participant population is inconsistent.

How do people learn tools and materials?

The practical understanding of tools and materials is revealed to the maker through repeated material and tool engagement. During courses in both making spaces, tutors deliver basic instruction in a group context, subsequently working with individual makers to achieve specific aims. The learning is, however, largely in the hands of the participants, who must feel for a way forward. This is frequently seen to involve the use of error and improvisation, as the inexperienced maker can only learn to know what they are feeling for through accrued tactile experience. The process of knowledge becoming tacit is through undertaking this repetitive engagement; there is a significant role for the notion of troublesome knowledge which does not give itself up to the maker so easily.

In the second Findings chapter I noted the importance of the maker *finding the knack* for a particular tool or method. In examining this I applied one of Meyer & Land's (2005) five 'Threshold Concepts', drawn from secondary education theory, in order to articulate this *aha!* moment of understanding. Elsewhere, I have drawn on the importance for the maker of sitting with troublesome knowledge that does not easily resolve itself (Meyer & Land, *ibid.*) in order to find a way past uncertainty.

The focus on experiential learning is contrasted with learning received by direct instruction, which reinforces the finding that although the maker can be told what they

must do, and how to do it, learning is embedded only through the maker's hands-on engagement in embodied processes of tool and material manipulation.

What role is played by the space in facilitating practitioners' development?

Whereas nineteenth century craft advocates such as Ruskin and Morris held a utopian vision of craft activity as offering a way of offering a means of emancipation from the onslaught of industrialisation, here, the shared community craft space can be considered as not so much a *utopia* as a Foucauldian 'heterotopia' (Foucault, 1984, p. 4), whereby it exists as something other, outside time and space; it offers the inexperienced participant (not yet the *maker*) the opportunity to experiment, to make a mess, to build, or, indeed, to do nothing, albeit within clearly delineated blocks of time and in a carefully constrained environment. In the first chapter of Findings, *Making Time and Making Space*, I presented the idea that the open access community making space can be considered as a form of 'permission space'. In framing the space in this way, I draw attention not only to the opportunities (that is to say, the *affordances*) of such spaces, but also their limitations. While such spaces have previously been conceptualised as 'affinity spaces' (Gee, 2004) where like-minded individuals gather to spend time in shared pursuits such as video gaming, Davies (2018) draws attention to problematic aspects, in particular complex social dynamics, but this is framed within a particular subsector of the shared making environment, the hackerspace, whereas my research extends into a different situation, and particularly in the more community-led ceramics space, into an environment where participants are present for reasons beyond the obvious tasks of engaging with tools and materials: social engagement, or therapeutic experience, to suggest two examples. In framing this

space as boundaried by a multitude of constraints, I demonstrate that the newcomer to the environment is an actor within a field of already complex relations. This offers the potential to reframe how we engage with the space, for example in navigating established social dynamics, or in being able to more easily assess the scope of the space for the potential user's creative approach and requirements.

How does the individual progress from instruction towards experimentation?

The third findings chapter locates the use of play and improvisation as aspects of a creative journey. This extends the notion of the 'permission space', demonstrating how improvisatory processes, employed in such a space, offer the user opportunities to try what Woodyer (2012, p. 322) terms 'ways to be "otherwise"', with space and time dedicated to exploring without fixed outcomes. At any moment the maker can cease to play the game: for the maker participating in an informal craft learning course, there is no significant commitment, no ongoing membership and no obligation to work through a series of steps in order to attain a qualification. The making space thus functions as a sort of suspended space – a liminal, or to be more precise, *liminoid* space of creative possibility.

This links the Ingoldian notion of *going along* and the idea of the maker *becoming*. This can be thought of as a means of (re)making the self as the maker uses playful approaches to develop their creative voice. This desire to engage with materials in playful and improvisatory ways implies a need for provision of spaces such as those in my research; I contend that the affordances offered by the space are, however, secondary to the social affordances, whereby people can work, or not-work, alongside

others, and the emotional affordances in the form of the permission mentioned above. In the maker finding ways of becoming, this speaks to choices about how we spend time, and the value of autotelic creative activity. Through engaging in improvisatory activity, the maker finds means of achieving self-actualisation.

Research contributions

This research offers several original contributions:

A key contribution is in the use of play as a lens through which to examine the experience of amateur craft learning. In these spaces where the emphasis is on autotelic creative activity, learning is a near-optional aspect of the courses, and the emphasis is on makers pursuing their own creative aims within the sessions; there is little obligation to improve or to produce anything, which in itself offers a sort of liberation. The focus on creative exploration positions this research alongside Tanggaardian conceptions of 'fooling around' (Tanggaard, 2014) as part of a sociomaterial approach to creativity; however, the boundaries, rules, opportunity to experiment, and lack of commitment demanded of the amateur maker in these spaces locates my research more closely with the attention to both constrictions and uncertainty that underpin theories of play. The use of play also extends interpretations of Dreyfus' (2004) arc of enskilment, building on its use within craft learning as examined by Brown, Greig and Ferrara (2017) and Patchett & Mann (2018). Play has not previously been applied in this way; this offers rich potential for thinking about making spaces and informal creativity in ways that focus more on intrinsic and less on instrumental aspects. It is of particular interest in thinking about research examining makerspaces and making spaces in relation to children, and the focus on play in that

context: what happens when we reframe messy, uncertain, playful creative activity (and the space and time in which to do it) as being significant for adults?

I present the positioning of strategic learning as a key model within these spaces of informal creative activity. While this approach to learning is positioned in education literature as lacking depth, here it facilitates the amateur maker only needing to learn that which they require in order to undertake the activity that interests them. The mode of learning might be by mimetic means, it might be by trial and error, or might be by formal instruction, but (particularly in the longer courses) the courses in both spaces offer few predetermined outcomes. This opens up opportunities for makers to shape their learning according to their particular needs.

The novel conception of the making space as a *permission space* for the performance of informal craft activity is a significant contribution, as explained in the responses to the research questions above. I define the permission space as a space where people can explore creative techniques such as ceramics or printmaking, with both access to appropriate facilities and tools, and capacity to experiment and to make a mess (both physically and creatively). The permission space is positioned as offering opportunities and resources that the maker might not be able to, or ready to, access either as an individual practitioner, or when working at home. However, the use of the word permission draws out aspects of control: while this space offers affordances (the aforementioned opportunities) to the maker, it also imposes constraints. These could be social, such as obligations to navigate the needs, practices and social behaviours of other makers, or the requirement to adhere to the expectations of gatekeepers such as

technicians and space managers. The constraints can also be physical – this space can be limited, and often involves improvised aspects – and temporal, in that access to the space is limited to class times or specified open access timeslots. In this way, while the permission space can be seen to offer significant potential, particularly for the less experienced maker, it nevertheless also presents limitations that cannot be ignored. This conception builds on Lave & Wenger's (1991) idea of the community of practice in which a group of people with a shared interest come together to learn together; Gee's (2004) affinity space, where people engage in common interests with people like themselves; Oldenburg's (1999) third place that is neither home nor work but a separate social location in which one can perform one's self; and, arguably most significantly, Stewart's (2010) bloom space of ambiguity, change and potential.

While there has been recent scholarly interest in the creative, social and motivational potential of creators working alongside one another on independent projects (Golding, 2015; Gauntlett, 2023), within my research I present the conception of *alongside* as a relational position offering makers both opportunity and challenges. The opportunities include camaraderie and potential for mimetic learning, but in the shared space, the maker is also vulnerable, in that when working at a large table alongside other makers, there is nowhere to hide oneself or one's creations at those moments when work does not go according to plan. This is significant as a contribution as it problematizes what is often presented as a benefit of shared informal creative spaces, namely the positive social aspects of indirectly sharing the making space with others.

Within the methodology, I draw attention to the ways in which the messy, iterative processes of ethnographic doctoral research into craft practices are themselves reflective of the haphazard conditions of amateur craft learning. In both instances the maker (of craft artefacts or of research) is finding out through doing, using new knowledge to make decisions about next steps. In the case of the craft activity, this presents as an open, exploratory approach to the specifics of the field work in the spaces, where one course is followed by another, while as a doctoral researcher, this abductive approach is most clearly manifested in writing that results in restructuring and reframing chapters - which then lead to more writing, as more is understood.

Implications

In considering the autotelic aspects of the activities happening within the spaces of my research, there is an argument for a shift in attention towards the examination of *intrinsic* aspects of everyday creativity, both to understand and communicate this value in itself, and as a counterpoint to the current significant focus on instrumentalised formulations of informal leisure activity – the arts and health, arts and wellbeing, and skill development for employment, to name three examples.

This research extends the work of craft scholars such as Brown, Greig and Ferraro (2017) and Patchett & Mann (2017), in further extending Dreyfus' notion of an arc of enskilment where the maker not only progresses forward, but can also return to earlier stages along the arc to make sense of or correct previous learning in the light of new understanding. This offers a link with the principle of strategic learning, whereby the learner acquires pieces of learning that are relevant to them without obligation to

commit to a deeper, more structured educational process. The significance as an implication for craft scholarship is in the linking of these two ideas, and the application within structured amateur craft learning environments.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of this project relate to the choice of ethnography as a methodology: an ethnographic study of this nature is necessarily very narrow; it is difficult to replicate as it involves lived experience; the findings are highly subjective, and subject to extensive researcher bias. However, I contend that this narrowness of focus offers the study its depth, and that, as discussed in the methodology chapter, in engaging in and analysing my embodied experiences within the sites of my research, I am able to access insights that are not available to the researcher working at one remove. In the Methodology chapter I referenced literature that explored the accusation, in research of this nature, that it simply provides an excuse for the researcher to indulge in their own interests (Carr & Gibson, 2016). However, a pragmatic issue, described in the methodology and at various points in the findings chapters, is the challenge for the researcher of sitting both within and outside the experience (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Within my research, the discomfort of the inexperienced maker hovering in the liminal space of uncertain competence is mirrored in the role of the similarly inexperienced researcher: I risk remaining aloof from both the processes under investigation and, conversely, the opportunity to observe without distraction. I found in my research that there is no obvious means to resolve this tension, other than by erring to one side – participation – or the other, of positioning myself as more of an observer; attempting to fulfil both roles entails the

acceptance of incomplete experiences on both sides, and I found this hard to reconcile. This is another example of the role of uncertainty in the research process: through acknowledging this discomfort, and accepting that this model is messy and that it will involve some stumbling (Tanggaard & Juelsbo, 2016; Wegener, 2016), I note that it reflects some of the haphazard processes of amateur craft practice, in which the inexperienced maker sits in a liminal space of incomplete entry into the environment. This tension presents a seam of enquiry to be located and drawn out more centrally within future research.

Another limitation of this study relates to the changing landscape of amateur craft engagement at both macro and micro levels. The fieldwork for this research took place between late 2018 and the middle of 2019, some four years prior to the conclusion of writing up the thesis. The global pandemic of 2020-21 saw heightened participation in craft activity within the home, and there has been a wider shift towards informal creative engagement in the subsequent period, whether through creative activity as a form of economically-driven side hustle or, conversely, as an aspect of wider rejection of commodified worldviews, sometimes described in terms such as *quiet quitting* (Odell, 2019). In the intervening time, significant public and scholarly attention has been paid to what can be termed 'Everyday Creativity' (The Audience Agency, 2023), or what Kaufman & Beghetto (2009) call 'small C creativity' – that is, creative activity undertaken for leisure purposes rather than for income, with little expectation of mastery. The sites of my research have also changed and evolved: Hive's building is being renovated into a fit-for-purpose facility rather than the compromised space it has inhabited, and Leeds Print Workshop has, similarly, relocated to a new dedicated site. I

present these aspects as limitations as they reinforce the ways in which the fieldwork captured a particular period in space and time. As I have described above, ethnographic research does not lend itself to replicability, and in many ways the conditions of my research have not changed significantly (aside from the physical contexts of the field sites), but the experience of the pandemic in particular lends this research a sense of having taken place in a different era.

Recommendations for future research

The key contribution of this research is in the presentation of the making space as a liminal space of possibility and potential, in which learning is one aspect of a set of interrelated sociomaterial encounters. The recommendations for future research all develop from this starting point.

The position of the novice inhabiting uncertain territory offers rich potential for development, particularly in relation to further interrogation of auto/ethnographic and researcher/practitioner methodological tensions. There is also opportunity for comparison of this experience within an informal craft learning context, with other investigative experiences of starting out in creative and leisure environments.

While various research uses ethnographic processes to examine initial forays into craft processes, as discussed extensively within the thesis, there is also scope to extend this through to interrogation of the next steps taken by the amateur maker who has acquired basic skills. This stage of craft practice, termed the 'amateur' in Dreyfus' (2004) five stage model of skill acquisition, is currently underresearched within the literature.

The third findings chapter examines the use of play and improvisation in development of a participant's creative voice. There is significant scope to engage more extensively with how play is, or can be, foregrounded as an aspect of everyday creativity more widely than simply for children. In addition, while attention is commonly paid to instrumental uses of informal craft activity (as described in the Research Context at the start of the thesis), I believe that the more intrinsic aspects of play in this context offer particularly rich potential for future research.

Through this research into hesitant first steps in ceramics, printmaking, and embroidery, in which (to draw from the language of sewing) the craft learning process has involved as much unpicking as stitching together, I have shown how practices of acquiring craft skills in shared making spaces can be iterative and messy. The open-access creative workshops of my research enable makers to share learning through working alongside others, but also to risk sharing something of ourselves as we perform our making, sitting at communal tables where we expose the small triumphs and disasters of our as-yet unrefined practices. In these *permission spaces* that offer (constrained) potential for experimentation and improvisation, we see how makers can engage in autotelic creative activity without expectation or obligation, playing with tools, materials and ideas in spaces that are, even if only for an afternoon, places outside the space and time of the rest of life.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of fieldwork activities

Courses

Date	Course	Duration
Hive Bradford		
Jan-Mar 2019	Slab building pottery	Ten weeks
May-Jun 2019	Raku firing	Three days
May-Jun 2019	Ceramics for All	Ten weeks
May-Jun 2019	Glazing	Ten weeks
Jun 2019	Wheel throwing one-to-one	Two hours
Leeds Print Workshop		
Nov 2018	Introduction to Printmaking	Five weeks
Feb 2019	Make a Zine	One day
Mar 2019	Introduction to Bookbinding	One day
Aug 2018	Introduction to Screen Printing	Two days
Feb-Mar 2019	Make your Mark: screen printing	Five weeks
Apr 2019	Letterpress taster day	One day

Drop-in sessions

Hive Bradford - five sessions between May and July 2019

Leeds Print Workshop - six sessions between April and August 2019

Interviews

Hive Bradford – eleven interviews with participants, three interviews with staff

Leeds Print Workshop – three interviews with participants, two interviews with staff

Sewing

This activity was ongoing at home for the entire period that the rest of the fieldwork was taking place; observations on my stitching are drawn from reflective notemaking.

Appendix 2: List of participants

N.b. this is not an exhaustive list of participants on courses I attended, or drop-in users; rather, it lists those participants who feature in this thesis. Each course at Hive Bradford involved approximately ten participants, and courses at Leeds Print Workshop involved up to eight participants.

Hive Bradford

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Approx. age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Details</i>
Frances	Ceramics tutor	50	Female	Came to Hive as student then developed and trained to become tutor
Bob	Ceramics tutor	60	Male	Very experienced commercial potter
Louise	Tutor for one-to-one wheel-throwing course	50	Female	Freelancer who works at Hive occasionally
Harriet	Course participant	45	Female	Lives with long-term chronic health condition.
Paul	Course participant	30	Male	
Nick	Course Participant	50	Male	
May	Course participant	55	Female	Recently completed Fine Art degree as mature student.
Irina	Course participant	75	Female	Hearing-impaired and slightly unsteady on her feet. Forthright in sharing opinions.
Pauline	Course participant	60	Female	
Rebecca	Course participant	25	Female	Participating with Lauren as a social opportunity
Lauren	Course participant	25	Female	Participating with Rebecca as a social opportunity
Ruth	Regular user, also does courses	45	Female	Uses Hive as part of mental health management strategy
Karen	Regular user	55	Female	Has a kiln at home; uses Hive for social connection
Brenda	Regular user	75	Female	
Ann	Regular user	50	Female	Lives with long-term chronic health condition

Phil	Regular user	55	Male	Wheelchair user
Fletcher	Occasional course participant and regular user	30	Male	Uses Hive as part of mental health management strategy
Barbara	Course participant and regular user	70	Female	Uses Hive to address social isolation

Leeds Print Workshop

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Approx. age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Details</i>
Ellen	Screen printing tutor	Late 20s	Female	Artist, also teaches at Leeds Art University
Jane	Lino printmaking tutor	50	Female	Leeds Print Workshop cooperative member, artist, also works at Leeds Art University
Jeff	highly experienced printmaking tutor	55	Male	Leeds Print Workshop cooperative member, artist, also works at Leeds Art University
Sian	Assistant on printmaking course	45	Female	Leeds Print Workshop cooperative member
Rob	Duty technician during some of my drop-in sessions	55	Male	Leeds Print Workshop cooperative member, printmaker
Ginny	Course participant	50s	Female	Recently rediscovered creative practice
Rachel	Course participant	Late 20s	Female	Working in creative-adjacent role, seeking hands-on creativity
Joy	Course participant	Early 30s	Female	Working in creative-adjacent role, seeking hands-on creativity
Jim	Course participant	Mid 20s	Male	Junior doctor attending course at partner's behest

Appendix 3: Ethical approval for the study

The Secretariat
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT Tel: 0113 343 4873
Email: ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Clare Danek
School of Performance and Cultural Industries
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT

**Arts, Humanities and Cultures Faculty Research Ethics Committee
University of Leeds**

12 June 2018

Dear Clare,

Title of study: Working alone, working together, exploring creative participation in open access communal making spaces
Ethics reference: LTSPCI-046

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for light touch ethical review has been reviewed by a representative of the Arts, Humanities and Cultures Faculty Research Ethics Committee and, following receipt of your response to their initial comments, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

Document	Version	Date
LTSPCI-046 Clare Danek LightTouchEthicsForm May 2018 signed.pdf	1	05/06/2018
LTSPCI-046 Clare_Danek_Participant_Consent_Form_Pilot_study_20180529.docx	1	05/06/2018
LTSPCI-046 Clare Danek participant information form May 2018.docx	2	08/06/2018

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment>.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as other documents relating to the study. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited, there is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits>.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie
Senior Research Ethics Administrator, the Secretariat
On behalf of Prof Robert Jones, Chair, [AHC FREC](#)
CC: Dr Leila Jancovich

Clare Danek [pc14cjd]

From: Clare Danek [pc14cjd]
Sent: 09 October 2018 11:34
To: ResearchEthics
Subject: RE: LTSPCI-046 favourable opinion

Dear Jennifer,

This is great news – many thanks. Please can you set the end date as 1st October 2019.

Many thanks
 Clare

From: Jennifer Blaikie **On Behalf Of** ResearchEthics
Sent: 08 October 2018 10:26
To: Clare Danek [pc14cjd] <pc14cjd@leeds.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: LTSPCI-046 favourable opinion

Dear Clare,

Yes that would be fine, thanks for checking. Please could you let me know your new research end date so that I can update our records?

Best wishes,
 Jennifer

~~~~~  
 Jennifer Blaikie | Senior Research Ethics Administrator | The Secretariat | University of Leeds | Leeds | LS2 9JT | 0113 34 34873 | [j.m.blaikie@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.blaikie@leeds.ac.uk) | [www.leeds.ac.uk/ethics](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ethics) | [@UoLResEthics](https://twitter.com/UoLResEthics)

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**From:** Clare Danek [pc14cjd]  
**Sent:** 04 October 2018 14:08  
**To:** ResearchEthics <[researchethics@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@leeds.ac.uk)>  
**Subject:** RE: LTSPCI-046 favourable opinion

Dear Jennifer,

I have now undertaken my pilot studies, for which the ethical review LTSPCI-046 approval was granted. The main body of my research will follow the same position and use the same methods, and will run until the end of the current academic year, so my supervisors have suggested that I contact you to find out whether this ethical approval can roll forward into the research, without the need for a new application.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Clare Daněk

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**From:** Jennifer Blaikie **On Behalf Of** ResearchEthics  
**Sent:** 12 June 2018 17:07  
**To:** Clare Danek [pc14cjd] <[pc14cjd@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:pc14cjd@leeds.ac.uk)>