



The Power of Making:

Craft, Sustainability and Wellbeing; In what ways can Contemporary Craft contribute to the Regeneration of a Community

Introduction

The arts and artists have a long history of contributing to places and communities experiencing change. Since the 1980s, arts, public art and cultural industries have advocated as positive contributors to urban regeneration (Tomaghi 2015) and have used the arts to tackle social exclusion on a relatively low budget (Laundry and Matarasso 1996; Matarasso 1997)

In the report commissioned by Arts Council England in 2011 it states the arts are *“Able to comment, reflect, influence, interpret and inspire and are increasingly recognised as a key part of the process that can help shape new environments and engage communities.”*

While artist collectives, hackerspaces, and business start-ups are all part of a city regeneration (Dawkins 2011) my research will focus on how crafts, particularly jewellery design, could contribute to urban regeneration within geographic communities who often find themselves excluded from the glamour of city regeneration.

Being Here!

The Being Here is a site specific action research project. Drawing on my past professional experience as a Community Development coordinator I will be draw on these principles whilst utilising an asset based approach as described by the Scottish Community Development Centre is one which; *“Recognise and builds on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists within local communities.”*

My research will be located in Muirhouse, North Edinburgh and my role within this project is as an Artist, Researcher and Maker. As described by McIver (2004) my site specific work will be; *“Part of a collective memory of the site – working on a site does not bestow ownership upon the artist. The artist and the work becomes part of the collective memory of the site, and the artist has to accept that.”*

The aim of the project is to;

- **Research** into what is it like ‘Being Here’? These ideas, concepts and emotions will be interpreted into simple jewellery which will be created by the local community.
- **Inspire:** Through participatory arts workshops will provide the opportunity for people to learn new skills and be inspired at about the possibilities of making.
- **Discuss** the current environment, explore people’s relationship and listen to people’s views on the emerging regeneration of the Muirhouse area.

More to a Community than Trainspotting?

Forth ward in Edinburgh covers the demographics of Muirhouse, one of Scotland’s poorest communities. During the 1980’s Muirhouse experienced high levels of unemployment and drug use was at an all-time high and the life expectancy is lower than the city of Edinburgh and the Scottish average⁽¹⁾. In the 1990’s the community was further stigmatised by the book and then the film ‘Trainspotting’⁽²⁾ and since the 2010 financial crash local businesses have closed and regeneration halted. Today Muirhouse has experienced some regeneration of housing stock and amenities however it still has higher than average levels of income deprivation and lower than average life expectancy. It is within this community that my research will locate itself.

MY RESEARCH QUESTION IS:
“In what ways can Contemporary Craft contribute to the Regeneration of a Community?”

Research Methodology

As an artist and researcher I aim to apply techniques traditionally used by ethnographers. Hoey suggests that this role; *“Goes beyond reporting events and details of experience. Specifically, he or she attempts to explain how these represent what we might call “webs of meaning” the cultural constructions, in which we live”* (Hoey 2014:2)

Some Conclusions?

Reflecting on McIver’s (2014) quote, I hope, my research will become part of the collective memory of the community and as described by Hannula (etel 2005) *“Produce a new kind of information that is not introspective but combinative, outward-looking and seeking new connections”* (Hannula, Suoranta and Vaden 2005:22)

Urban Wandering

Building on the ‘Wearable Stories’ project (Hanson 2016) I will draw on theories of Psychogeography. In his article, Nigel Rapport (2014) positions Psychogeography approaches as; *“the study off specific effects of geographic, environmental, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals”* (Rapport 2014:35)

Drawing on these theories and my interest in Cartography my artistic research will include and reflect on some key issues for the project. These will include but are not exclusive;

Exploration: Site specific engagement of the urban environment of Muirhouse, its utilitarian buildings and the dichotomy surrounding them.

Document: I will be paying particular attention to the layers (physical and human) surfaces and documenting the lost and found objects.

Understanding: This new information generated will enable me to think about our interconnectedness and (I hope) will reconstruct a new experience of space, memory and how local people view their community of Muirhouse.

Making: As an artist and contemporary jeweller I hope to translate the interconnectedness of people of Muirhouse experiences with my new knowledge into 3D wearable objects.

Building on previous tested research methods I applied during my ‘Fusion’ and ‘State of Flux’ projects (Arnott 2015) my Masters Research project will use a variety of arts based research methods (Leavy 2009) and integrating craft research methodologies (Nimkulrat 2010) as well as data collection using both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Thomas 2009).;

Examples of my artistic research methods



My research methods will take three avenues

My own artistic research methods: sketchbooks, samples, objects collected.

Qualitative research methods: recording the stories of making from the project participants

Quantitative research methods: semi structured interviews and data collection



Taking on board these approaches to my research, locating myself within the community of Muirhouse and balancing my own artistic practice, I hope this project will enable me to explore how contemporary craft could contribute to the regeneration of an urban community whilst exploring the importance of craft (jewellery design) as political position in drawing attention to issues of Poverty, Inequality and Regeneration.

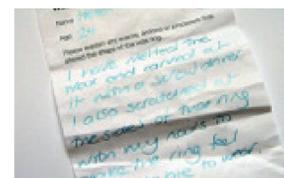
Artists whose research methodology I have found of interest:



Diedre Nelson Textile Artist
www.dstitch.blogspot.co.uk



Linda Brothwell Object Maker
www.lindabrothwell.com



Laura Potter Object Maker
www.laurapotter.co.uk



Elizabeth Turrell
www.elizabethturrell.wordpress.com

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- Hanson, M; (2015) *Wearable Stories Project student summer project*

¹ Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2012 <http://www.sns.gov.uk/Simd/Simd.aspx>
² Welsh I., (1993) *Trainspotting*. Vintage and *Trainspotting the Film* (1996) Directed by Danny Boyle