

N
N
O
N

ANDREA VAN DER KUIL

UNCRAFTING WORTH:

USING CRAFTY LABOUR TO
RENEGOTIATE WORTH



HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES



GRAPHY
FORMANCE ART
ES
ODY
PERFORMANCE
OGRAPHY
RT PERFORMANCE ART
EATRE PRACTICES
SCIPLINED BODY
EOGRAPHY
CE ART
PRACTICES
ODY
NCE
PHY
PERFORMANCE ART

UNCRAFTING WORTH:

**USING CRAFTY LABOUR TO
RENEGOTIATE WORTH**

ANDREA VAN DER KUIL
MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

A Thesis presented by Andrea van der Kuil to Master Performance Practices,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts in
Performance Practices, 2022.

**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**



2022

SYNOPSIS

Uncrafting Worth is a craftistic research that hypothesises that when the female crafter's body, her craft object, and her crafting process all become opaque bodies, the ability to renegotiate the worth of these bodies becomes possible. Placed at the intersection of feminist theory, craftivism, and performance practices, the research interrogates the concept of worth by offering a new subsection to craftivism called crafty labour, investigating the idea of unreclaiming, and eventually uncovering an alternative approach to durationality.

Where feminist theory focuses on exposing the mechanisms of gender, performance practices encompasses the body in performance, and craftivism highlights craft as a form of activism; this research focuses on how the intersection of the three creates a space where fixed identity definitions are queered and a fluid freedom in discussion between bodies may take place.

Through an autoethnographic approach, and using heuristic field research, craftistic practice-as-research, reflective and speculative writing, and literature reviews, the findings of this research reveal that by reaching opacity (accepting the multiple unknowable characteristics of the other and the self), a renegotiation of worth occurs. Crafty labour foregrounds

the crafter's body, process, and craft object, and I hope it will begin a contemporary practice of embracing differences between peoples, objects, and journeys which unites rather than segregates.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Fenia Kotsopoulou. Thank you for guiding, supporting, and challenging me in a way that has taught me how to trust my thoughts, grow as a researcher, and make work that is critical. Your encouragement, not just in the final stretch, but throughout the entire two years of this masters, has pushed me to weave together a practice and way of seeing that sits in the rich soil of care and consideration, crafty implementation, and viewing things from every side.

To my external mentor, Casey Jenkins; thank you for sharing your craftivism and performance art practice with me. Our conversations on how to use craft and the female body to dismantle socio-political structures in the world always lit a fire inside of me and fuelled a determination to make work that meant something and did something.

Thank you to Nishant Shah for always providing me with a new and distinctive perspective, especially when marrying the worlds of craft, feminism, and performance practices. Your approach to academia always leaves me excited and inspired to write, and think, and engage.

To the Bush family in Dala-floda, Sweden; thank you for

welcoming me with so much love into your home, spinning mill, and life. Your skills and expertise enriched my research to a point that I could never have imagined, and I feel incredibly lucky that you said yes to the South African living in the Netherlands who wanted to learn about wool. The space you offered me, was in many ways a huge turning point, and will forever be something that I hold close to my heart.

I want to extend an enormous thank you to my colleagues at HOPP. Thank you for not only making this an entertaining, fun, and exciting two years, but for inspiring me every day to think from different perspectives, and for teaching me when and how to say no.

Thank you to my ever-loving family for providing me with the opportunity and privilege to do a masters. To my mother, Ellen, for letting me express every emotion I possess at any time of the day, for coming all the way to see me craft in public, and for being the most keen, critical, and meticulous editorial eye for my thesis writing. To my father, Ferdi, for telling every old friend and partial acquaintance in the supermarket about my research, and how proud you are. To my brother, Bern, for always building me up with a steadfast love, while training my stamina and resilience with the hard questions. To PetJet, for providing me with a landing pad and entry point to the Netherlands that I know I can always call home.

Thank you to my beautiful friends scattered across the world for your always-engaging conversations about life, philosophy, and research. A special thanks to Caitlin, Fran, and Melody for constantly being open to discussing concepts and ideas, and for reading through my thesis with feedback.

Thank you to the lecturers and professors that make up HOPP, including Pavlos Kountouriotis who headed this programme. To João da Silva, for so clearly extrapolating and explaining the world of artistic research, always offering a new consideration, and for asking the question that solidified my decision to enrol in this masters. To daz disley, for continuously challenging my thoughts on crafting, and for providing such attentive documentation of my work alongside Fenia. And to Elena Cologni, whose thoughts and discourse in her elective module instigated my dive into the world of craft and gendered space.

Lastly, thank you to every other person, friend, love, and stranger, who has crossed my path and inspired my thinking throughout this journey. I do believe that it is made up of every single, small moment, and I feel grateful for your patience, candour, and presence herein.

DECLARATION

I, Andrea van der Kuil, hereby certify that I have personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, 'Uncrafting Worth: using crafty labour to renegotiate worth'.

No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma prior to this date.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Declaration</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>v</i>
INTRODUCTION	1
PART 1: THE WORLD WE KNOW	4
<i>THE SPACE BETWEEN VISIBILITY & INVISIBILITY</i>	5
<i>PERFORMING FEMALENESS</i>	10
<i>CRAFTED BY THEM</i>	13
PART 2: A GAP FOR DARNING	17
<i>CRAFTY LABOUR</i>	17
<i>DURATION, UNRECLAIMING AND GENTLE PROTEST</i>	25
PART 3: CRAFTISTIC RESEARCH	31
<i>HERE BY MY OWN (UN)ACCORD</i>	31
<i>A RESIDENCY IN THE BODY OF A FACTORY WORKER</i>	33
<i>DURATION BEFORE DURATION</i>	38
<i>THE 12 HOUR PUNCH</i>	43
PART 4: UNCRAFTING WORTH	49
<i>CRAFTING A WAY OUT</i>	50
<i>UNRECLAIMING SPACE</i>	54
<i>A NEW DURATIONALITY</i>	58
<i>THE UNCRAFTING TO COME</i>	62
REFERENCES	64
APPENDICES	66

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	20
CECILIA VICUÑA, SKYSCRAPER QUIPU (2006) PHOTO FROM CECILIA VICUÑA WEBSITE (2022)	
FIGURE 2	24
CASEY JENKIN, CASTING OFF MY WOMB (2013) PHOTO FROM CASEY JENKINS WEBSITE (2022)	
FIGURE 3	28
MARINA ABRAMOVIC & ULAY, IMPONDERABILIA (1977-2017) PHOTO FROM DREAM IDEA MACHINE WEBSITE (2017)	
FIGURE 4	40
UNDOING TO DO AGAIN IN UNCRAFTING WORTH (2022) PHOTO: STELIOS TROULLAKIS	
FIGURE 5	46
THE FINAL UNDOING IN UNCRAFTING WORTH (2022) PHOTO: FENIA KOTSOPOULOU	
FIGURE 6	56
AN AUDIENCE MEMBER TAKES A CLOSER LOOK IN UNCRAFTING WORTH (2022) PHOTO: ZUZA SOSNOWSKA	

INTRODUCTION

When I acknowledge the context from which I emerge - that of a white, middle-class, able-bodied, South African Dutch, cisgender female crafter, performer, and production designer, born and raised in South Africa - thoughts surrounding how I am and have been placed in the world begin to emerge. The detail of being a female in South Africa holds a certain weight to it and teaches a certain cautiousness. In my recent years of living there, I followed this rule: you can do whatever you want, say whatever you want and dress however you want, as long as you are prepared to deal with the unsolicited responses you will receive. The socio-political ontologies of gendered space and place illustrate that public space, and therefore what exists in it, is owned and authored by men. Occupying public space quickly becomes a performance of the body, and when I place that body into the public space, it becomes of that space and no longer just mine. Meanwhile, within the economic climate where the privilege of white men still lingers in power and wealth, in my career as a theatre production designer, I perform a detached, behind-the-scenes performance, where the objects I make become of that space. In both cases, a judgement and measurement of worth is assigned to these bodies by a historically, white, heterosexual male.

There has rarely been a time in the world where one's gender, race, class, sex, ability, and sexuality has not had an impact on one's placement in the world. How one is regarded by another person or system has always, and continues to, dictate social status, political influence, financial placement, and geographical situation. Worth depends on the problematic system of fixed gender definitions constructed by a long-standing patriarchy, and biology determining behaviour; how "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1953: 273). Within the limited female-male binary of being¹ lies a hierarchy attributing more worth to men than women, further implying that the worth of a body dictates the worth of its processes and outputs; for example, the prescribed female task of domestic crafting and output of a craft object.

My research hypothesises that when the female crafter's body, craft object, and crafting process all become opaque bodies (bodies that are not reduced to and by another's definitions), the ability to renegotiate the worth of these bodies becomes possible. My hypothesis is realised by offering a new subsection of craftivism. Residing in my craftistic² space and

¹ In investigating how bodies performing the same labour attain different worth, I use gender (and gender performativity) as a divide. Through strategic essentialism, I use the female-male binary as placeholders to observe how power separates to concretise my argument. I recognise, however, that this does not encompass all variations of gender, nor all variations in which segregation occurs.

² As opposed to 'artistic'.

through my practice-as-research, I propose the subsection crafty labour, which recognises the crafter, object, and process equally and uncovers a durationality embodying slowness. This slowness is non-confrontational, gentle, and often silent yet in its stillness and tranquillity it is menacing. Through crafty labour, I question the worth between these three figures (body, object, and process), how a female's visibility and worth affect each other, and whether the female body and process can acquire worth without an attachment to an external output, specifically in maintaining the hierarchies of art and men. By doing so, my research creates a space in which worth may be renegotiated.

PART 1: THE WORLD WE KNOW

Using an autoethnographic approach, I bring together the fields of craftivism, feminist studies and performance practices. Through previous research and theory in these fields, I aim to fill the gap present at their intersection, thereby contributing to each respective field. This new perspective specifically offers a theory to the young theoretical field of craftivism, calling for a shift away from the singular focus on the final craft object and, through durationality, moving towards crafty labour which integrates the female body, her craft object, and her process - I will refer to these three elements involved in crafting as figures throughout this thesis. The equal focus on these three figures brings the question of each's worth to the fore, further asking for the renegotiation of the concept of worth.

In my practice-as-research, to have 'worth' is to be something or someone that is regarded as good, desirable, important, or necessary by a system or body that has the authority to define it so, thus also determining its treatment. The assignation of worth is dependent on: how worth is measured, who measures worth, and the authority that comes with that measurement of worth. When I speak of authority, I refer to one's ability to control or influence an environment (another's behaviour or the events of something), with or without the consent of

others. Considering this, worth equates authority, and yet, worth can only be appointed by someone/thing already in possession of authority. I use 'worth' instead of 'value' as a small yet significant resistance against the structure I am opposing. I resist the default word 'value' and its already present multiple matrixes of measurement which produce distinctions of hierarchy and privilege. By denying the word, I rob it of its distinction as the 'normal'.

The literature reviews in this part will contextualise and refine the varying influences of worth I am interested in, specifically kindling the durationality performed by the female crafter's body, her craft object, and her crafting process. Furthermore, it will frame how durationality in crafty labour may achieve opacity and thus allow worth to be renegotiated.

SPACES BETWEEN VISIBILITY & INVISIBILITY

American feminist scholar, Peggy Phelan's text *Unmarked* (1993) problematises the assumption that power lies in visibility. She describes visibility as something assumed to equate power but stipulates that it is the invisible that hold authority and thus the ability to assign worth to certain bodies, an assignation typically determined by gender. Phelan candidly states: "if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture" (1993: 10). In her quest to "revalue a belief in subjectivity and identity which is not visibly representable"

(1993: 1), Phelan identifies the gap situated between the real and the representational. This gap exists because the representational can never be the real. The representational is a separate signifier that indexes the real, which exists as an intangible concept in the mind. Thus, between these two entities: a gap. A gap that allows for an excess, leading to multiple interpretations and, eventually, misinterpretations.

In the attempt of representing the real, the Self uses the Other as a point of departure. In her example, Phelan uses the female-male binary to describe the invisible-marked and visible-unmarked, recognising that the designation of in-/visibility is weighted in the markedness, value or worth of bodies:

The male is marked with value; the female is unmarked, lacking measured value and meaning...cultural reproduction takes she who is unmarked and re-marks her... while he who is marked with value is left unremarked...He is the norm and therefore unremarkable; as the Other, it is she who he marks.
(Phelan, 1993: 5).

Phelan recognises that the gap between the real and the representational woman is filled by her fetishization and Othering. Once filled, this gap becomes fixed and unchangeable; it is no longer questioned, leaving women as fetishized Others, and thus unseen for who they truly are. I question how this gap can become hollow again, an undefined non-place, and therefore unfixed. I am interested in the potential of the precariousness of this gap in opposition to the habit of fixing identities and definitions, and how

durationality illuminates and compels it.

The fixing, assumption, and reduction of identities is what French writer, poet, and philosopher, Édouard Glissant calls transparency: “to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale...to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce” (1997: 190). Opacity, however, exposes the limits of visibility and identity that prevent the acceptance of identities as unfixed and varying. I acknowledge that the terms opacity and transparency already exist in discourses like politics – where transparency implies honesty – and fine arts – where building up layers of paint produces an opaque surface. My definition of opacity, however, expresses the recognition of a body as it is, thus a body that is not characterised by another’s classification. It does not see through bodies by reducing them to personal definitions and understandings, but acknowledges the multiple unknowabilities of the other and the self; “the right to opacity would not establish autism; it would be the real foundation of Relation, in freedoms” (1997: 190). I use unknowabilities as a collective term for what Glissant describes as the parts of one’s own identity and the identity of the other that is obscure and unknown (1997: 192). The relationality within opacity concentrates on the connectedness between the other and the self, the performer and the audience, and the materials and the labour, calling for hospitality, consideration, and care.

Opacity interrogates worth by understanding another through its relational difference and thereby subverting the presupposed way identities afford worth. Glissant insists that the coexistence and weaving together of opacities is what would make for understanding across boundaries of gender – “thought of self and thought of other here become obsolete in their duality” (1997: 190). Artist and writer Malakai Greiner claims that “to fully exercise our right to opacity and protect it for others, we need to find ways of describing the indescribable,” (Greiner, 2019). I insist that the indescribable, and thus the opaque, is what exists in Phelan’s unfixed gap. In its precarity, this gap grants endless interpretations and the inability to fix representations of the real, allowing for the development of ideas. The gap is nothing and everything, and by acknowledging, accepting, and appreciating it as an unknowable non-place, opacity appears. Using durational crafting, my practice-as-research plays inside the gap, stretching it, and keeping it fluid and unfixed.

In *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), British feminist geographer Doreen Massey identifies the importance that space and place play in gender construction surrounding Britain’s 19th century Industrial Revolution. She particularly highlights the distinction between public and private; “the attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity” (1994: 179). Massey identifies the reciprocal way gender affects place/space, and place/space affects gender; each influencing and constructing

the other. From the same context, in a co-authored essay *A Woman’s Place?* (1984), Massey and British geographer and academic, Linda McDowell, dissect the ontology of the idea of women in space and place. In opposition to Phelan’s ideas, McDowell and Massey problematise invisibility because the woman “remains confined to the privatized space of the home” (McDowell et al., 1984: 203), while the man is free to occupy the public space. There is, however, a commonality between Phelan, and Massey and McDowell; women’s authority. In both cases, women are powerless to choose their visibility or invisibility because they are expected to perform fixed roles determined by their gender. Although the possibility of earning wages began to shift women’s socio-political role and increased their occupation of public space in the 19th century, “relations between the sexes continued unchanged” (McDowell et al., 1984: 206), it could be argued, even today. Elaborating on the ideas of women in the public space from the perspective of 21st century India, in *Why Loiter?* (2012), sociologists Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade articulate women’s use of gender performativity to justify their presence in public space:

...she has to overtly indicate her reason for being there... By using such performances of gender strategically and by demonstrating that they have a reason to be in public space, women create both respectability and simultaneously enhance their access to public space. This performance cannot be a one-time thing, as appropriate femininity has to be enacted again and again each time women access public space.
(Phadke et al, 2012: 41)

From an autoethnographical perspective, my personal

experiences of occupying public space are made significant by Massey's assessment of space as constructing and being constructed by gender, and Phadke's recognition of the expectation of women to justify themselves in the public space. Here, my practice-as-research offers and implements the unreclaiming of space which does not imply you and me as separate, but rather you and me as different and thereby connected, thus creating a new system which refuses any division into irreconcilable categories. Unreclaiming (elaborated on in part 2) produces a (self-) authority and freedom to realise an opaque identity rather than allowing gender to dictate an identity.

PERFORMING FEMALENESS

In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988), American feminist, scholar and author, Judith Butler, seeks to realise how gender could be understood in new and unfixed ways. Butler explains that gender "is a stylised repetition of acts [and] stylisation of the body" (1988: 270, my parenthesis). The consistent repetition of acts assigned to those identifying as female and those labelled female by others - including virtuosity, domesticity, performing craft work, and occupying the private space - have constructed an image of what it is to be female; to perform femaleness. Affirming this idea, psychotherapist, feminist, and writer, Rozsika Parker, writes in *The Subversive Stitch* (1984) that the expected behaviour defined as femininity "though obviously related to the

biological sex of the individual, is shaped by society" (1984: 2). Parker names embroidery as a characteristic of femininity and warns of the paradox inherent in identifying the worth of women's creative work as a validation that reinforces "rigid sexual categorization and justifies the separate spheres" (1984: 7). Women's subjection to mediums that echoed work performed in domestic spaces, accentuated the disparity of the hierarchies between women and men, and craft and art. Parker recognises this parallel:

...there is an important connection between the hierarchy of the arts and the sexual categories male/female... The art/craft hierarchy suggests that art made with thread and art made with paint are intrinsically unequal... But the real differences between the two are in terms of where they are made and who makes them. Embroidery, by the time of the art/craft divide, was made in the domestic sphere, usually by women, for 'love': Painting was produced predominantly, though not only, by men, in the public sphere, for money. (Parker, 1984: 5)

Parker and Butler's words affirm the historical and socio-political perspective that a woman's worth, and thus craft's worth, is inherently considered less than that of a man's, and thus art's; allotting men the power to assign worth in a way that maintains male dominance and female subservience. Thus, the way in which a woman can attain worth is already constructed, and only by successfully complying with what is expected of her may she attain that worth.

Professor Sally J. Markowitz in *The Distinction Between Art and Craft* (1994), continues these thoughts stating that "'art' has a positive evaluative connotation that 'craft' lacks. Some

critics...claim that this difference in evaluative meaning reflects our culture's elitist values: what white European men make is dignified by the label 'art', while what everyone else makes counts only as craft" (1994: 55). Markowitz unpacks the elitism between craft and art through 'aesthetic criterion' and 'semantic criterion' (1994: 56). According to Markowitz, aesthetic criterion differentiates craft objects as often possessing "what are loosely called practical or utilitarian functions" while art have "no use at all, only aesthetic use" (1994: 57). Under the semantic criterion, art acquires "the possibility and necessity of interpreting the work, of offering a theory as to what it is about, what its subject is" (1994: 60), while crafts are "mere things; and although they may be beautiful ones, they do not require an interpretation the way paintings do" (1994: 61). The distinction between semantic and aesthetic clarifies how worth is assigned to craft and art, and how that worth affords each different authority. I interrogate craft and its worth because of its entanglement with women, women's worth and the marginalised domestic space. In my research, I refer specifically to domestic craft - also often referred to as 'women's work' - as craft traditionally done in the home to serve a (usually) utilitarian purpose, and including knitting, embroidery, sewing, punch needling, and crocheting.

Encompassed in my practice-as-research, craft is a concept and medium which articulates and challenges these

hierarchical disparities and becomes that which renegotiates its own worth and the system which has defined it as unworthy. In the move towards craft activism within feminism, where craft is used despite its 'lesser worth', Parker exemplifies fibre artist, Kate Walker, to identify the benefit of embracing craft:

Kate Walker's attitude is characteristic of contemporary feminists' determination not to reject femininity but to empty the term of its negative connotation, to reclaim and refashion the category.
(Parker, 1984: 207)

Once embraced as an asset and articulated as a socio-political action, craft eventually developed into what we now know as craftivism and what I offer as crafty labour.

CRAFTED BY THEM

In her book *How to be a Craftivist* (2017), author and craftivist, Sarah Corbett, identifies that before Betsy Greer coined craftivism in 2003, craft had, for several years, already been used as a form of activism. Corbett describes craftivism as a tool "to engage deeply and critically with the issues you care about" (2017: 1). Although regarded a manifesto for "contemplative activism" (2017: back cover), I disagree with Corbett's general approach to craftivism. Her book comprises of methods, opinions, and instructions, but lacks a theoretical framework that pushes the complete possibilities of craftivism forward. Furthermore, while she does dedicate a section of her book to the Power of Process (2017: 35) and references the reflection and presence inherent in *The Slow Movement*

(a protest ignited in 1986 by Carlo Petrini), Corbett's craftivism remains focused on the object. Her assessment of the underappreciated power of process is completely undermined by her consistent return to a final output and it becoming "a pretty little thing" (Corbett, 2017: 230). While I support her insistence of craftivism as slow activism, I contend that its strength exists in more than just its attachment to an outcome. I acknowledge the power of aesthetics to draw attention, and the slowness of making which provides care to a final craft object, however, I think that craftivism possesses more depth as to what its processes, objects and bodies can do together; it is this depth that I realise with crafty labour.

In her essay *Craftivism: The Role of Feminism in Craft Activism* (2014), scholar Rachel Fry defines craftivism as craft inspired by politics, "the practice of engaged creativity, especially regarding political or social causes... but without chanting or banner waving" (2014: 94). Furthermore, Fry identifies a "lack of focus within academia on the theoretical and social implication of craftivism" (2014: 3), stating that her thesis will explore "the intersection of feminism, fibre-art practice and activism through an investigation of craftivism" (2014: abstract) to make up for this. Fry identifies the distinction between craft and art as being rooted in gender and class, and elaborates that craftivism has the power and potential to influence social and political change. Furthermore, Fry identifies the relationship between feminism and craft, wherein a possible

tension exists caused by some second-wave feminists' opinion of "crafting as a negative result of domesticity" (Fry, 2014: 22). Regardless thereof, craftivism exists because of the work of those feminists who saw reclaiming craft as a valid endeavour in stipulating women and craft as entitled to the same worth as men and art. As mentioned in response to Corbett's work, I agree with Fry's notion that the theoretical depths of craftivism have yet to be extrapolated. Fry's work forms the beginnings of this undertaking by comprehensively defining major terms like 'craftivism' and 'feminism', describing the history of fibre art, placing craft in relation to feminism, and using case studies to bring her theory into the contemporary sphere. Fry's endeavour lays the foundation for craftivist theory upon which I expand. I contribute crafty labour as a subsection of craftivism with a significance in durationality to understand and deconstruct systems of worth in the female-male and craft-art hierarchies.

PART 2: A GAP FOR DARNING

In this part, I describe my position as craftistic researcher and performer. I offer crafty labour as a new subsection to craftivism, and how it becomes possible through durationality and unreclaiming. Similarly to feminist craftivists who use and thus reclaim craft to address socio-political issues, my practice-as-research offers crafty labour as that which brings together the female crafter, her craft object, and her crafting process. Unlike crafting for the sole purpose of a final product, the coalition of these three figures produces an investigation into each's own worth and the worth of each other; form and content interrogating one another. I claim crafty labour as integral in the endeavour of reaching opacity and renegotiating worth. This part focuses on unpacking crafty labour and understanding the entangled relationship between durationality, unreclaiming, taking public space, and gentle protest.

CRAFTY LABOUR

I formulated crafty labour as a way of articulating and interrogating the problems in the system that names men and art as holding more worth than women and craft; thus intending to discover a new practice that interrogates this system. Crafty labour deviates from object-based craftivism because its focus on labour acknowledges the triad of figures

involved - the body performing that labour, the process of that labour, and the object produced from that labour - as equally significant. I have entitled this concept crafty labour because of the mischievous possibilities with which it can affect systems of worth and authority. Crafty labour is in kitchens and backrooms, movements and intentions, skin and blood, pillows and wall hangings, time and effort, process and durationality. It weaves and shapeshifts from one to the other, refusing to remain stagnant. The rationale of its naming implies rebellion in crafting, because according to Oxford Languages³ to be crafty is to be:

1. clever at achieving one's aims by indirect or deceitful methods, or
2. involves the making of decorative objects and other things by hand.

To perform crafty labour is to submit to an assigned gender role so vigorously that it undermines this role's structure. Through excessive crafting - amplified by durationality - it offers a rebellion in choosing to partake in something previously subjected onto female bodies. Moreover, in its activism, crafty labour does not seek to become art but rather redefine its own worth. A redefinition that is equally necessary in the

female-male binary and which begins in the gap between the representation and the real where opacity occurs. As defined in part 1, opacity realises the differences between identities as indefinable and integral to understanding the intersectional nature of people, objects, and processes. While not the same thing, opacity and the gap between the representational and the real are both intangible, indescribable, and precarious - a term borrowed from Cecilia Vicuña.

Cecilia Vicuña is a poet, artist, and activist born and raised in Santiago, Chile, who began her Quipu series in 1972. A quipu is a "knotted textile record-keeping device historically used in the Andean South America" (Cecilia Vicuña, 2022) to record poems, narratives, music, and data. When describing her work, Vicuña states that it "dwells in the not yet, the future potential of the unformed, where sound, weaving, and language interact to create new meanings" (Cecilia Vicuña, 2022). A quipu is a "poem in space, a way to remember...a tactile, spatial metaphor for the union of all" (Cecilia Vicuña, 2022).

Vicuña names these works "Arte Precario;" a new and non-colonised name that plays with the precariousness of non-place. I adopt Vicuña's arte precario - meaning precarious art - to expose the ambiguous nature of identities, worth and definitions, and highlight the inability to pin down descriptions. Unlike Vicuña's embrace of record keeping in



figure 1
Figure 1: Cecilia Vicuña, Skyscraper Quipu (2006).
Photo from Cecilia Vicuña website (2022).

her quipus, however, I adopt precarity through ephemerality, which only leaves behind traces of what once was, and doesn't fasten notions to one place - just like the gap, which is a non-place, void of fixity, full of multiple possibilities of being, and made possible by opacity. Opacity and the gap are anti-spectacle, anti-revelation, anti-grasping, anti-ownership, but can only be so if empty of transparencies that reduce and fix an identity to personal definitions and understandings.

Crafty labour is how my research reaches opacity within this gap. By placing the female body, process, and object in an intra-action⁴, an unknowable body is formed. Herein, worth constantly shifts between figures, disrupting previous understandings of worth's assignation. Questions that arise ask how the gender of a body may affect the worth of the craft object, whether a longer process equates a more worthy body, or whether an ephemeral object is the result of a worthless process. Due to its attachment, as worth begins to unravel so do constructions of gender, performativity, and identity definitions. With this unravel, a recognition of the unknowabilities of the self and the other begin to surface, and strict expectations of identity are questioned.

⁴ Coined by Karen Barad and unlike inter-action, intra-action "signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (2007: 33) and emphasises the idea that things can never happen or exist as individual elements, they are always influencing, and diffracting off one another.

Australian craftivist and performance artist, Casey Jenkins offers a contemporary example of feminist craftivism in their durational work *Casting Off My Womb* (2013), where they questioned what a female body 'should look like' by bringing together the biological expectations of the female body and knitting. Jenkins spent 28 days knitting from yarn that had been inserted in their vagina, thus marking one full menstrual cycle. Their work explored "intense community expectations regarding what they should do with their body, based on perceived gender" (Jenkins, undated) and laid the groundwork in performed craftivism that refuses transparencies which dictated the space one is expected to take up, and the tasks and behaviours one is expected to perform (Butler, 1988). Jenkins uses usually concealed menstruation and the assignation of knitting as a female task to gently protest how the expectation of performing femaleness denies these bodies authority and autonomy. Like Jenkins, my craftistic practice uses a subverted embrace of gender identity to question its ontology and refuse its continuation, thus exposing the unknowabilities of opacity. It is also here where the attempt to describe the indescribable begins.

Due to craft-as-a-medium's underappreciated consideration as 'less-worthy', when articulated through activism, craftivism-as-action holds considerable potential for describing indescribable opacities. Craft is traditionally known for



Figure 2. Casey Jenkin, *Casting Off My Womb* (2013).
Photo from Casey Jenkins website (2013).

including a technique, pattern, or score which one follows to achieve a specific outcome. My practice queers these scores because of the freedom craft affords when regarded as 'less worthy'. Craft's exclusion from the category of 'high-culture' in relation to art, provides it the ability to deviate - making it a suitable language with which to describe the indescribable nature of opacities. In line with Glissant's idea to remove all scales of comparison with the intention of doing away with reduction, crafty labour deviates from score, pattern, and prescription. In embracing the fluidity of opaque identities and definitions, it embraces intuition, impulse, and improvisation. While there are still parameters, there are no rules. Part 3 and 4 will illustrate clear examples in the research

where crafty labour began to find a non-linguistic language that described the unknowabilities of people, processes, and objects. These examples illustrate moments where the intention did not focus on an object-outcome but instilled a slow, laboured durationality, and sustainable presence that gave equal worth to the crafting body, the process of crafting, and the objects being crafted.

DURATIONALITY, UNRECLAIMING AND GENTLE PROTEST

Crafty labour's play within the gap and endeavour to reach opacity, lies in bringing together craftivism and performance practices through durationality. Durationality is evident in many moments throughout my crafty labour practice and embraces characteristics of both 'craftiness' and 'labour'. The craftiness of durationality is evident in embracing the subjected act of crafting and pushing it to the absurd, successively producing a labour that is defined by time and effort. The commitment to crafting for extended periods undermines the expectation of women to perform crafting as prescribed by their gender role by subverting the intention of it, manifesting a gentle protest. Sarah Corbett's "gentle protest" (Corbett, 2017: 21) is a form of protest that channels "negative emotions into productive, strategic and effective activism" (Corbett interviewed by Scouts on Medium.com, 2018) and questions the ontology of timeous and laborious craft done by women. In my practice, I adopt Corbett's term gentle protest, implementing it as mode of queering systems

and structures by combining various iterations of 'women's work' and 'women's place' in a way that ironically disrupt each other. An example of this is *Weaving the Kitchen, Again* (2021)⁵, in which I spend 40 minutes slowly weaving a kitchen into a tangled web of yarn. In my practice, gentle protest embraces duration and slowness, as well as care and labour, which shifts craft into craftivism and challenges the adage that 'time is money'. My research asked why something attains more worth when it is done quickly; why not slowly? Furthermore, I began recognising slow labour and durationality as an effective tool for working against masculine-capitalist desires for mass production which undermine the skill and precision inherent in craft, and thus dismantling conceptions of worth.

Crafty labour, as a form of activism, and in its durationality, remains gentle and unaggressive in its action, yet menacing and mischievous in its intention. In opposition to the brashness of shouting and marching seen in most activism, craftivism activates the imagination of an oppressor as to what a crafter could be thinking, plotting, or planning. Alongside gentle protest, I name the action within crafty labour: unreclaiming. Unreclaiming seeks to unbutton, unknot, undo, unravel, and untie. It seeks to un; to not. To not claim, to not reclaim. To unreclaim. Unreclaiming asserts that bodies, processes, and objects do not belong to anyone. They just are. They do

⁵ For more: <https://andreavanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreaartez/weaving-the-kitchen>

not own and are not owned. As an alternative to 'claiming' and 'reclaiming', unreclaiming does not state or assert dominance, but offers a rational and unflustered resistance, and thus denial to the system of 'who-owns-what', and 'how one is defined'. Unreclaiming is not passive, ignorant, or indifferent, it is an intentional protest. A gentle protest. The 'un' in unreclaiming, announces a negation of the 're' in reclaiming - that is to do again or go back. By placing 'un' (meaning 'not') at the beginning of the word, the taking and taking back again of claiming and reclaiming is dismantled. It is an engagement by rejection. The simplicity and stillness in unreclaiming echoes durationality and returns to the idea of the opaque and unfixed gap where multiple interpretations exist without effort or justification.

Following unreclaiming as an action found in crafty labour, is my practice of unreclaiming space. Responding to the demarcation of space based on gender, my practice unreclaimed space specifically to assert an authority over where my own female body is placed in space. Based on the literature, the female body is typically domesticated in the private space or objectified the public space. In my practice-as-research, I sought to take public space while performing domestic craft in it, thus merging the private and public. Using the unaggressive nature of unreclaiming and gentle protest, my intention in the public space has never been about ownership or dominance. Unreclaiming space refuses

to justify taking space but does not intimidate others for space. It is a practice of being present in space; moving but not being removed, taking but not taking away, being but not being in the way.



Figure 3. Marina Abramović & Ulay, *Imponderabilia* (1977-2017).
Photo from Dream Idea Machine website (2017).

Marina Abramović & Ulay's performance *Imponderabilia* (1977) is a clear example of unreclaiming space. Naked and face to face in the narrow doorway of Galleria dell'Arte Moderna in Bologna, Italy, Abramović and Ulay use their bodies to silently engage with their audience through the simple act of standing. As visitors to the gallery step up to the door, they must make a split-second decision about which body they will face on their way in, female or male. Ulay describes this decision as one that needs to be made before

they can figure out why (Ulay on Dream Idea Machine, 2017).

The crux of the work lies in its title: *Imponderabilia*, or imponderable, meaning impossible to evaluate exactly. The pair claim space in a way that is, apart from their nudity, unabrasive, and additionally claim an in-between space, a passageway. Like Abramović and Ulay, my practice unreclaims the in-between, public, non-space through unabrasive presence. Although unabrasive, Abramović and Ulay's performance is menacing. In opposition, where *Imponderabilia* begins with menace, my practice begins with gentleness. Unreclaiming space is intentional, yet gentle, and underlined by a crafty menace essential to craftivism. The menace in my practice and in unreclaiming blurs the gender expectations of public space, contributing to the opacity of the female crafter, her process, and her object.

PART 3: CRAFTISTIC RESEARCH

'When the work begins' is a complex idea, and to trace the ideas, urgencies, and concepts in my research to a single origin point is near impossible. For the benefit of this thesis, however, I will accept the unfixed beginnings of all things and state my point of departure as my earliest engagement with the materials used in the work. My craftistic research was embodied through three principal methods; field research at Wålstedts Ullspinneri (spinning mill) in Sweden, practice-as-research with a focus on heuristics including a daily durational knitting practice in Arnhem, the Netherlands, and literature reviews; all around which I implemented reflective and speculative writing. In this part, I will explain the methodological approach, methods, logistics, and choices I made in practice leading up to my final moment in performance in *Uncrafting Worth* (2022)⁶.

HERE BY MY OWN (UN)ACCORD

Situated between intersectional feminism, performance, and craftivism, my practice-as-research brings together the behind-the-scenes-ness of the crafter and the actionable affect-ness of the performance artist and activist. In doing so, I use autoethnography as a performed methodological

⁶ <https://andreavanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreaartez/uncrafting-worth>

framework, specifically through Elizabeth Ettore's text *Autoethnography as Feminist Method: Sensitising the Feminist 'I'* (2017). Ettore is a feminist scholar and sociologist engaging with gender equality, and states that autoethnography is about "placing the 'I' firmly within a cultural context and all that that implies" (2017: 2). She explains that autoethnography describes "the cultural dynamics that an individual confronts rather than personal dynamics as in traditional autobiography...knowledge comes from political understandings of one's social positioning as well as experiences of the cultural freedoms and constraints one encounters" (2017: 2). Unbeknownst to me, I have long implemented autoethnography, often describing 'using my own experiences and experiments as examples of larger concepts', making it the appropriate methodology for my research. Due to my research's placement at the intersection of feminist studies, performance practices, and craftivism, autoethnography's ability to study the 'feminist I' makes my data sensitive to the intersectional nature of individual bodies, as well as allowing me to illustrate how another may go about renegotiating their understanding of worth and identity definitions. Autoethnography allows for "interpretations of personal 'truths' and speaking about oneself to transform into narrative representations of political responsibility" (Ettore, 2017: 3). Additionally, autoethnography embraces opacity by disregarding research data as fixed entities because the data will always shift based on who performs the experiments.

Ettore offers us four ways in which she envisions autoethnography as a feminist method:

(1) autoethnography creates transitional, intermediate spaces, inhabiting the crossroads or borderlands of embodied emotions; (2) autoethnography is an active demonstration of the 'personal is political'; (3) autoethnography is feminist critical writing which is performative, that is committed to the future of women and (4) autoethnography helps to raise oppositional consciousness by exposing precarity. (Ettore, 2017: 4)

I chose autoethnography because of its characteristic to find common ground in the shared nature of the personal as a product and reflection of the political climate, and echo Kathie Sarachild when she says, "if all women share the same problem, how can it be personal?" (Sarachild cited in Ettore, 2017: 8). As in Ettore's first point, autoethnography generates spaces that mimic the idea of the precarious gap (a precarity also echoed in her last point). Where intermediate spaces are formed, fixed binaries are replaced with a crossroad of spectrums - spaces of intersectionality if you will. I bring together these discourses to create community and relationality (through craftivism), accessibility (through performance), equality (through feminist studies), while offering an example for others (through autoethnography).

A RESIDENCY IN THE BODY OF A FACTORY WORKER

In the months of February and March 2022, I performed heuristic field research to inform my research of the worth

and duration of craftisan⁷ labour by learning the craft of taking raw sheep's wool and turning it into finely spun yarn at Wålstedts Ullspinneri in Dala-Floda, Sweden. I chose a yarn spinning mill because of its intersection of physical labour and domestic craft activities like knitting, embroidery, weaving, and crocheting. The placement afforded me a technical skill-based learning and an engagement with concepts of visibility, invisibility, labour, worth, and gender roles surrounding the production of yarn, thus allowing me to study the process occurring before that of domestic crafting. Implementing a performative autoethnographic approach with a focus on the 'personal as political', it was integral that I place my female body in this space to perform this physical labour. My body - a female crafter - would become invisible and hidden within the factory space and create a final product with no other attachment to that product other than my memory of it. In this manner, I sought to better understand and thereby decentralise the notion of the female crafter's body in response to worth, as well as the worth attached to the products I made, and the processes I undertook.

Inspired by Lenka Clayton's Artist Residency in Motherhood (2012-2015)⁸, which reframed parenthood as an opportune site for creative practice, I framed and named my field

⁷ As opposed to 'artisan'.

⁸ For more: <https://www.artistresidencyinmotherhood.com>

research as a Residency in the Body of a Factory Worker (2022), spending the first month observing what could be afforded by the factory's environment, and the second month placing my craftistic research practice, questions, and concepts into these pre-established conditions. In the first month, I surrendered to the unknowingness of the process, routine, and circumstances presented to me and relished in learning what was offered to me, at the pace, method and disposition of the spinning mill and my mentors. This allowed for an entanglement between theory and practice, and for my practice-as-research to diffract through the lens of the mill instead of stagnating in the parameters of its own world. A particular experiment I implemented involved beginning each day by choosing either the theoretical concept of opacity, transparency, or worth, and finding a practical manifestation that engaged with that concept in the factory's conditions. My own understanding of the concepts within the factory conditions offered new and tangible ways of expressing and relaying these concepts - the findings of which will be shared and analysed in part 4.

Extending past the 8-hour working day, I spent many evenings and weekends learning traditional domestic crafting techniques through organised workshops and in my host family's home. These extracurricular skills included Swedish påsöm embroidery, needle felting, wet felting, hand spinning, continental-style knitting, and two-end knitting.

These crafting techniques, as well as the skill of spinning yarn followed the notion of 'passing down generational knowledge'. Some skills dated back to the 19th century, and thus carried history, heritage, legacy, and eventually expectation with them; expectation indicating a 'right way' and a 'wrong way' to execute these techniques. In the discourse of worth, products or processes had to meet a standard by performing the way they had been created to perform, thus echoing Butler's notion of performativity, which suggests that there is a 'right way' to be female, there is a 'right way' to be yarn, and a 'right way' to knit, embroider and crochet. The notion of a 'right' and 'wrong' way fed into the concept of opacity and idea of being reduced to an expected performativity rather than being accepted for unknowable differences. Although effectively fulfilling the intentions of my field research, I recognise that a different duration could have changed the outcome of my research. Although learning the rhythms of the factory quickly, I believe that the research would have produced more in-depth findings regarding the worth of labour if I had spent, for example, a year at the spinning mill. Through variations of durationality, I believe that the considerations of worth shifting between the body of the object, crafter, and her process would have taken a new shape had I become a 'master' of these crafts, a consideration for a future iteration of this research.

My field research schedule usually ran from 08:00 - 16:30,

and included learning the full process of spinning yarn, thus sorting, scouring, dyeing, picking, carding, spinning, plying, skeining, washing, drying, and pulling together a 100% sheep's wool blend to create a yarn to be sold in store. Each day was different, and some days included more admin, self-care, and research work than others. The findings extrapolated from my field research revealed how the subjection of performativity extends past the body and further onto processes and objects, and how the mechanics of expectation are formed through generational transmission. The fixed and constructed nature of these two revelations emphasise the significance of implementing crafty labour to queer the way in which bodies, processes, and objects are devised.

From my field research at Wålstedts, I began grasping the divergent approach to time and slowness, the significance in considering the body's self-care, and the gentleness in process. Thereby discovering how the parameters of the three figures in crafting are continuously considering, influencing, and impacting each other. The record of my autoethnographic field research findings was documented through photography, video, drawing, a logbook, and a manuscript of reflective and speculative writing, of which some excerpts can be seen in appendix A, B, C and D.

DURATION BEFORE DURATION

My initial final performance considerations involved interrogating notions of worth through the operations of doing and undoing, thus blurring the lines between the body, object, and process. Practically, thus, I would need something to undo, and from my first-year practice and final performance⁹, I knew that the easiest craft technique to transport and undo was knitting. Knitting, however, quickly became entangled with gender performativity and eventually manifested into a durational practice. On 19 April 2022, a month before my 'final performance' date, I began a durational knitting practice entitled Duration Before Duration (2022). The parameters were simple; knit for one hour every day in a public space. The typical structure included knitting from 11:30-12:30 in Arnhem's Audrey Hepburnplein, yet did allow for deviation. These deviations supported my practice's embrace of improvised, intuitional, and impulse-based crafting. Furthermore, Duration Before Duration engaged with "how rejection is still an engagement \neg - and rejection of that which is imposed, still recognises the power, and shapes identity and worth as a response to that structure" (Shah, 2021). The practice's intention was to engage with:

- (i) 'The right way' of knitting
- (ii) Knitting in public space
- (iii) Unreclaiming public space as a female

Prompted by Professor Nishant Shah's invitation to focus on unreclaiming occurring while still recognising the system that already exists, I imagined the system of constructed gender roles and identities (consisting of endless measures of worth) as something that could be broken down into its primary building blocks, and then used to build something new. Accordingly, I first had to acknowledge and accept the system that already was, and this is where the operations of doing and undoing manifested. The 'doing' of knitting something in the way that was passed down to me represented both the tangled state of generationally learned behaviours and the 'right way' of crafting, which would eventually be undone to build, and in this case punch needle, something new in *Uncrafting Worth* (2022).

Performing Duration Before Duration in the public space highlighted how gender construction and the construction of space influence one another, and by doing so, the interrogation into the system determining fixed gender roles had already begun. Knitting in public activated unreclaiming space and offered a perspective of a female in public that did not abide by performative expectations. Like Jenkins, Duration Before Duration sought to present the female crafter's body

⁹ First-year final performance:
<https://andreaavanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreaartez/1st-final-performance>



Figure 4. Undoing to do again in *Uncrafting Worth* (2022).
Photo: Stelios Troullakis.

in a way it hadn't been presented before. Typically placed in the private space of the home, the female crafter's object becomes the only thing that is eventually seen, her process and body remaining invisible. Meanwhile, the female body is placed in the public space as an object to be fetishized. In implementing crafty labour, I brought all three figures to the visible and public space by choice. The intention, to quote Butler, was "to examine in what ways gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts, and what possibilities exist for the cultural transformation of gender through such acts" (Butler, 1988: 272). By subverting the expected corporeal acts by crafting in public, this practice uncovered what possibilities existed in an opaque realisation of identity.

Duration Before Duration was documented in two formats every day: an image taken by a passer-by and a short reflective text (appendix E). The intention of both forms of documentation implemented the same unreclaiming of space that the practice itself embodied. From the Latin 'teach' and 'proof', the documentation of this practice became significant in the concept of taking space from the perspective of the autoethnographical as performative feminist critical writing. The images taken by passers-by, and the reflective descriptions I wrote after each day, offer proof of my unreclaiming of space, and engage with the concepts of visibility and invisibility. By asking passers-by to take my picture, I was inadvertently asking them to see

me. The documentation is evidence of the discourse that is committed to the future of women, in this case, the future of women taking and unreclaiming public space while crafting. It is these same actions that manifested themselves into Uncrafting Worth.

THE 12 HOUR PUNCH

The programme note of Uncrafting Worth (appendix F), describes a "durational and nomadic artistic research investigation regarding the worth of the female crafter's body, the craft object she produces, and her crafting process." What I consider 'my final performance', however, extends further than the assessed 45-minute showing I offered for assessment. The 12-hour period of Uncrafting Worth began at 07:00am in my room in Arnhem. Over a white tank top, a pair of jeans, and a pair Dr. Martens, I wore a dress I had sewn from a semi-transparent linen fabric. I carried the green knitted piece manifested in Duration Before Duration with me, to which to a punch needle was attached, and which, through unravelling, provided the yarn I needed. Punch needle embroidery evolved from rug hooking in the late 1800s, and although it is used to make both what we would call 'artwork' (for aesthetic purposes) and 'craftwork' (for utilitarian purposes), it remains classified as a 'craft' and holds a worth less than artforms like painting or sculpture. Punch needling uses a needle through which yarn of varying thicknesses may be threaded (appendix G) and 'punched' into cloth creating loops on one side, and

stitches on the other side (appendix H). The fabric onto which one works is usually stretched tightly in an embroidery hoop or onto a frame (appendix I) ensuring ease and precision.

In punch needling, no knots are made to fasten the yarn in place, and while the compact placement of the loops next to each other ensure they remain secure, it is not difficult to pull and undo the stitches. Because of this, punch needle stitches are characteristically precarious; if done 'the right way' the stitches will stay in place, however, if done 'incorrectly', or with some pulling, the work can easily be undone. I chose punch needling for its precarity and for the ease of which large amounts of yarn can be stitched. I deviated from the 'correct' technique, which follows a pattern and stacks stitches tightly, by working loosely, without a pattern, and with improvisation. Additionally, I did not use an embroidery hoop or frame to stretch my fabric, a decision which literally brought object, body, and process together, by advocating that my body act as the embroidery hoop. Furthermore, I imagined that the affordances of the spaces I would encounter would assist my body stretching the fabric. Hereby, my body, the space, object, and process would form a moving, making body of work. My performance travelled by foot through Arnhem, with pauses that lasted various amounts of time, where I would sit and punch needle my dress. The journey, making, movement, and pauses all followed impulse and intuition, while both modes of taking space - in walking and in crafting

- implemented gentle yet intentional unreclaiming.

Each condition, frame, and decision implemented in my performance had a theoretical underpinning. These will be unpacked and elaborated on in part 4, revealing the findings of my research.

**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**



PART 4: UNCRAFTING WORTH

In my hypothesis, I claim that when the female crafter's body, her crafting process, and craft object all become opaque bodies, the renegotiation of worth becomes possible. As made evident by the findings that follow, I stipulate that this is achieved through a new subsection of craftivism called crafty labour, out of which I have realised two sub-findings regarding durationality and unreclaiming. While what was considered and assessed as my 'final performance' on 19 May 2022, I insist that my final performance truly began with my Residency in the Body of a Factory Worker (2022) field research on 31 January 2022 at Wålstedts Ullspinneri, moving through Duration Before Duration (2022), and concluding with Uncrafting Worth (2022). These three durational moments spanned over three-and-a-half months and encompassed multiple iterations of performed crafty labour, durationality, and unreclaiming. This part will reveal the findings and discuss the instrumental role crafty labour plays in reaching opacity and making the renegotiation of worth possible, how the unreclaiming of public space is integral for the broader awareness of crafty labour, and how a possible new consideration of durationality arose from crafty labour.

CRAFTING A WAY OUT

Throughout my craftistic research, I have developed crafty labour to offer theory to the discourse of craftivism. This theory implements a gentle protest through an exaggerated embrace of crafting as attached to the female gender identity. Furthermore, it moves away from object-focused craftivism and towards placing the female body, her craft object, and her process in an equally weighted interaction with each other and the space around them. My practice's findings show that this engagement and placement brings the question of each figure's worth to the fore, making the renegotiation of worth in the female-male and craft-art hierarchies possible.

Crafty labour is manifested through a hyperbolic submission to the expectation of women to craft. By practicing excessive crafting, the subjection to perform this role is overexaggerated and eventually undermined, subverting the intention to produce a utilitarian object that maintains the hierarchy of men and art. In *Duration Before Duration*, many people who engaged with me would ask me about my knitting. I told some people that the journey of the knitting would eventually include its unravel. In one such moment, there was a clear shift in focus. The passer-by immediately became more interested in my process and I, and no longer the object I was producing. It was as if their perspective on where worth lay had expanded and they acknowledged the presence and action happening before them. In other

moments, I told those who asked that I didn't know what I was making. They seemed surprised, and almost didn't know how to respond. One passer-by tried to speculate; maybe it could be a jersey, a beanie, or a scarf. They had many ideas but did not seem bothered by the fact that they couldn't pin it down. I saw this as a moment of opacity. The passer-by was happy to accept the unknowable nature of exactly who I was, what I was doing, and what I was making. In these small moments, my female body, process, and object became untethered from expected performativity, making their worth equal and thus undistinguishable. Both the worth of the three figures and my female gender identity seemed to float opaquely in non-space, no longer held to what they 'should be' or 'how much they were worth'. They became unquantifiable; existing in the gap between the real and the representation of a female crafter crafting a craft object.

Another significant part of achieving crafty labour arose in the operations of doing and undoing. Operations which, as the findings will show, aid in preventing the fixity of worth and definitions. Although already working with these actions in my first-year final performance, my notions of doing and undoing were reinforced in my three-and-a-half-month final performance. At *Wälstedts*, I recognised the "variation of processes, but more so how they all overlap and affect each

other” (van der Kuil, 2022: 50)¹⁰; how that doing becomes another kind of doing which becomes another kind of doing. A process like spinning yarn is full of smaller processes, which goes on to become a part of the process of knitting, which too is full of smaller processes, and so on. These processes, however, all drive towards a final point, which crafty labour queers through undoing. In *Uncrafting Worth*, I unravelled the knitting done in *Duration Before Duration* to perform punch needling, and eventually undid it all again. The back and forth of doing and undoing between process, body and object in my final performance caused these three figures to become ephemeral, further causing worth to become opaque: ungraspable and unownable. Furthermore, due to worth and gender identity’s connectedness (claimed in part 2), crafty labour’s unravelling of worth, causes the same unravel of the female gender identity.

In my experimentation at Wålstedts, I found that opacity and transparency were not present exclusively in bodies, but also in processes and objects. As mentioned in part 3, the second month of *Residency in the Body of a Factory Worker* placed my practice into the pre-established conditions of the factory, where each day I chose either opacity, transparency, or worth, and sought an engagement with it. This brought me to the final moment of quality control in the yarn-making

¹⁰ See appendix D for excerpts from manuscript.

process. At Wålstedts, in the final step of producing yarn, skeins are pulled together into a hank¹¹ and the standard of the yarn is checked one last time. The yarn is inspected for inconsistencies in thickness, plying or spinning, ridded of any small pieces of hay or uncarded curls of sheep’s wool, and determined a ‘first’ or a ‘second’. The firsts meet the qualitative standard and are sold at full price, while the seconds lack this qualitative standard and are placed in a separate container at a cheaper price. The moment of quality control illustrates Glissant’s concept of transparency; instead of accepting the yarn for what it is, it is reduced to what it ‘should be’ and is thus changed or denied. Considering transparencies as intrinsic even in products made for the sole purpose of profit exposes the depth to which the subjection of definitions onto others exists, something that I argue is only so because of our learned and pre-established notions of worth. The moment of quality control is one that prioritises a final product, and in opposition to this, crafty labour insists that we simultaneously prioritise the object, body, and process involved in crafting. A prioritisation which asserts that we don’t ignore how the body feels or how long the process takes for the sake of the object, but rather that the body, object, and process are entangled and act for the sake of each other. By focusing on all three figures, we give weight, or worth, to all three.

¹¹ The yarn is loosely wound into a large ring shape and twisted on itself. See appendix J.

The findings of my three-and-a-half-month final performance confirm how, through a menacing compliance to the crafting subjected onto the female gender identity, and equal focus on the female crafter's body, object, and process, crafty labour makes the renegotiation of the fixed definitions of identity and worth possible. Significant to realising this menacing nature, however, is unreclaiming and its implementation in public space.

UNRECLAIMING SPACE

Unreclaiming seeps into multiple aspects of my research, specifically its unaggressive tone in crafting and unauthoritative taking of space. Unreclaiming is the gentle, yet intentional protest against prescriptions of performativity, an engagement by rejection. Seen in crafty labour as the doing that subverts expectation, unreclaiming is also implemented in taking public space. As indicated by the literature, space and place significantly contribute to the way in which identities are constructed and worth is assigned. In my research, the play in moving the female body, the craft object, and the crafting process between the visible and invisible, and public and private space is integral in women's agency to placing themselves.

My investigation into the notions of visibility and invisibility at Wålstedts expanded my understanding of the disconnected relations between body, object, and process, within the

crafting process. Here, questions regarding how the worth of one figure affected the worth of another arose and brought me to the notion of crafty labour which appreciates these three figures equally. Furthermore, my time in the private space of the spinning mill at Wålstedts made me realise the significance of performing in the public space to realise crafty labour. When mentioning 'performing', however, I mean performing as doing; doing craft, doing the work, not performing performativities. This 'not', echoed in the 'un' of unreclaiming, encourages the idea of not justifying the taking of or crafting in public space. At the same time, it denies the ownership over body, process, and object to perform in a specific manner, thus realising an opaque body that is anti-spectacle. In both *Duration Before Duration* and *Uncrafting Worth*, by crafting in public, I subverted preconceived notions of how a woman 'should' behave in public to explore new formulations of how public space may be occupied. Unable to exist only in theory or in a vacuum, however, I realised how significant the exposure of unreclaiming was.

The audience plays an important role in the manifestation of crafty labour and confirmation of my hypothesis, proving the necessary intersection between the discourses of craftivism and performance practices. Only through a witnessing audience, could the renegotiations of what worth means occur and an understanding of how we construct (and eventually deconstruct) identities manifest. Through *Uncrafting Worth's*



Figure 6. An audience member takes a closer look in *Uncrafting Worth* (2022).
Photo: Zuza Sosnowska

move through various public spaces, unreclaiming of space, and becoming a body unseparated from object and process, the audience was encouraged to reconsider how they defined my body, my process, and the various iterations of what would usually be considered my 'final object'. While I believe that Uncrafting Worth was successful in posing these ideas, I recognise that there is space in the future of my research to explore how I could engage with an audience's reconsideration of notions of worth initiated by the work. Furthermore, while covering more ground in both time and space, the durationality and nomadic nature of Uncrafting Worth may have limited my research. In my programme note, I gave context to the durationality, nomadic nature, and materials of Uncrafting Worth. If however, a passer-by did not receive this information, the weight of doing and undoing would be lost, and while posing an interesting question into the notion of worth for me as a researcher, it lacks a complete fulfilment in the intention of disseminating the research to the public. Apart from reconsidering logistical assistance, a future iteration of the research could consider how to share this information from within the work itself.

A NEW DURATIONALITY

In my findings and in the theoretical and practical formulation of crafty labour, I arrived at an unexpected discovery that I could be dealing with an alternate durationality. In a reciprocal bind, crafty labour is what realised this possibility, but it is also

by this alternate durationality which crafty labour is achieved. Through their interaction, I speculate a durationality that sits specifically at the intersection of craftivism and performance practices.

Claiming that my final performance began at Wålstedts immediately challenges considerations of durationality in performance, suggesting that the beginning of the crafting process is already the beginning of the durational performance. I negate the idea of the durational performance as an end-product, or producing an end-product, by taking slowness and moving it past any kind of object. These ideas came from my findings at Wålstedts, where the notion of waiting enforced a perspective of durationality that was not focussed on an assumed, strenuous labour or intensive manufacturing of objects. Here, the blur of boundaries between the body of the crafter, crafting process, and craft object began.

My intention to engage in this field research of learning the craft of spinning yarn, aligned with crafty labour's notion of submitting to a prescribed gender role with subverted intention. In the first week at Wålstedts, however, my expectations and performative ideas of a what a 'typical' and 'productive' factory, its processes, objects, and workers looked like were challenged. Where I had anticipated long hours of work performed by tired bodies that mass produced

products, I received a slow, sustainable, and thoughtful process and consideration for the bodies that worked and objects they produced. Allowing my craftistic practice to diffract through the conditions of the spinning mill revealed a new comprehension of the labour and patience that goes into craft and highlighted the notion of slowness and waiting. Waiting for something to dry, waiting for a tank to heat up, waiting for newly spun yarn to rest. While constantly influencing each other, the slowness in waiting is something that offers time and space for the crafter's body, object, and process to do what it needs individually and as a triadic group. The entanglement of slowness and waiting began to formulate the idea of a different kind of durationality. In my reflective manuscript from Wålstedts, I spoke extensively about time and came to this conclusion:

*That is why when we take time, have patience, embrace slowness, be gentle, take care, and persist, we put our value in something other than commodity. We put worth in the making of, in our making, thus the maker and their journeyed process.
(van der Kuil, 2022: 26)*

Deviating from a durationality that involves endurance, continuous doing, and a focus on a final output, the durationality in crafty labour deviates away from the expectation to become anything or perform a certain way. A notion which becomes especially true when durationality remains while shapeshifting through various iterations. I am reminded of Butler who writes that "the body is not

merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body" (Butler, 1988: 272). The three figures in my research materialised possibilities outside of the "concrete and historically mediated expression" (Butler, 1988: 272) of durationality through crafty labour. Crafty labour materialised sheep's wool into yarn, re-materialised yarn into knitting, re-materialised (or undid) knitting back into yarn, re-materialised yarn into punch needling, and re-materialised punch-needling back into yarn again. Throughout, there were various iterations of my female body, the green, woollen yarn, and the process of crafting, in shape, stance, emotion, worth, placement, visibility, opacity, and location. The durationality in crafty labour does not focus on one action or process, one body, or one object; it focuses on all possible materialisations of each. It exists in the undefinable, unknowability of opacity. Eventually, this alternate durationality has the potential to never reach an end point, constantly in flux. What is interesting to me here is its continuousness instigating ephemerality, which I claim promises even more potential in this durationality.

In *Uncrafting Worth*, I did not manage to unravel the entire piece of knitting - its metaphor implying that there is still work to be done in the undoing of structured gender identities and considerations of worth and highlighting the necessity of the continuous shiftiness inherent in opacity. Hereby, I

speculate a durationality that is not organised by minutes or the completion of an object or task, but perhaps by the tiredness of a body or improvisation of a process. While I cannot yet realise the full potential and implications of how this durationality could be understood, I do recognise its link to crafty labour, and offer these inquiries as spaces for continuation at the intersection of feminist studies, craftivism, and performance practices.

THE UNCRAFTING TO COME

Informed and framed by autoethnography, it is clear to me that my urgency to interrogate worth through craft is a deeply personal one. My research has and continues to provide me with an ever-developing understanding of the unjustness existing in the placement and consideration of marginalised bodies. While feminism has already taken many steps forward, I believe that there is still much to achieve, and I insist that one of the ways to initiate changes is through craft, craftivism, and crafty labour. Simultaneously, I am excited by the possibilities inherent in the young field of craftivism and how it can be used to undo injustices and benefit marginalised groups across the board.

REFERENCES

- Abraham, A. (2018) 'The art of gentle protest', Scouts. Available at: <https://medium.com/@ukscouts/the-art-of-gentle-protest-527d6b8bcf8a> (Accessed: 30 May 2022).
- Abramović, M. and Ulay (1977) *Imponderabilia* [Performance Art]. Available at: <http://www.dreamideamachine.com/?p=59272>.
- Adichie, C.N. (2014) *We Should All Be Feminists*. New York: Vintage Original.
- Ahmed, S. (2006) *Queer Phenomenology: Orientation, Objects, Others*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Barad, K. (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- de Beauvoir, S. (1953) *The Second Sex*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- van den Berg, M. (2016) 'The discursive uses of Jane Jacobs for the genderfying city: Understanding the productions of space for post-Fordist gender notions', Sage Publication [Preprint].
- Butler, J. (1988) 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), pp. 519-531. doi:10.2307/3207893.
- Callen, A. (1914) 'Women Artists of Arts and Crafts Movement', *Woman's Art Inc*, 1(2).
- Clayton, L. (2012) *Artist Residency in Motherhood*. Available at: <https://www.artistresidencyinmotherhood.com>.
- Corbett, S. (2017) *How to be a Craftivist*. Unbound Publishing.
- Crenshaw, K. (2017) *Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later*. Available at: <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later> (Accessed: 18 April 2021).
- Ettorre, E. (2017) *Autoethnography as Feminist Method: Sensitising the Feminist 'I'*. New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Fry, R. (2014) *Craftivism: The Role of Feminism in Craft Activism*. Saint Mary's University.
- Glissant, É. (1997) *Poetics of Relation: For Opacity*. Translated by B. Wing. Michigan, USA: The University of Michigan Press.
- Greiner, M. (2019) *Voids of Understanding: Opacity, Black Life, and Abstraction in 'What Remains'*, Walker Art Centre. Available at: <https://walkerart.org/magazine/opacity-black-life-abstraction-will-rawls-claudia-rankine-what-remains> (Accessed: 25 February 2022).
- Haraway, D. (1991) *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist- Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. New York: Routledge.
- Hasseldine, R. (2020) *Uncovering the root cause of mother-daughter conflict - Counseling Today, Counseling Today*. Available at: <https://ct.counseling.org/2020/01/uncovering-the-root-cause-of-mother-daughter-conflict/#> (Accessed: 30 May 2022).
- Hochschild, A. (1989) *The Second Shift*. United States: Viking Penguin Inc.
- Jenkins, C. (2013) *Casting Off My Womb* [Performance art and craftivism]. Available at: <http://casey-jenkins.com/works/casting-off-my-womb/>.
- Jenkins, C. (undated) *Casey Jenkins - Casey Jenkins artist website*, Casey Jenkins. Available at: <https://casey-jenkins.com/> (Accessed: 19 June 2022).
- van der Kuil, A. (2022) *Wâlstedts reflective & speculative manuscript*. unpublished.
- Marina Abramović & Ulay-*A Living Door of the Museum* (2017) *Dream Idea Machine*. Available at: <http://www.dreamideamachine.com/?p=59272> (Accessed: 30 May 2022).
- Markowitz, S.J. (1994) 'The Distinction between Art and Craft', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 28(1), pp. 55-70. doi:10.2307/3333159.
- Mcdowell, L. et al. (1984) *A Woman's Place?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 'Opacité / Opacity (Édouard Glissant) - Keywords in Transcultural English Studies' (no date). Available at: <http://www.transcultural-english-studies.de/opacite-opacity-edouard-glissant/> (Accessed: 21 January 2022).
- 'Opacities: An Introduction + Biometrics and Opacity: A Conversation' (no date) Zach Blas. Available at: <https://zachblas.info/writings/opacities-introduction-biometrics-opacity-conversation/> (Accessed: 21 January 2022).
- Packer, C., E. (2010) 'The Evolution of Craft in Contemporary Feminist Art', Scripps College, Scripps Senior Theses.(Paper 23).
- Parker, R. (1984) *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. London: The Women's Press Ltd.
- Phadke, S., Khan, S. and Ranade, S. (2012) *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets*. Digital Edition. India: Penguin Random House.
- Phelan, P. (1993) *Unmarked: the politics of performance*. London; New York: Routledge.
- The Artists Are Present - Marina and Ulay | DailyArt Magazine | Art History* (no date). Available at: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/marina-and-ulya-artistic-partnership/> (Accessed: 30 May 2022).
- Vicuña, C. (1972) *Quipus* [Performance, sculpture, craft]. Available at: <http://www.ceciliavicuna.com/quipus>.
- Vicuña, C. (2022) *Cecilia Vicuña, Cecilia Vicuña*. Available at: <http://www.ceciliavicuna.com> (Accessed: 19 June 2022).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Two documentation images from field research at Wålstedts, in Sweden.
See all photo and video documentation here:
<https://andreavanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreatartez/documentation>



APPENDIX B

Two documentation drawings from field research at Wålstedts, in Sweden.
See all drawing documentation here:
<https://andreavanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreatartez/drawingaday>



APPENDIX C

Two excerpts from logbook from field research at Wålstedts, in Sweden. See full logbook here: https://3ad10544-5cdd-4064-a99d-45e1670c22b2.filesusr.com/ugd/3eec3d_91864b784edc484b8fa811ad9c42fb9c.pdf

LOGBOOK – ERASMUS+ TRAINEESHIP

Master Performance Practices
ArtEZ University of the Arts

Student Information	
Name:	Andrea van der Kuil
Student number:	1544836
Study Year:	2nd Programme approval given by: Erik Pastors, Director Masters Programmes a.i.
Receiving Organisation / Artist	
Name of organization or Artist:	Wålstedts Ullspinneri
Address (or addresses) where traineeship mentoring activities take place:	Hagen 15, Dala-floda, 785 44 Sweden
Name of mentor:	Sonia, Roger and James Bush
Period of traineeship:	From: 31 January 2022 To: 31 March 2022

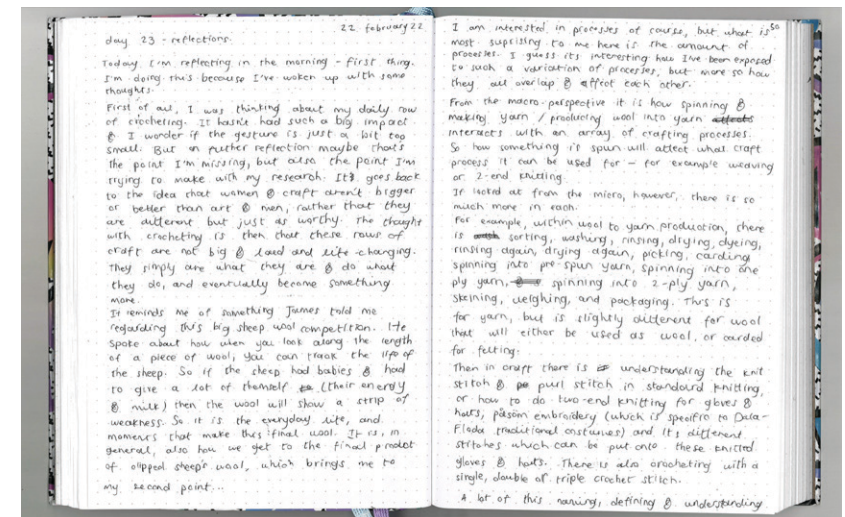
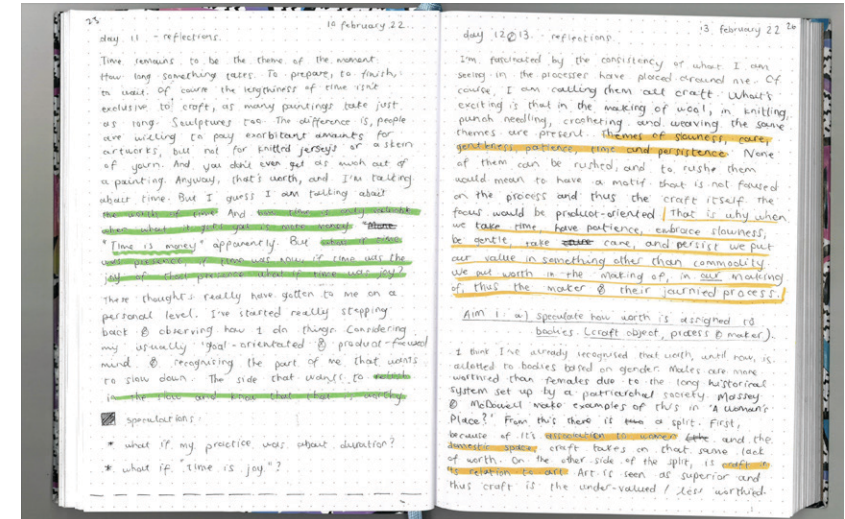
Activity Registration (logbook)		
Date	Hours worked	Activities
31 Jan	11	Mentoring in the drying process and equipment, as well as learning the beginnings of skeining. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.
01 Feb	11	Learning and being mentored in the picking and single block carding processes, producing wool for wet felting workshop on the weekend. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.
02 Feb	11	Observing and being mentored in the dyeing process – dyeing more wool for the wet felting workshop. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation. Academic reading.
03 Feb	11	Continuing with picking and carding wools for workshop. Sewing and hanging up curtains for the workshop space. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation. Academic reading.
04 Feb	11	Setting up the workshop space and final preparations for the workshop. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation. Academic reading.
05 Feb	8	Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation. Reflection on the week, academic reading and academic writing.

LOGBOOK – ERASMUS+ TRAINEESHIP

Date	Hours worked	Activities	SIGNATURE MENTOR
06 Feb	3	Academic reading and daily drawing documentation.	
WEEK NUMBER: 1		TOTAL HOURS WORKED: 66	<i>Roger H. Bush</i>
07 Feb	11	Mentored by Sonia, learnt about dyeing recipes including dye quantities, heat of water, and additives that make the dye take to the wool. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.	
08 Feb	10	Online tutorial with external mentor, academic reading and writing, reflective writing, daily drawing and speculations.	
09 Feb	12	Learning how to skein yarn, quality control of two-end yarn. Conversation with James about time and process. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation. Academic reading.	
10 Feb	12	Learnt how to hand spin carded wool and mentored by Roger how to spin pre-spun yarn into one-ply yarn on the spinning machine. Began crocheting practice/experiment. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.	
11 Feb	13	Sorted wool and created the Wålstedts blend, washed wool. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.	
12 Feb	6	Engaging with aims and objectives of research. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.	
13 Feb	2	Reflective writing, speculation and drawing documentation.	
WEEK NUMBER: 2		TOTAL HOURS WORKED: 66	<i>Roger H. Bush</i>
14 Feb	10	Learnt how to hand-card wool and practiced hand spinning into a yarn. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.	
15 Feb	11	Washing and dyeing wool and yarn, hanging up skeins for drying. Taught traditional Dala-floda påsöm embroidery by Anna-Karin. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.	
16 Feb	10	Helped with packing and sending wool championship winners. Began weaving practice. Daily reflection, speculations and drawing documentation.	

APPENDIX D

Two excerpts from reflective and speculative manuscript from field research at Wålstedts, in Sweden (pages 25, 26, 49 and 50). See full manuscript here: <https://andrea Vanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreaartez/walstedtsullspinn>



APPENDIX E

Day 10's documentation image and text from Duration Before Duration (2022).
See full documentation here:
<https://andreamvanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreaartez/duration-before-duration>



day 10

Taking space. Holding space. Taking because it's necessary. Holding because my yarn is finished. Today there was a cacophony of cleaning. A plethora of packing. Men moved screens around on forklifts. People drank coffee to cure their 'katers'. Ryan flitted past me on his bike. And one man at the Focus café looked at me curiously as I sat on the bench with unknittable knitting in hand. Only the man with the two dogs spoke to me today. I asked a mother and daughter to take this picture. The daughter shot me in portrait and landscape, while her mom facilitated.

APPENDIX F

The programme note for Uncrafting Worth.

Uncrafting Worth

Andrea van der Kuil

Welcome to this space.

I am a body.

I am a body amongst bodies.

I am a crafting body before you.

I am a body crafting with you,

And together, I hope that we may reach opacity.

Uncrafting Worth is a durational and nomadic artistic research investigation regarding the worth of the female crafter's body, the craft object she produces, and her crafting process. There has rarely been a time where one's gender, sex, race, ability, sexuality, and class has not affected one's placement in the world.

Women, those identifying as female, and those labelled female by others, have long been subjected to the invisible domestic space to perform women's work, or paraded in the visible space as sexualised objects; placements deeply interwoven with a prescribed worth.

Edouard Glissant's term 'opacity' examines worth by understanding another through difference. Opacity does not see through bodies by reducing them to personal definitions and understandings, but accepts the multiple unknowabilities of the other and the self.

Today, yesterday and tomorrow, I invite you to see the opaque body before you, to see your own opaque body, and to see the opacity of all bodies around you.

A few more notes for the programme note:

The crafting before you has been taking shape since 07:00 this morning, moving through various public spaces.

The knitted piece before you materialised through a month-long, hour-a-day knitting practice that began on 19 April 2022.

The dark green yarn before you took its form in a spinning mill in Sweden in February 2022.

APPENDIX G

A threaded punch-needle.



APPENDIX H

Either side of a punch-needle work; one side with tall loops, the other side with flat stitches.



APPENDIX I

Fabric stretched in an embroidery hoop.



APPENDIX J

The difference between a ball, skein, and hank of yarn.



APPENDIX K

A concise list of links to the documentation of my final performance:

A Residency in the Body of a Factory Worker (2022)

<https://andreavanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreaartez/walstedtsullspinneri>

Duration Before Duration (2022)

<https://andreavanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreaartez/duration-before-duration>

Uncrafting Worth (2022)

<https://andreavanderkuil.wixsite.com/andreaartez/uncrafting-worth>

CHOREO
PERF
THEATRE PRACT
DEDISCIPLINED BO
DIGITAL PERF
CH
PERFORMANCE A
TH
DEDIS
CH
PERFORMA
THEATRE
DEDISCIPLINED BO
DIGITAL PERFORMANC
CHOREOG

PERFORMANCEPRACTICES.NL
FB / INSTA: HOMEOPPERFORMANCEPRACTICES

