

# “Not a straight line by a spiral”: charting continuity and change in textiles informed by feminism

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## ABSTRACT

In response to Rozsika Parker's (2010:xi-xxii) preoccupation with charting continuity and change in both the gendered meanings of craft and the work of women artists employing craft techniques and materials, in this article, I reflect on my experience of curating a retrospective exhibition of crochet and mixed media works by Su Richardson, a participant in the collaborative mail art (1975-1977) and installation project *Feministo* (various venues, including the ICA, 1977). Superficially, Richardson's domestic iconography has grown in mainstream popularity, as has the use of craft, yet the political, aesthetic and historical specificity of her *oeuvre* should not be misrecognised: these self-reflectively home-made objects stir the unconscious of domesticity, femininity and their mutual implication from decidedly feminist perspectives. Following Parker (2010:xxi), I argue that threads of influence and dialogue in textiles informed by feminism are often oblique, broken and unexpectedly tangled. If Richardson's retrospective aimed to forge links not only between past and contemporary feminisms but also with current DIY aesthetics and countercultural practices, contemporary artists working with textiles mine a wealth of cultural and artistic references, suggesting complex and transgressive webs of kinship. Bronwyn Platten's quilted homage to Mike Kelley, *For more and more love hours (R.I.P. Mike Kelley 1954-2012)* (1973-2013), is an example of a work in which such cultural and artistic references are brought to the fore. In it, Platten questions Faith Wilding's dismissal of his work as an abject reification of 'bad boy masculinity' (Wilding 2000:94), to propose feminist and gender-critical alliances across genders and generations.

**Keywords:** Rozsika Parker; Susan Richardson; Bronwyn Platten; Mike Kelley; feminist craft; mourning

In 2010, a revised edition of one of the most influential books on craft, femininity and feminism was published. To be precise, Rozsika Parker wrote an updated introduction to her otherwise unchanged text. In it, she simultaneously acknowledged the different global landscape that had emerged since the first publication of *The subversive stitch* nearly a quarter of a century earlier, and the double status of her book as both a current critical apparatus through which the complex relationship between women and craft can be analysed, and an important historical document of the radical re-evaluation of “women’s craft” in the context of second-wave feminism. In its explicit concern with continuities and change, the new introduction is symptomatic of the recognition that feminist thought in general, let alone art historiography, is developing in self-reflectively retrospective directions, while also contributing to such retrospection. To reflect on history, memory, continuities, breaks and returns, while also considering how and why one does so, has gradually emerged as a central, timely and pressing feminist issue. In *Why stories matter: the political grammar of feminist theory*, Clare Hemmings (2011) formalises a meta-theoretical interrogation of the discursive and political effects of feminist narratives of progress, loss and return, which has, nevertheless, long been in the making. As Hemmings (2011:5) demonstrates, charting continuity and change is ‘affectively saturated’ and fraught with complex and not necessarily foreseeable side effects. In the worst case scenario, dwelling on continuity and change may devolve into a policing activity of drawing boundaries along definitions that are meant to be inherently flexible and open to transformation, if feminism is to remain, as Griselda Pollock (1996:5) has argued that it should, not a doxa, a commonly held belief or opinion, but a critical practice. Yet, conversely, an unconsidered celebration of feminist continuities on the basis of superficial commonalities can also result in false optimism and leave the political and aesthetic contexts of craftwork from the 1970s unexamined and vulnerable to presentist misreadings.

In her new introduction, Parker (2010:xviii) surveys developments in the ways in which textiles evoke women and vice versa, and notes a growing visibility and acceptance of craft in art practice. Yet she also expresses some ambivalence. The assertion that neither feminism nor embroidery evolve in a linear fashion is embedded in the evocation of a varied and not altogether promising landscape.

I wish I could end with an unqualified celebration of the recent history of embroidery. Change, however, is slow and uneven. [...] while similar issues are re-visited [...] both feminism and embroidery continue to evolve, although tracing a pattern of progress is less suggestive of a straight line than a spiral (Parker 2010:xxi).

The ambivalence and ambiguity inherent in domestic crafts for women, resulting from the simultaneous acknowledgement of their role in inculcating female subservience and providing an outlet for creativity and woman-to-woman sociality, is revisited, amplified and enriched in Parker's new introduction. This time, a celebration of the increasing visibility of apparently gender-critical uses of craft in art practice is tempered by a sober assessment of the gender politics of these new practices.

There are real differences between work employing embroidery to comment on the condition of women in the seventies and work produced in later decades influenced by Second Wave Feminism (Parker 2010:xxi).

Parker cites Tracey Emin as an example of an artist who strategically employs craft techniques in her work, being aware of their history and gendered connotations, but who ultimately has more significant differences from, than similarities with, her feminist "foremothers". Not only has Emin benefited from her celebrity status, for which individualism is a precondition, contrary to a feminist commitment to collectivity, but more importantly, Emin 'employs embroidery as the prime medium of personal life not to proclaim that the personal is the *political*, but that the personal is the *universal*' (Parker 2010:xv). Although such and other disparities between Emin's practice and work produced in the context of the Women's Liberation Movement cannot be doubted, I do not altogether agree with the deduction that her work is therefore not feminist. Perhaps there is inherent feminist value in Emin's intensely – sometimes abjectly – embodied approach, marked by gender, sexuality, class and race, combined with her 'breath-taking confidence in her ability to speak as a woman' (Robinson 2006:2), born or made, particularly from the perspective of the recent reclamation of 'women' as an apt analytical category (Moi 2001; Gunnarsson 2011). In her discussion of another successful woman artist who never actively embraced feminism, namely Louise Bourgeois, Parker finds the means to articulate once more the specificity of craft creativity. Bourgeois's (cited in Parker 2010:xix) own words, at once highly personal and evocative of the material and ideological workings of craft work, contrast the needle to the pin, the former imbued with the power to 'repair damage', to forge and maintain connections, the latter attributed with aggression and the capacity to puncture. Nevertheless, both separation and aggression are at play in Bourgeois's work, mirroring 'the dual face of embroidery' as 'both a weapon of resistance for women and [...] a source of constraint' (Parker 2010:xix). In her effort to unravel the threads of continuity and pick out the broken ones, Parker is led back to the knotted indeterminacies of craft's history, its entanglement with femininity and its fraught yet powerful pull for female artists. Perhaps Parker's insistence that

discontinuities also need to be acknowledged, even as they tend to mesh into endlessly unfolding intertext(ile)s, should be understood in reference to a highly influential theorisation of craft and its materials as indexically saturated in affect, fundamentally 'relational' and 'connective' (Pajaczkowska 2010:146). It is that fabric that Parker seeks to punctuate, by lacing it once more, more densely, with the ambiguity of craft's multiple cultural meanings and uses, and ambivalence towards craft as gendering apparatus. After all, the complex relationship between women and craft is often cast in ways that not only foreground an intimate connectivity, but elevate such connectivity to a politically purposeful strategy and, even, an assumed artistic and historiographical practice.

[I]n feminist practice, it is possible to construct a sense of solidarity across these gaps of time and space through the materialisation of memory. [...] From a feminist perspective, craft is a telescoping, transhistorical optic, a commemoration of a commemoration of a commemoration – a series I am conscious of extending here. At every stage of this historical procession, craft serves as a means to articulate the present: remembering marks a departure from precedent as well as continuity. In fashioning their stitches and their texts, feminists have been mindful of their past, but certainly do not advocate a return to it (Adamson 2013:224).

## Craft and the domestic unconscious

The tension between continuities and discontinuities and the troubling dilemma of which should be foregrounded, since clearly both are always at play, presented itself to me in a very practical and pressing way when I curated the crochet and mixed media exhibition *Burnt Breakfast and Other Works* by *Su Richardson* (Constance Howard Gallery and MAKE, Goldsmiths, University of London, 6 July-9 September 2012). Richardson was one of the key participants in landmark collaborative feminist projects, most notably the *Women's Postal Art Event* a.k.a. *Feministo* (1975-1977), alongside Kate Walker, Monica Ross, Suzy Varty, Philippa Goodall and others (Kokoli 2004; Parker & Pollock 1987:206-214). Crucially, not all of Richardson's work that was included in *Burnt Breakfast and Other Works* was made for such projects, and not all of it was produced in the wider context of second-wave feminist art and activism. The question for me was how to exhibit artwork from the feminist 1970s in crochet and textiles, work which consciously and subversively uses such highly gendered techniques, in the context of the present, when craft has made an impactful and multi-faceted comeback. The return of craft has not only, nor even primarily, taken place within contemporary art practice, nor in the highly politicised context of

craftivist and/or contemporary feminist activism. Rather, in contemporary austerity Britain, craft has emerged as a signifier and, to a lesser degree, a money-saving pastime, whose connotations and ideals hark back to wartime rationing and the thrifty sensibility of 'make do and mend' (Make Do and Mend 2014). While I could not reconcile the clearly radical politics of feminist craft with some of its contemporary uses, which are symptomatic of political and cultural conservatism, a return to an implicitly white British identity before the end of Empire and Commonwealth immigration, and an economically conservative response to austerity, I also realised that the increasing visibility of craft, regardless of where it originated, would be advantageous to the exhibition of Richardson's craftwork.

Austerity craft is nostalgic, concerned about environmental pollution and opposed to certain kinds of consumerism, specifically of cheap and disposable commodities favoured by differently classed subjects than its own, while simultaneously supporting market values, particularly entrepreneurialism and small business (Jeffreys 2011). The contrast between austerity craft and the craft strategically deployed by countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, including the Women's Liberation Movement, is not only profound but often becomes discursively explicit: in the words of Kirstie Allsopp promoting one of her shows for Channel 4, 'forget free love, this is about loving free' (Channel 4 2013-).

Simultaneously acknowledging, exploiting and subverting the connotations of feminine craft skills such as crocheting and embroidery, Richardson's self-reflectively homemade objects stir the unconscious of domesticity, femininity and their mutual implication. In her crocheted food, two different kinds of womanly and domestic "labour of love", cooking and craft, clash and cancel each other out. *Burnt Breakfast* (1976) (Figures 1 & 2) is emblematic of the ambivalence that characterises feminist attitudes towards such traditional and traditionally womanly techniques (Kokoli 2012). In the words of Agnes and Kate Walker (1987:27), 'although we respect the skills passed on to us, they stink of poverty [...] your work was used, trodden on, or worn right out, like you yourself'. Many of Richardson's works produced between 1974 and 1977 were made for *Feministo* (Figures 3 & 4) arguably a British equivalent to the famous large-scale collaborative installation and performance space *Womanhouse* (1972) produced under the auspices of the CalArts Feminist Art Programme. Others were made for *Fenix* (1977-1978), a collaborative project following on from *Feministo* undertaken by Richardson, Kate Walker, Monica Ross and Suzy Varty (Parker & Pollock 1987:215-219). Most exhibitions of *Feministo*, which was originally developed out of a correspondence between friends using small handmade objects and was borne out of consciousness raising, took the form of uncanny domestic installations, with the collaborative exhibition *Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife* at the ICA, London (1977)



FIGURE **N° 1**



Su Richardson, *Burnt Breakfast*, 1976. Crocheted wool, found objects. Dimensions variable.

Courtesy of the artist and the Goldsmiths Textile Collection, Photograph by David Ramkalawon. Installation shot from the exhibition *Burnt Breakfast and Other Works* by Su Richardson, curated by Alexandra Kokoli (Constance Howard Gallery, Goldsmiths University, 2012).



FIGURE **N° 2**



Su Richardson, *Burnt Breakfast*, with *Packed Lunch: Babyface; Salad; Butterfly; Fly and Tongue*, and *Nappy Sandwiches*, 1976. Crocheted wool, found objects. Installation shot.

Courtesy of the artist and the Goldsmiths Textile Collection. Photograph by David Ramkalawon.





FIGURE N° 3



Su Richardson, *Virgin/Mother/Whore*, 1983. Crocheted wool, fabric, found objects. Installation shot.  
 Courtesy of the artist and the Goldsmiths Textile Collection. Photograph by David Ramkalawon.



FIGURE N° 4



Su Richardson, (on the armchair, clockwise) *Face Cushion*, 1976; *Feministo Crochet*, 1976; *Wonderwoman Cushion*, 1976; (on the coffee table, clockwise) *Inside/Outside Breast*, 1975; *Momento Mori*, 1975; *Consolation Prize*, 1975. Installation shot.

Courtesy of the artist and the Goldsmiths Textile Collection. Photograph by David Ramkalawon.



FIGURE N° 5



Kate Jenkins, *Le Crochet Frying Pan*, 2009. Crocheted wool mounted on A1 board, 59.5cm x 84cm.

Courtesy of the artist, <http://www.cardigan.ltd.uk/kate-jenkins.php>

being the most developed. Works were arranged in different rooms according to their themes (thus much of Richardson's work was placed in the kitchen), but this treacherous home also contained a memory room and a rape room. *Feministo* installations were therefore subversive and transgressive on at least two counts: by unsettling the homeliness of home; and, as Parker (2010:209) notes, by disrupting the status of the gallery as a non-domestic special space whose identity is maintained by what is kept outside it.

Straddling two economic crises and, incidentally, the celebrations of Queen Elizabeth II's Silver and Diamond Jubilees, and also in acknowledgement of the great significance of *Feministo* and *Fenix* in feminist art history, I was mindful to signpost the context in which Richardson made her work, especially as she repeatedly stressed how much she was personally motivated by it. Yet I was also aware of the benefits of emphasising the timeliness of this show in 2012, in the midst of a craft renaissance. After all, the flagship work after which the show was named is not the only crocheted full English breakfast in existence.





FIGURE N° 6



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Kate Jenkins, *Cupcakes on Cake Stand*, 2009. Crocheted wool, found objects. Dimensions variable.

Courtesy of the artist, <http://www.cardigan.ltd.uk/kate-jenkins.php>

Kate Jenkins, maker of *Le Crochet Frying Pan* (2009) (Figure 5), is a Brighton-based artist and former knitting consultant for numerous international designers. ‘Famous for her unique crocheted food, Kate takes a nostalgic look at everyday items, re-invented in wool and yarn with wry, comic touches’ (Jenkins 2014). Visitors to her website are invited to ‘the home of knitted art goodness’ (Jenkins 2014), a place that is indeed filled with humour and wit but appears to lack the critical and subversive edge of the *Feministo* installations, as well as Richardson’s individual pieces. As I discovered by following women’s craftivist collectives on social media, even yarn bombing initiatives are often free from any reflexive analysis of the media of knitting

and crocheting, viewing them instead in purely celebratory terms and casting their activities as unequivocally positive injections of colour and joy into the harsh (and implicitly masculine) urban environment. The ambivalence so painstakingly drawn out by Parker gets lost within a discourse that celebrates women's craft as inherently revolutionary. This is part of a broader issue: Canadian artists and cultural workers Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch (2014) coined the term 'craftwashing' to refer to instances where craft (or a crafted aesthetic) is being used to market lifestyles and/or fashionable goods in a way that obscures the sticky ethical, environmental, and economic effects of their production.

Against this backdrop, I eventually decided to adopt a curatorial approach that underlined the origins of Richardson's works in art associated with the Women's Liberation Movement and *Feministo* in particular by recreating a rudimentary domestic environment that overturned the comforting associations of domesticity.<sup>1</sup> I hoped to be not a nostalgic imitator but a student of *Feministo*, whose lessons, as I was finding out, were still far from being heeded, or else had fallen out of favour. In the end, my strategy did not exactly pay off. A funding application for essential costs and modest fees was unsuccessful despite making a convincing case for the work's historical significance, as the evaluators confirmed. In fact, this strength turned out to be perceived as a weakness: according to the feedback, the work was not "contemporary" enough, despite eventually including one piece from as recently as 2011, made by Richardson as a present for a friend. Instead of postponing the show, we went ahead foregoing fees, doing things as cheaply as possible and relying on the unpaid labour of many capable and generous volunteers. Ironically, it seemed fitting to re-enact the labour of love that *Feministo* performed, even while it sought to debunk it. *Feministo* truly encapsulated the characteristically eccentric status of craft, in terms of both economic and art world systems of circulation and exchange. It had started as a craft correspondence and gift exchange running on minimal resources apart from the time and commitment of its participants and eventually fizzled out as many works were lost in transit or stolen by exhibition visitors.

## Difficult honourings: looping Mike Kelley into craft and feminism

1. My decision process may seem calculated and deliberate only in retrospect; at the time, available resources and chance rather than any coherent strategy probably influenced me.

A decade after the ending of *Feministo*, in a substantially different context and with much greater visibility and success, Mike Kelley's work with and on craft, such as, famously, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever be Repaid* (1987), also dwells on labour of love and the unconventional economy of the gift. However, the pronounced

ambivalence of second-wave feminist work and Parker's approach to embroidery and textiles here seems to have been resolved towards the negative pole of abjection. Kelley (2004:52-53) often spoke of the uncanny aura of craft, which he saw not only as superseding economic exchange but as partaking in the even more troubling economy of the unwanted and undervalued gift, typically from an older female loved one, with its associations of guilt, obligation and low culture. Interestingly, the wretchedness of such gifts for Kelley is apprehended from the point of view of their recipient and not their giver. It has been noted that, as well as using and referencing quilting and feminine crafts and evoking an emotional economy of obligation (Rondeau 1999:66), this particular work hung vertically as it is also alludes to abstract expressionism, which for a while remained synonymous with a macho mythology of artistic genius and vigour. Whether its masculinist connotations trump its feminist links or vice versa, or whether, more convincingly to me at least, by 'plac[ing] the soft toy motif centre-stage as all-over painting, [Kelley] satiris[ed] the masculine, Greenbergian sublimity of abstract expressionism' (Haynes 2013:4) is up for debate.

According to Faith Wilding's (2000) influential evaluation of Kelley's work and other object art that employs textiles in a similar way, economy in this context is not only challenged through gifting but also through stealing. A lack of acknowledgement of their feminist predecessors by Kelley and others like him, in some though not all cases stemming from ignorance, is not miles away from plagiarism, argues Wilding (2000), as did Mira Schor (1994:251) before her.

Many artists are "returning" to feminist work of the 1970s without really knowing they are doing so – because so much of this early work entered the art mainstream, and was picked up by influential artists such as Mike Kelley, without acknowledgement of its sources. [...] It must be noted that these artists are usually not working in the context of a strong socio-political movement such as the feminist movement of the 1970s. [...] Kelley's reclaimed crocheted afghans, chewed toys, and cloth dolls, scattered about in the Whitney Museum, somehow do more to reify his bad boy masculinity, than to address or change the codes of gender (Wilding 2000:93).

When, in an interview with Lynn Hershman (2006:2-3), Kelley is probed about his attitude to feminist art and relationship with feminism, he reminisces about his feminist teachers at CalArts but also brings up different gender-critical influences from other sub- and countercultural sources, including glam rock, early punk and freak subculture. Upon closer inspection, Kelley's treatment of gender and sexuality, particularly in the context of the 1980s, 'reflects the complexity of this moment, not only acknowledging its paradoxical gender politics but embracing such paradox as the centerpiece of an alternative approach when others seemed to have stalled' (Levine 2010:76). With regard



FIGURE N° 7



Bronwyn Platten, *For more and more love hours (R.I.P. Mike Kelley 1954-2012)*, 1973-2013. Hand-stitched Marimeko quilt, found soft toys, oats, liquorice, treacle. Dimensions variable.

Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Sam Roberts.

*Also shown is:*

Bronwyn Platten, *body to brain and back again*, 2013. Digital video of live performance and 96 printed cards.

Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Sam Roberts.

to his appropriation of feminist concerns and practices, Kelley evokes ‘cross-dressing work’, following ‘a Dionysian trajectory in art’ and ponders whether his involvement with this typically ‘feminine mess’ resulted into a form of ‘sissy art’ (Hershman 2006:5). The video work and element of the installation *Kandor-Con 2000, Superman Recites Selections from the Bell Jar and Other Works by Sylvia Plath* (1999) exemplifies Kelley’s strategically queering cross-contamination of Superman’s hypermasculinity with Plath’s profoundly gendered alienation, brought together by their shared iconic status. In his lecture “Cross-gender/cross-genre”, Kelley (2003:103), elaborates on his queer aesthetic, while also underlining the role of ‘displays of femininity’ across different countercultures ‘as signs of resistance’. All this is not to suggest that feminist responses to Kelley are simplistic but, rather, that they can be revisited and reconsidered within a fluid and constantly changing feminist critical landscape. What interests me here, in reference to charting continuities and discontinuities, is how Kelley’s (mis)appropriations have been looped back into the history of feminist craft, not only in writing but also, crucially, through feminist art practice.





FIGURE **Nº 8**



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Bronwyn Platten, *For more and more love hours (R.I.P. Mike Kelley 1954-2012)*, 1973-2013, detail.

Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Alison Main.



FIGURE **Nº 9**



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Bronwyn Platten, *For more and more love hours (R.I.P. Mike Kelley 1954-2012)*, 1973-2013, detail.

Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Alison Main.





FIGURE **Nº 10**



Bronwyn Platten, *The Charismatic Personality (for Mike Kelley)*, 1993. Ceramic tiles over wooden construction, vanity chair, stuffed toys, rolled oats, strawberry jam.

Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Michal Klivanek.

Upon hearing about Mike Kelley's suicide in 2012, multi-media UK-based Australian artist and researcher Bronwyn Platten was moved to commemorate both the artist and her long-standing and ever-changing relationship with his work, from early idolisation to a questioning inspired by feminism and finally sadness at his passing. The installation *For more and more love hours (R.I.P. Mike Kelley 1954-2012)* (1973-2013) (Figures 7, 8 & 9) was shown alongside an earlier work on Mike Kelley in the exhibition *Mouths and Meaning*, held at the Australian Experimental Art Foundation in 2013. Referencing Kelley's 3-dimensional quilt, Platten makes an assemblage of old stuffed toys sourced in thrift shops, thereby tracing the uncomfortable trajectory of the no longer wanted sentimental gift in which Kelley was so interested. Rather than being soiled, these stuffed animals are carefully cleaned and covered in oats, whole or in parts, alluding to another labour of love, cooking and feeding, as Richardson's work does. Platten's animals spell out Kelley's name and dates of birth and death in liquorice as they sit on a quilt made out of Marimeko fabric at a much earlier time, when the artist was in her teens and not yet a professional artist. The almost dizzyingly colourful offcuts pieced together make for an interesting background to the toys, acting almost as camouflage and defying the melancholy tone expected



FIGURE **Nº 10**



Bronwyn Platten, *The Charismatic Personality (for Mike Kelley)*, 1993. Ceramic tiles over wooden construction, vanity chair, stuffed toys, rolled oats, strawberry jam, detail.

Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Alan Cruikshank.

of a mournful commemoration. The words fringing the quilt are from another work by Platten, a performance, video and installation titled *body to brain and back again* (2013), consisting of selected words found between “body” and “brain” in a children’s dictionary, and which may have approximated the artist’s own vocabulary at the age when she made the quilt. Platten (2013, emphasis added) describes these works as ‘my good bye to him and a kind of *difficult* honouring’.

Prior to this work and by way of reflecting on the feminist critique of Kelley’s appropriation of the low value women’s domestic and craft labour, Platten made *The Charismatic Personality* (1993) (Figures 10 & 11). At that time, ‘whilst my work sought to be admiring of Kelley’s practice it also doubled as a tribute to the domestic and the low that he appropriated and in some way also seemed to denigrate’ (Platten 2013). In her response to Kelley’s practice and artistic uses of craft more generally, Platten strove to underline the multiple pleasures of feminine domestic practices, through the act of coating the teddy bears with oats (as she did in *For more and more love hours*) and in the inclusion of a strawberry “jam smile”. According to Platten (2013), ‘[t]he coating of the teddy bears in oats was to doubly domesticate them – to

intensify or underline their place in the order of things – as domestic, interior, beloved, comforting’. I however, see considerably more ambiguity stemming from ambivalence in these works and the interpretation of their different elements. The uncanny domesticity of Richardson, *Feministo*, and, in a different way, Kelley’s too, suggests to me a smear of blood or excrement as well as a jam smile, almost at the same time, flickering between the two, as in a lenticular print. The oats coating may “doubly domesticate” the reclaimed toys by recuperating and making literal their nurturing function, but it also resembles dried vomit, a reminder that behind the sheen of sentimentality, these toys are also transitional objects, to be used, abused and eventually overcome and abandoned.

Kelley’s approach to his transitional materials has itself been transitional: in his artistic career, stuffed toys and craft techniques alike have been cast by him as stages to entertain, work through and come out of. The *Arenas* series (1990)<sup>2</sup> ‘puncture the mythic preciousness for which stuffed animals and handmade baby blankets are renown’ (Gilsdorf 2010), while *Craft Morphology Flow Chart* (1991)<sup>3</sup> virtually exorcises their wretched sentimentality by imposing on them alien and inappropriate classification systems. In *Craft Morphology*, the collected second-hand stuffed animals are no longer salvaged but are made to look well and truly finished, dead, paradoxically hollowed out and re-stuffed, as if embalmed for mysterious scientific purposes. In their metaphorical emptiness, they remind me of Richardson’s disturbing crocheted skins and stitched soft sculptures, made to be worn but also perhaps to be shed, in a different kind of exorcising ritual. Richardson’s *Underwear Skin Sale* (1979), for example, made around the time of the feminist demonstrations against the Miss World contest, gives material form to the disturbing idea of ‘wearing your skin like a costume — heart on your sleeve, sleeve with a price tag. Wig on, arms in sleeves, the skin costume trails behind you’ (Richardson cited in Kokoli 2012:7). Despite seeming perhaps facetious, this connection may well deserve further exploration for at least two reasons: because the poetic and artistic literalisation of metaphors has been a pervasive second-wave feminist strategy (Kokoli 2011); and also because it follows a spiral trajectory that pries progress away from chronological sequence, and in which a second-wave feminist craft work may be seen to converse with and even anticipate the gender-critical practice of a famous male artist over a decade later.

2. 2 For images of the *Arenas* series, see [O]. Available: <http://dailyserving.com/2010/06/mike-kelley-arenas/>

3. 3 For images of the *Craft Morphology Flowchart*, see [O]. Available: <http://mcchicago.org/exhibitions/collection/browse/title/2/59>

Even as he announces the abandonment of craft and transitional objects in his art practice by submitting them to purification through classification with the intention of foregrounding their materiality over and above their ‘psychological baggage’, Kelley (2004:54) foresees defeat: ‘Of course, by attempting to repress them, these emotional qualities become even more pervasive’. Returning to the beginning of this article, and Rozsika Parker’s preoccupation with continuities and discontinuities, it appears that

one possible characteristic of craft informed by feminism across different cultural and historical contexts might be the tacit yet resonant understanding that the formal purity sought by Kelley can never be achieved, nor is it desirable. Kelley's attempted shedding of craft's baggage is turned on its head and mined for its repressed undercurrents in Platten's unashamedly sentimental and openly ambivalent tribute as it loops Kelley back into the story of craft and feminism, not as an outsider, let alone a plagiarist, but as a critical discussant.

In mourning the death of a fellow artist, who is simultaneously admired and a little begrudged his gender and geographic privilege, Platten allows her ambivalence to punctuate and stitch together, in delicate reconciliation, mixed feelings, divergent thoughts and disparate artistic practices into a material collage. In this manner, Platten lays the ground for a rapprochement between feminist approaches to craft, in both theory and practice, and Kelley's craft legacy. Craft, as both process and product, mourning, and making (up) for the loss of love and intimacy have always been intricately connected, and their affective relationship has not gone unnoticed in feminist craft history and theory. Writing on embroidered memorial samplers, Parker (2010:138) combines a semiotic analysis of text and image with a quasi-phenomenological and implicitly psychoanalytic focus on the activity of sewing in the aftermath of the death of a loved one: 'the time taken to complete a memorial sampler or picture allowed a period of mourning, and possible acceptance of separation and loss'. She specifically evokes a sampler sewn by a ten-year old daughter upon the death of her mother, in which she vows to continue to be good and obedient, not least 'by maintaining the code of behaviour laid down in sampler making' (Parker 2010:138). It is revealing and relevant that Freud's definition of decathexis, namely the 'incremental divestment of libido from memories of the lost object' (Hagman 2001), emphasises the dimension of labour: the work of mourning is hard work, just like craft. 'The task is carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time the existence of the lost object is continued in the mind' (Freud 1917:244-245). '[M]ourning is a kind of *work*, the work of memory' (Laplanche 1999:241), the template for which is, tellingly, Penelope's weaving on the loom while waiting for the return of her husband Odysseus, feared dead (Freud 1975:248-253).

Visual conversations between artworks, practices and ideas continue to unfold, not in lines but in spirals, or perhaps in patterns that proliferate rhizomatically. It is thanks to the survival of craft informed by feminism that practices which do not bear the hallmark of any historical Women's Liberation Movement can be included in the conversation, or rather that their actual participation can now be confidently recognised, without the fear of watering down, contaminating, let alone betraying feminist memories or feminist futures.

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