

Materializing a Mad Aesthetic Through the Making of Politicized Fibre Art

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ABSTRACT

The field of Disability Studies not only acknowledges the value of creative production, it also turns to it as a way to craft knowledge. However, this project asserts that it is not enough for the field to support and promote Deaf, mad, and disabled artists by documenting and analyzing our practices through qualitative and/or quantitative research. Calling into question the focus that Disability Studies puts on access and inclusion, this studio-based project interrupts this discourse with the methodological approach of research-creation and the theoretical frameworks of Mad Studies and Critical Craft Praxis.

My creative work intervenes in the text, positioning the knowledge created as knowledge *in making* based in the provocation of change and movement. Instead of looking inward at my own experiences, as mediated through my identity, I *make* to look outward. I turn to craft, specifically fibre-based practices like quilting and nature-based dyeing, as a way to make sense of the world around me. Craft is what makes me *feel* things. It forces me to see big pictures, look outside of myself, get raw, question my long-held beliefs, be uncomfortable, desire to do better in this world. Craft can be that space where we come together, commune with each other, hold one another, see the beauty and the ugly together, and struggle through the really tough shit.

Key themes that have emerged from this performative research include the significance of commodifying identity as a process of depoliticizing creative work, the transformative possibilities of disrupting simplified notions of community, the role of the audience in the creative process, the role of nature in the vulnerability of craft as object and anti-colonial praxis, and the ability for quilts to be sculptural and layered with meaning. In my final reflection I feel as though I have ended with more questions than concluding statements. And yet with more

questions than answers, this dissertation has accomplished what it set out to do: use Mad Studies and Critical Craft Praxis as a way to create ruptures, open up space for exploration, engage with ideas, and create new lines of inquiry.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all of the artist-activists whose work transcends this limiting world in ways that create ruptures that necessitate we make change together. It is in these spaces that we can really fuck shit up and create new futurities where the flourishing of all not only matters, but also is a necessary condition of living.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project at its heart is born out of a space of community organizing. The thoughts and ideas that are shared in these pages could not exist without the decades of art practice that happen within, alongside, and beyond the communities of Deaf, disability, and mad art. This requires that I thank those who are tirelessly dedicated to the politics of the movements with an acknowledgement of how the academic archiving of these art communities results in gross erasures.

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I am lucky enough to have a lot of fierce women in my life; one of my favourites is my maternal grandma. From day one she declared me to be her person, and we have been ride or die

ever since. To my grandma, Allison Cunningham, a fiery woman who has given life to all of my most cherished parts of my personality. All things that patriarchy has tried to fight out of me, my grandma has taught me to value and nurture. From her I have learned to honour my anger, to speak up for what I believe in, and to be unapologetically me. Yet perhaps most importantly, she has taught me that at the end of it all you must always demand a good glass of scotch.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	viii
List of Figures	x
Chapter 1 – The Crafting of a Dissertation	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Deaf, Disability, and Mad Art	5
1.2.1 Disability Arts and Culture, The Academy, and Making a Dissertation	7
1.3 Limitations of the Essentialized Mad Artist	10
1.4 Nothing About Us Without Us ... Is not Enough	14
1.5 Thinking Through Praxis, Thinking Through Craft	19
1.6 Overview of Chapters	21
Chapter 2 – Creating Methods of Resistance	26
2.1 Introduction	26
2.2 Space as a Methodological Site	28
2.3 Making Meaning with Research-Creation	32
2.3.1 Making Meaning with Critical Craft Theory	36
2.4 Critical Craft Praxis as Research Methodology	40
2.4.1 Crafting Research Like Crazy	41
2.5 How to Make a (Traditional North American) Quilt	44
2.5.1 The Quilt Top	45
2.5.2 The Process of Quilting	46
2.6 Designing the Research	47
2.6.1 The Function and Form of the Exegesis	49
2.7 Research Questions	56
2.7.1 Thesis Question	57
2.7.2 Secondary Questions	57
2.8 Conclusion – Crafting Survivor Research	58
Chapter 3 – Auditing an Aesthetic Framework	60
3.1 Introduction	60
3.2 Judith Scott	60
3.3 Richard Boulet	63
3.4 Josh Faught	64
3.5 Al Loving	66
3.6 Line Bruntse	67
3.7 LJ Roberts	69
3.8 Chawne Kimber	71
3.9 Sanford Biggers	73
3.10 Ginger Brooks Takahashi	74

3.11 Yoshiko Jinzenji	75
3.12 Kyoung Ae Cho	76
3.13 Conclusion – Fibre Art as Critical Praxis	77
Chapter 4 – Making (Space) for Theoretical Exploration	79
4.1 Introduction	79
4.2 Exploration as (Making) Theory	80
4.2.1 A Semester at Haliburton School of the Arts	81
4.2.2 Attending to the Land as Anti-Colonial Process	86
4.3 Making (Space for) Mad Studies	89
4.3.1 The Propagation of the Mad Artist	91
4.4 Making (Another) Shift – Creative Work as Transgressive Practice	98
4.4.1 Social Justice-Oriented (Art)Work	99
4.4.2 Project One: <i>Comrade</i> (And the Feminist Art Conference Residency)	101
4.5 Conclusion – Making Sense of That Which is Imperceptible	102
Chapter 5 – Reifying Mental Illness Through Aesthetic Values	103
5.1 Introduction	103
5.2 Aesthetic Regimes	105
5.3 Understanding Aesthetic Markers of the Mentally Ill	109
5.3.1 No Heads, and While You’re at it, Throw Out the Pill Bottles	111
5.4 Project Two: <i>Pissing on Pity</i>	115
5.4.1 How to Get Through an Artist Talk About Pissing the Bed as an Adult	116
5.5 The Curative and Healing Imperative	119
5.6 Conclusion – The Implications of the Aesthetic Markers of the Mentally Ill	124
Chapter 6: Re-Crafting Mad Aesthetics	127
6.1 Introduction	127
6.2 Questioning the Role of Community in Community Arts	129
6.3 Dis/Identifying as Political Aesthetic	137
6.3.1 Project Three: Reflecting on Process While Making (Within) <i>Movements</i>	141
6.4 Disrupting Inclusionism as an Insider/Outsider by Crafting New Worlds	144
6.5 Crafting a Mad Aesthetic is Political... ...But You Have to Make It That Way	148
References	156
Appendices	166
Appendix A	166
Appendix B	167

List of Figures

Figure 1: <i>Lost Ships</i>	1
Figure 2: Studio space	28
Figure 3: Studio shelves	31
Figure 4: Free motion machine embroidery	44
Figure 5: Nature-based dyeing	86
Figure 6: <i>Comrade</i>	101
Figure 7: <i>Pissing on Pity</i>	115
Figure 8: A study in movements	141
Figure 9: Fragile movements	142

Chapter 1 – The Crafting of a Dissertation



Figure 1: *Lost Ships*. Photo: Cat O'Neil (Image description: A quilt top with multicoloured "lost ships" blocks is laid across a printing table. Sitting on the quilt top is an iron, some half-square triangle blocks, yellow fabric, and a box of quilt blocks in progress.)

1.1 Introduction

Quilts have been an intimate part of my daily life from some of my earliest memories. Every quilt found in my childhood home had a story. All of the quilts were made by my only paternal aunt, Donna Ward (née Reid). Each quilt had layers of meaning – who it had been made for, the occasion for the gift, the process of selecting each piece of fabric, the reasons that determined the specific patchwork pattern, and their various uses (decorative wall hanging, bed cover, baby blanket, lap warmer, etc.). It was the summer I turned fourteen that I first learned how to make my own quilt. That same summer my dad died of congestive heart failure. The end of my dad's life and my introduction to the skills of quilt making are intricately intertwined in a way that makes it difficult for me to think of one without the other.

My dad had been chronically ill throughout my childhood, an experience that seemed anything but remarkable. He spent the last couple of weeks of his life in the hospital. The details

of this time are blurry. Hospital visits and the complications of chronic illness were all things I experienced as relatively normal growing up. At the time of his death I was a young teenager and completely unprepared for what was to come. My journey through grief has had a profound impact on the way I hold, tell, and long for stories.

Shortly after my dad died I was sent to stay with my aunt, my dad's only sibling. During my childhood I had always known my aunt as the family quilt maker. In the way that I understood it, my aunt took up quilting as her life's work. She spent many of her adult years perfecting the various skills involved, such as patchwork, appliqué, machine quilting, and hand quilting. She was part of her local guilds, taught classes at the community college, and used the objects that she made to mark momentous life events, as gifts to celebrate the people she loves, and to barter for her everyday needs. My aunt Donna makes quilts for a variety of purposes: they hang on walls, they drape over couches, we wrap ourselves up in them for comfort, and they keep us all warm at night as we sleep in our beds. Her quilts are the holders of stories, the materialization of nostalgia, and the active process of grieving.

During the summer of my father's death, my aunt and I spent a couple of weeks together in which she instructed me on the importance of an accurate quarter-inch seam. Once I had a handle on my seams, she taught me how to keep the triangular points on flying geese blocks from disappearing into the seam allowance. As my skills improved, she helped me manoeuvre the ever-dreaded curved seams. For my aunt Donna, no introductory quilting course would be complete until she had instilled in me a love of the slowness of stitching by hand.

The summer of 1999, I learned that a quilt is so much more than the finished product. As a quilt maker I have come to understand quilting to be a process of learning and engaging with knowledge. It is a method of exploring experiences. It is a dedicated effort involving skill

development and aesthetic, practical, and conceptual components. It is a practice that is social, bringing people together and serving as a tool to build community. It is also an activity that happens in solitude, providing space for quiet reflection through its rhythmic and repetitive tasks. It is a method that engages both destruction and construction in a dialectical process. The final product has the capacity to hold memories, create stories, and form identities. Through use, misuse, and overuse, the quilt breaks down. Through love and neglect, the quilt, across many seasons, degrades. As it breaks down over time – through broken stitches, ripped seams that reveal the inner layers of batting, and fibres worn so threadbare that holes become plentiful – the quilt develops an abundance of stories and meaning.

Quilts and other fibre arts have often been theorized simultaneously as a valuable yet dismissed and overlooked gendered practice. As a response to the typically taken-for-granted value of women's work in relation to textiles, makers and theorists have repositioned and narrated textile practices as political, subversive acts of resistance. As a young cisgender woman, I have found this framing to be meaningful in how I have emotionally connected with quilt making. Positioning the craft alongside a history of feminist practices has allowed me to connect my studio-based work to the social world around me, seeing it connected to structures and systems of power, politics, and complicated socio-historical contexts. It is for this reason that as I quilt my way through this dissertation, I draw on the skills and techniques of quilt making as a studio craft practice in an effort to explore the uses of Critical Craft Praxis within the context of Mad and Disability Studies.

And yet the more I centralize quilting as a method of knowledge creation and an extension of my community engagement, the more critical I am with these oft-romanticized views of how and why we value making as inherently subversive and political. Instead of turning away from

these productive ways of narrating quilting, I explore how we might refocus our stories and why. I take seriously the critiques that the stories we most commonly centre are Eurocentric ones that whitewash the histories of textile work and more often than not uphold systems of capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism in our promotion of a white, middle-class, heteronormative, feminist politic. Instead I work toward decentring the colonial narrative – one that centres normative ways of being – and work from a position that values the radical histories of people of colour and queer, trans, mad, Black, and Indigenous folks and perspectives. This is an ongoing journey in the work that I do as a white settler. As frameworks such as anti-oppression, intersectionality, and anti-racism gain traction and attention in academic and activist spaces, these approaches are appropriated and employed in ways that maintain hegemonic power structures. Attending to these tensions is both complex and necessary. Keeping in mind the parameters of this project, I argue that it is helpful to explore these issues through unpacking the limitations of working from an identity-based framework and the centring of efforts of inclusion and diversity in cultural production.

Working through the fields of Mad Studies, Disability Studies, Visual Arts and Studio Craft Praxis, this project upholds creative and artistic practices as a valid and necessary method of theoretical development and knowledge production. In its theorization of aesthetic values in relation to identity-based and politically engaged studio craft, this project will work both in the spaces of overlap and with the exciting theoretical possibilities found in the liminal spaces between these fields. Drawing on the theoretical musings developed through a/r/tography,¹ these

¹ A/r/tography refers to arts-based research methodologies that attend to the relational, creative, aesthetic, educational, performative, and in-between spaces that allow for new meaning to be created through ruptures and slippages found when working in the creation of new disciplinary fields (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Irwin, 2013)

spaces found in between, where the boundaries of the fields of practice abut one another, exist as rich areas of often-unexplored ideas. By looking to these in-between places, this project repurposes (Ware & Sweeney, 2014) the various aspects of the aforementioned fields of study and practice while exploring aesthetic values in ways not previously considered.

This chapter contextualizes the general issues pertaining to the overall dissertation project through historically situating the main areas of research: Deaf, disability, and mad art (in the academy and beyond), critical perspectives on mad experiences, the issue of inclusionism, and the role of Critical Craft Praxis. This situating sets the stage for my further work and argumentation. Through the creative process, studio outputs, and theoretical writing, I engage with traditional quilt-making techniques in a way that challenges and disrupts the flattening of identity-based craftwork. Creating ruptures in how we take up, take in, and respond to cultural production related to mad experiences requires a consideration of the lasting impacts of the aesthetic of absence, an unpacking of the politics of inclusion, and calling into question the individualizing of experiences of crisis and distress. This project unsettles the views and values that are ascribed to and translated through the creative work made by and about mad people by centring frameworks of social justice and highlighting interdependence as deliberate acts of resistance.

1.2 Deaf, Disability, and Mad Art

The movements of Disability Arts and Culture help us to understand how art has been taken up, practiced, and theorized within the context of Deaf, mad and disabled experiences. Disability Arts and Culture arose around the late twentieth century and has been identified as a radical political shift within the Disability Rights Movements (Barnes, 2003). Initial developments in Disability Arts and Culture focused on highlighting issues of equity and

inclusion (Barnes, 2003). Often contrasted with art therapy, Disability Art has historically been taken up as communicative, expressive, exploratory, educative, participatory, and transformative (words that are not dissimilar to those being used in the literature on arts-based research) (Barnes & Mercer, 2001; Barnes 2003; Barrett & Bolt, 2014; Gabel, 2005). Moving beyond the individual maker, Disability Arts and Culture embraces the creation of culture, the expression of the realities of disability, and the taking up of experiences of discrimination. Through the process and products of Disability Arts and Culture, both group consciousness and solidarity are cultivated (Johnston, 2009). The works produced within and alongside these movements are just as much about those who are disabled as those who are not.

Through recent coverage in popular media, changes in funding and policy initiatives, recognition in the formal art world, and renewed interest in academia, artwork made by Deaf, disabled and mad folks is experiencing unparalleled interest and support in Canada. Similarly, artists of various backgrounds in regard to arts training, formal education, arts practices, and intersecting positionalities are engaging with and centralizing their Deaf, mad, and disabled identities within their creative practices as key determinants of aesthetic choices, conceptual content, and as a tool to engage in a politics of social justice organizing. Through the concept of “cripping the arts,” Eliza Chandler (Reid, 2016) emphasizes the exciting possibilities positioning the value of both the identity and the experience of the Deaf, mad, and disabled artist as informing aesthetic techniques. Shifting the identity of the Deaf, mad, and disabled artist has us moving away from framing disability as a limitation or mistake in our art practices and instead seeing it as a place of possibilities. Centring non-normative ways of being here allows for valuing the impact of difference as it materializes desirable aesthetic markers. And so, to crip the arts can then be understood as a technical skill to develop, a conceptual framework to explore,

and a disruption of the aesthetic values that have historically been highlighted through the artistic historical canon. To cripple the arts, according to Chandler (and appreciating the abundant history of Deaf, disability, and mad art in Canada) is to move away from seeking inclusion in dominant art practices, which at best maintain these dominant structures. Instead, the valuing of Deaf, disability, and mad art contends that through cultural production, our communities have the ability to change, unsettle, transform, and transgress the larger art world (Reid, 2016). This, however, is not new. Deaf, disabled, and mad artists have built their practices not despite their differences but through distinctively developed technical skills that embrace, enhance, and engage their experiences of being the Other.

Yet, within this surge of interest in the various Disability Arts and Culture movements, our contemporary efforts remain severed from the histories of the cultural workers who came before us. In Canada, Deaf, disabled, and mad artists have received training and engaged in artistic programming and cultural production, specific to our movements, for over forty-five years. Instead of building on our histories and growing our movements, many artists, organizations, and policy makers – both mainstream and within our own communities – continue to approach the work as if it is novel. Sadly, this limits our ability to build on the work and accomplishments of those who have preceded us. The dialogues that are maintained seem to revolve around the same issues – namely, access and inclusion – and the sector continues to promote work that is disconnected from the political roots of our movements.

1.2.1 Disability Arts and Culture, the Academy, and Making a Dissertation

On the one hand, Deaf, disability, and mad art is a multifaceted political movement rooted in the community. However, it has also received institutional support from the academy, largely through the field of Disability Studies. This relationship is important to address, as it

accounts for much of the institutional memory and documentation of our practices. What is documented, how this is done, and how accessible it is to the general public matters. Further, since the academy exists in a position of power relative to the community, it is also relevant to question who is storying this history and for what purpose. There is no lack of documentation of Disability Arts and Culture in Disability Studies literature. In 2004, Abbas, Church, Frazee, and Panitch defined Disability Arts and Culture as a countercultural political movement led by disabled artists. At the time of publication, Abbas et al. referred to Disability Arts and Culture in Canada as both a young and emerging movement as well as being at a point of developing somewhat of a critical mass. In 2007, Gorman linked the histories of marginalization faced by disabled artists with the political roots of the Disability Arts and Culture movement. In 2013, Kelly connected the decline in funding for advocacy- and activist-based efforts to a rise in the use of creative and artistic practices as tools for social change. Three years later, Decottignies (2016) explained how Deaf, disability, and mad arts often engages with messages of social justice that are unconventional and bold.

In 2012 and again in 2015, Derby discussed the importance of working across the disciplines of Disability Studies and Art Education. Acknowledging the historical crossover between the two fields, Derby simultaneously saw them as connected through research and pedagogy yet only having minimal and seemingly superficial contributions to one another. Derby (2012) points out the abundance of research that focuses on a critical analysis of disability in the arts and the lack of work on the forefront of actual artistic production. Later, Derby (2015) highlights a collaborative project he worked on to introduce Disability Studies into undergraduate Art Education curricula in order to convey concepts of difference, ableism, and inclusion; the project culminated in a public exhibition of creative work. In sharing this work,

Derby (2012, 2015) encourages the use of multiple modes of expression to explore, attend to, and communicate new ideas and concepts.

And yet Derby seems to be stuck in a theoretical position regarding Disability Studies that is quickly becoming outdated in the field and practice of Deaf, disability, and mad art. Well before Derby wrote of the need to work in a transdisciplinary fashion, Koppers (2000) questioned the ways in which art excellence is determined and upheld within Art Education. Then, in 2004, Koppers opens up the conversation to discuss the subversive acts in which disabled artists knowingly engage in response to the dominant ways of pathologizing and storying difference and disability in our society. Siebers (2010) also theorizes aesthetics through the lens of disability, urging for the highlighting as opposed to the inclusion of disability and difference. Siebers views disability aesthetics, similar to the aforementioned crippling of the arts, as unsettling and repurposing aesthetic values and markers as well as an explicit effort to nurture the development of disability as a value in and of itself.

And so, Deaf, disability, and mad art is positioned as a necessary component to both Disability Studies and creative fields such as fine arts and studio craft. It is heralded as a unique form of expression and exploration that is able to engage with ideas that are better served through creative mediums. It is positioned as central in the action and politics of the disability rights movement and as a way to form and disseminate collectivized expressions. It shifts and redefines our aesthetic values, and it emphasizes skills and techniques unique to Deaf, disabled, and mad artists. Yet much of the scholarship we read on Deaf, disability, and mad art relies on commodifying the artistic process, product, and artefact in order to analyze it as a source of secondary data. This has contributed to documenting of the development and relevance of the various aspects of the Disability Arts and Culture movement(s). However, as Gorman (2007,

2011) and Decottignies (2016) point out, even when institutions and organizations work toward supporting and promoting Disability Arts and Culture, the very movement itself is commonly depoliticized, which ultimately compromises its central aims and goals.

I argue that it is not enough for the field of Critical Disability Studies to support and promote Deaf, mad, and disabled artists by documenting and analyzing our practices through the skill set of qualitative and/or quantitative research. Nor is it enough for arts programs to work toward the inclusion of Deaf, disabled, and mad people into established programming, training, institutions, and workshops. Undoubtedly these efforts of support, promotion, inclusion, and accessibility play a role in the development and sustainability of Disability Arts and Culture. However, without making institutional and policy-level changes that allow for the Deaf, disabled, and mad artist and their studio practices to lead efforts both in areas of research and practice that pertain to Disability Arts and Culture, we silence a vital aspect of knowledge creation in relation to the movement. Further, through privileging the voices of academics, researchers, non-artists, and people who do not identify with politically engaged Deaf, disabled, and mad movements, we reproduce unethical research practices that continue to objectify the communities that we research.

1.3 Limitations of the Essentialized Mad Artist

While the aims and goals of Deaf, disability, and mad art have moved beyond identity politics, it remains a central component of how the work gets framed and understood. For this project, it is important to think about how the formal art world is influenced by the dominant ways in which marginalized identities are framed. Moving through the broader framework of Disability Arts and Culture, focusing in on mad identity, it is necessary to acknowledge how madness and distress have overwhelmingly been understood through psy-based disciplines.

Through psy-based knowledge, values and institutional practices aided by the process of mental health literacy, madness and distress have been taken up through the medical model as experiences that need to be labelled, confined, controlled, and eliminated (White & Pike, 2013). Taken up through images of violence, unpredictability, and chaos, madness is seen as something to fear and/or to pity. Contemporary views of the mad person are deeply rooted in Eurocentric western psy institutions, which have historically pathologized difference in a way that disproportionately impacts marginalized communities (LeFrançois, Menzies, & Reaume, 2013).

As a mad-identified artist, I have become keenly aware of the ways in which these dominant perspectives of madness manifest in environments in unexpected ways. The connections between creative production and mad people have been intricately tied to the asylum – informing how we reify mental illness through the construction of the mad artist as well as through our responses and reactions to their acts of creative production. Connections between art institutions and psy institutions continue to have a direct impact on the creative production of artists who take up experiences of madness, whether explicitly or implicitly. Mad artists continue to be positioned as outsider artists, devoid of aesthetic and technical skills (Cardinal, 1972; Davis, 2006; Maclagan, 2009; Jenkins, 2011). Oftentimes, explicitly socially engaged art and exhibitions explore madness in ways that perpetuate views of madness as ahistorical and apolitical. Furthermore, they flatten mad identities into single-story experiences. The mad artist is read as mentally ill and the medical model is centralized in the framing of both the artist and their artwork.

In order to think through the limitations of identity and framing one's work alongside it, Lloyd (2005) reminds us that identities do not pre-date politics; they are in fact a political construct. We can thus situate our identities and how we mobilize them as both having

conceptual and political value but also having limitations. In order to do so, it is important to question the need for a stable subject (Lloyd, 2005), or as Diamond (2013) would position it in relation to madness, the universal mad subject. From a feminist perspective, Lloyd pinpoints the limitations of identity politics as being essentialist in nature. Instead, if we unsettle the notion of a fixed identity, we call into question claims of authenticity. This in turn helps us to situate the power relations inherent in the mobilization of identity and the centring of identity politics in the work that we do. By doing this, we open up space for questions about the use, potential misuse, and flaws of working from this paradigm.

As a person who roots their work in the organizing efforts of the mad community, being openly mad identified in many public ways, I am often mistakenly positioned as an identity-based artist. At best I think of myself as a somewhat reluctant identity-based artist. This reluctance compels me to centre the importance of working from a politicized place; resisting some of the more romantic and rigid aspects that inform both cultural organizing and identity politics, the conceptual issues I explore are rooted in systems of power, histories of institutional violence, and community experiences of discrimination and marginalization. So why, then, am I read as an identity-based artist? First, much of the artwork developed through the first wave of Deaf, disability, and mad art movements was in fact overwhelmingly identity-based work. Further, folks who are not familiar with the historical trajectory of the aims and goals of Deaf, disability, and mad art arguably remain somewhat stuck in the allure and comfort of identity-based work (Solvang, 2012). While I am reluctant to be understood as an identity-based artist, I am not wholly resistant. Through feminist and queer work – both scholarship and community-based activism – I can appreciate how identity politics, more specifically strategic essentialism,

allows for marginalized communities to come together over shared experiences and constructed identities.

Scholars such as Spivak (2005) and hooks (2000) are excellent places to turn in regard to thinking about strategic essentialism in critical ways. And yet it is necessary to note here how the context of Spivak and hooks's work is rooted in theorizing experiences of race and ethnicity. Too often this scholarship is used to support the ideas of identity politics and is mobilized in ways that fail to unpack the role of white settler supremacy within the power relations of various subjectivities. For instance, to uncritically work from the position of a universal mad subject, as Diamond (2013) outlines, fails to account for the privileges of asserting pride and organizing strategies in relation to the white mad body. As a white mad woman, I have come to understand that this is a central place to question the misappropriation of the role of strategic essentialism. While it might be the starting point of many of our organizing efforts, it is a point that needs to be taken up in direct relation to how power and privilege structure the makeup of our communities and inform the issues that are positioned as worthy of attention.

And so, as I unpack the role and aims of my work in this dissertation, I intend to build a case for why I am not in fact an identity-based artist. Instead I will centralize the impact of cross-movement organizing, as well as my ongoing efforts to decolonize and Indigenize my epistemological standpoints as reasons for positioning my work beyond the parameters of identity-based work. Just because I am openly mad identified – or queer, or femme – it does not mean that my work necessarily has to reflect or represent individually situated lived experiences. Instead, I outline how my work fits into a canon of practices that moves beyond this approach to mad art, taking up issues that are systemic in nature. This does not indicate a complete abandonment of identity politics; while weary, there is an important element of connecting to the

historical context of cultural work that came before me. However, my work opens up a space in between that considers the limitations of being seen solely (or primarily) as a mad artist.

1.4 Nothing About Us Without Us ... Is Not Enough

When it comes to discussing both the need for and the needs of Deaf, disability, and mad art – both within the field of the arts as well as in Critical Disability Studies – all too often the dialogue revolves around access and inclusion. Focusing our conversations on the efforts of access and inclusion limits the transgressive possibilities created through Deaf, disability, and mad art. As a result, through the efforts of access and inclusion, Deaf, disabled, and mad identities and experiences are decontextualized and the revolutionary aspects of their histories of organizing and activism are ignored or silenced. The political roots of Deaf, disability, and mad art movements are stripped away as artists and their artwork are lauded as inspirational, are used to promote narratives of recovery and resilience, or are seen as windows into the biopathography (biography of pathology) of the artist (Davis, 2006). This positions the role of Deaf, disabled, and mad artists as contributing to the representational diversity within theoretical and physical spaces that institutionalize discriminatory practices. Instead of making the necessary room for Deaf, disability, and mad art to unsettle socio-political, cultural, and artistic hegemony that is entrenched in ableist values, it simply co-opts the work while reinforcing the status quo.

Through developing a body of work that historicizes and politicizes a non-essentialized mad, feminist, queer identity, this dissertation intends to be unconventional, non-normalizing, and committed to an ethics that centres social justice. Through subverting and repurposing various symbols and signifiers that are tied to the lives, bodies, experiences, and very existence of the difference that exists in the margins, the artwork shared here will engage with madness as a source of consciously made aesthetic decisions. Through this process, the art will redefine the

ways in which mad artists are historically positioned as creators incapable of agency or void of artistic skills.

Again, though, it is important to re/consider the limitations of understanding the work by mobilizing the framework of culturalism, which is one element used to constitute the rhetoric of inclusionism. Critiques of culturalism are not new to theoretical explorations of art and artistic production. Previously, Domingueze (1996) presented a worthwhile critique of the implications of culturalizing difference. Similar to critiques of essentialized identities and strategies of identity politics, Domingueze points out that within political movements, culture is often naturalized. Through this objectification, Domingueze posits that this creates a story in which culturalism moves us toward a space where racism is transcended and cultural identities are inherently cherished elements of our lived experience. This mobilizing of a resistance politics behind efforts of culturalism, Domingueze warns, does not decentralize power and does not attend to issues of white settler supremacy.

We can thus see that when culture is positioned as a commodity with social value, it further develops a model that relies on a political economy of culture. Both through the notion of culture as hegemony as well as the democratization of culture, this commodification develops with a heavy focus on inclusion and accessibility. However, the method for access and inclusion happens in a top-down or centre-periphery fashion and thus the impacts of cultural policy do little to disrupt the power structures in a given society (Mulcahy, 2006). It is problematic to highlight access and inclusion as being the main issues of cultural policy, because doing so is driven by the assumption that through education, the dominant culture inherently becomes relevant to all (McGuigan, 2004).

In *The Dark Side of the Nation*, Bannerji (2000) develops a useful framework to understand how the marginalized artist is interpellated through Canadian cultural policy. Bannerji points out that arts and culture policies create both direct and indirect support of cultural production through a model that relies heavily on the assignment of cultural and community identities. For instance, when applying for arts grants, applicants are asked for statistical information regarding their identification with priority groups, such as artists of colour or Deaf, disabled, new generation (ages 18–30), Aboriginal, and francophone artists (for example, see Canada Council for the Arts, n.d.: <http://canadacouncil.ca/equity-office/cultivate>). This is done in order to ensure equitable access to resources and support of those who are positioned as peripheral and marginal to the cultural norm. Through this model, cultural and political identities are reified, essentialized, and become deeply intertwined and managed through the efforts of the state.

Bannerji (2000) highlights the importance of contextualizing how these identities come into being through a policy structure that celebrates multiculturalism. When the Canadian state celebrates multiculturalism, there is a lack of consideration for the structures of power that impact day-to-day experiences of difference. While claiming to celebrate difference, Bannerji points out, the state ignores that not all difference is created (or experienced) as equal. Considering power provides context for thinking through how some identities become dominant, hegemonic, and universal while others are positioned as Other, peripheral, and marginal. Further, social and historical contextualization helps to expose Canada's multicultural values as privileging the English and French communities while simultaneously downplaying their dominance in the cultural sphere. For instance, Canadian cultural policies uphold the state as having two national languages (English and French) yet inadequately address the impacts of

federal and provincial/territorial cultural policy on the obliteration of many Indigenous languages.

What is multiculturalism doing to those of us who get defined as the Other, peripheral and marginal? Specifically considering race, Bannerji (2000) describes it as “a form of bounty or state patronage [as] a managed version of our antiracist politics” (p. 118). In essence, formulating cultural policies around a celebration of multiculturalism quells the unrest linked to the material experiences of institutionalized power imbalances. Bannerji then delineates how categories that are established through these policies create niche organizations and through this, state policies both shape and define communities in a divisive fashion. What deserves attention here is that multiculturalism (and culturalism) are most commonly taken up and theorized in direct relation to experiences of race, ethnicity, racism, and white supremacy. While there are superficial similarities that can be made between experiences of difference, I do not intend to draw parallels here. Both Domingueze and Bannerji build up their argument in direct relation to experiences of race and ethnicity. Often the discourse of (multi)culturalism is simply applied to other community experiences; doing so, however, ignores the way that these practices largely contribute to both the whitewashing of community constituents and the white supremacy built into such organizing efforts. Instead of cross-community organizing, we are more likely to see single-identity efforts, as individuals and communities compete for resources set aside for specific identities. While it seems counterintuitive to those of us who understand the impossibility of untangling lived experiences into discrete identity boxes, it necessitates questioning the centrality of culture in this framework of understanding.

In order to address the divisive nature of cultural policy, Bannerji (2000) asserts that: “Thinking in terms of culture alone, in terms of a single community, a single issue, or a single

oppression will not do. If we do so our ideological servitude to the state and its patronage and funding traps will never end. Instead we need to put together a strategy of articulation that reverses the direction of our political understanding and affiliation – against interpellating strategies of the ideological state apparatus” (p. 119). To do this, Bannerji insists that the dominant frameworks be unsettled, reworked, and necessarily connected to social and historical contexts of relating in ways that consider how our struggles are interrelated and mutually constitutive. It is through perceiving the struggles of various movements as inherently tied together that efforts of fragmentation can be overcome. Further, integrating into dominant culture, as Bannerji suggests, seems less relevant than social issues that acknowledge the relationships between and across social movements. In attending to these relationships, though, we need to address the fact that histories of social movement organizing have enacted the very violence and oppression they purport to be fighting. The mad and disability communities that gain recognition and are centred within their connected academic fields of studies have not historically attended to intersecting experiences, particularly race and Indigeneity (Nwadiogo & Ware, 2008). In order to move forward in ways that cross movement organizing, there is still a lot of work to be done by those of us who benefit from white settler colonialism, class privilege, and other types of social capital. This requires listening to the histories of cross-movement violence perpetrated by those with power and privilege, attending to the needs of Indigenous, Black, and people-of-colour movements, and building trust through actively changing how we organize. Recognizing that there are rich histories of mad and disability organizing led by Indigenous and Black folks and people of colour allows for shifting from a politics of inclusion that requests that we be intersectional in our organizing efforts to one necessitating this as our starting point in our efforts to materialize social change.

1.5 Thinking Through Praxis, Thinking Through Craft

In using craft-based skills to explore the primary and secondary research questions (which are outlined in Chapter 2), the artwork created for this dissertation will be concerned with the issue of “not if our art is good, but what is our art good for” (Leavy, 2009). Anticipating a rich and complex series of answers that will arise through my studio craft practice, I move forward with the intention of exploring issues and experiences tied to the madness in a way that “affirm[s] countercultural knowledge and ways of being” (Decottignies, 2016, p. 43).

To do this, my project will draw on an investigative framework that looks to the theoretical and methodological developments of research-creation. Research-creation, within a Canadian context, is understood as the complex intersections of art, theory, and research (Truman & Springgay, 2015). It is developed within the institutional contexts of both the university as well as major funding bodies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Vaughan, 2009). By privileging the development of knowledge through cultural production, research-creation necessitates moving beyond simply folding arts practices into the process of research (Truman & Springgay, 2015). Research-creation calls on artist-researchers to draw on materiality within their practices, which, as Truman and Springgay (2015) point out, “can shift from representationalism into looking at why matter matters in the process of understanding cultural production” (p. 153). Directly relevant to the creation of my own project, Lowry (2015) points out that social justice is necessarily positioned as central within discussions of the development and resulting projects of research-creation. “Locating social justice at the heart of this discussion, rather than addressing it as an addendum to mainstream debates, we might ask how new forms of creative practice and innovation will help citizens and governments respond to important cultural challenges” (Lowry, 2015, p. 45).

But more than that, we have to think through the relevance of making within the context of craft practices. Adamson (2013), in particular, outlines how the positioning of craft directly impacts our values around knowledge and knowledge creation. Craft, in many ways, can help us to see the materialization of knowledge through process and object. More specifically, craft has overwhelmingly been positioned as intuitive and non-verbal knowledge – a natural, meditative state of (no) mind. Alternatively, craft can be seen as a form of memory work, particularly collective memory work, positioned as a kind of resistance. Thus, craft exists as a mediator between the past and the present, as well as between the individual and the collective. Perhaps most importantly, though, is the understanding that our framing of craft and the potential it holds is discursively informed. And so before we position craft as being inherently progressive or radical, we also must keep in mind the asymmetrical power relations regarding class, race, and imperialism that have taken up craft as a tool within efforts of colonialism. Part of my work within this dissertation is to complicate Critical Craft Praxis in order to carefully unpack its social, historical, and conceptual framings.

With this in mind, and informed by the fields of Mad Studies, Disability Studies, Visual Arts and Studio Craft Praxis, this project understands cultural production as a valid and necessary method of theoretical development and knowledge production – not to be incorporated as an add-on, but a unique and valuable method in and of itself. In the theorization of aesthetic values in relation to mad art and mad artists, a qualitative or quantitative research design would not adequately address the posed research questions. While one might be able to interpret, summarize, and re-present the knowledge gained from experiencing mad art, this is not the same as creating knowledge through making art. Spurred on by Isadora Duncan's statement, "if I could tell you what I meant, there would be no point in dancing it," this project presupposes the

understanding of the difference between making art and translating art. Further, drawing on Loveless (2015), this project acknowledges the unique contribution to knowledge creation and theorization that research-creation allows, as it enables artists “the opportunity to re-envision and re-craft – to re-story – our disciplinary practices. Rather than uncritically adding one disciplinary apparatus to another, research-creation marshals new methods that allow us to tell new stories, stories that demand new research literacies and outputs” (p. 53).

1.6 Overview of Chapters

With the recent uptake of Mad Studies in academic spaces, and for the increased support of creative research practices outside of fine arts programs – both in Canada and abroad – this dissertation comes at a time where critical perspectives on mad experiences matter. This introductory chapter has outlined my initial interest and motivation for bringing these two seemingly disparate points of interest together. Accordingly, Chapter 1 outlines the context for *why* the theorizing of mad aesthetics through the making of mad art matters. This context is particularly relevant in Critical Disability Studies, as a field that claims to support the artistic production of Deaf, disabled, and mad people. In Chapter 2, I outline how the methodological frameworks of research-creation as well as survivor research inform the design of this dissertation project. Working in the context of a humanities program, it is important to outline how the use of my craft praxis is not to be understood as an analogy or a metaphor: I do not make research *like* I make quilts, I make quilts as a core element of my research process. Approaching the work of making as an action-based endeavour, this research project is concerned with craft not as a set of objects to be translated; instead, my inquiry extends from questions regarding what my craft praxis is *doing* relationally in the world that shapes and engages it. Seeing craft as relational is an important element in rendering it complex and full of

subversive possibilities without flattening it by positioning it as inherently informed by radical politics.

I turn to the histories of survivor research as a way to create what I have come to position as a methods of resistance. Survivor research can be understood as disruptive and political. Of particular importance to the design of my own research project, survivor research in fact has very little to say about individualized mad experiences and instead looks outward in framing and naming problems (Landry, 2017). As I outline the framework of the research methodology, I discuss the relevance of space as a methodological site and how this informs my methods of quilt making and writing. As I explore the layered meanings that art can create when not referred to as representational data, I see the creative and written components of this project being interwoven, complimentary to one another, and equally guided by the outlined research questions. One of the important ways that this impacts the structure of this exegetical writing is that the creative work is detailed and explored throughout the chapters. Instead of writing about my studio work in one discrete chapter, my studio process and outputs intervene in the text through various styles of documentation. As such, I see the knowledge created through this project as knowledge *in making* and in this way assess my contributions as being based in the provocation of change and movement.

Chapter 3 moves into an artistic audit, through which I set up the aesthetic framework of my fibre arts practice. Following the tradition of Swanwick (as cited in Haseman, 2006, p. 9), the interrogations explored through the artistic audit express more than a neutral gathering of sensory impressions. I, as Haseman advocates, use my experienced and informed view of the artists and their work to detect and discuss the relevant nuances of their creative practices. The overall goal of this chapter is to establish prior work done in the field of fibre art in order to

present the relevance of my own studio-based experimentations; in exploring this broader field, the chapter looks at a range of artists who turn to textiles as a way to intervene in the world. Drawing on examples beyond the reaches of Deaf, disability, and mad art helps build an aesthetic framework that is not entirely self-referential to the politics of the movement, both in how the movement frames itself and how the world frames it. The exploration of eleven fibre artists provides my project with a comprehensive aesthetic framework informed by conceptual, technical, and political aesthetic markers. Key themes that have emerged from this performative research include the significance of commodifying identity as a process of depoliticizing creative work, the transformative possibilities of disrupting dichotomous thinking, the role of the audience in the creative process of making meaning, the role of nature in the vulnerability of craft as object, and the ability for quilts to be sculptural and layered with meaning.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation begins to outline the scholarship generated through my academic and creative findings. Here I identify key theoretical points and in so doing identify gaps in the current debates. This chapter outlines my distinct approach to mad aesthetics, in that this dissertation does not in fact *determine* a mad aesthetic but instead experiments with how to make art that engages *in dialogue* with mad aesthetics. In this way I explore the significance of access and inclusion to formalizing creative practices while reflecting on the relevance of learning how to pass as an artist. In this process, I question the focus that Disability Studies puts on access and inclusion, interrupting this discourse with the theoretical framework of Mad Studies. Through this theoretical disruption, I outline how the mad artist is propagated as a reification of mental illness. This is the starting point for processing the necessity of dis/identifying as a mad artist in the overall project of politicizing mad aesthetics, and I invoke the act of storytelling as both a powerful act of disempowerment for mad people as well as a

potential site for political resistance. This shifts the goals of mad art from inward-looking efforts of inclusion and representation toward social justice-oriented work that is developed in and through relationships. In this chapter I likewise outline my first project, *Comrade*, as an example of this political shift in the aesthetics of mad art.

The theoretical explorations outlined in Chapter 4 allow for a consideration in Chapter 5 of the findings that have come through my experimentation with aesthetic markers. Opening up the chapter with Rancière and his theorization regarding the complicated relationship between politics and aesthetics allows me to contextualize my analysis of political aesthetics. Turning to critical craft theorists such as Robertson then has me understanding the relevance of political aesthetics not just in mad art but in craft practices like quilting as well. Taking up the concept of productive re-interpretation as outlined by Robertson, I work through the need to unflatten stories of craft in moving toward contradictions as sites for political aesthetics. It is here I determine that mad art is in fact not at all about the mad identity. Outlining the storying of mad artists and their artwork, through examples like Yayoi Kusama, I unpack the aesthetic markers of the mentally ill. In an attempt to create a rupture in this aesthetic framework, I disrupt the writing with my second project, *Pissing On Pity*, in which I demonstrate how these aesthetics markers can in fact be subverted through the making and exhibiting of a quilt.

In my final chapter, I consider on how this overall dissertation project contributes to the field of Deaf, Disability, and Mad Arts. In doing so, I reflect on my experiences at two symposiums and one strategic planning retreat – all three related to the field more broadly. I likewise explore three central questions, posed at the end of Chapter 5 in order to shape my final thoughts on my journey through this dissertation: 1) In what ways are people invested in mad art? 2) For what purpose are people interested in mad art? A secondary question here is 2.b) How

does this interest materialize and impact the lives of mad people? And, finally, 3) Who benefits from the inclusion of mad art in the realm of cultural production? In answering this third question, I am also interested in reflecting on who does not benefit from and/or who is not included in this cultural production.

Through considering community processes and dynamics and reflecting on my current work in process, I write myself to a place where I consider how to re-craft a mad aesthetic that is rooted in the social and historical context of the struggles and resistance of the mad community. I also use this inquiry to question the neoliberal implications of how community is typically called on in order to collectivize our considerations of embodiment as a way to work from a place that values and centralizes issues from the stance of disability justice. In final reflection, I feel as though I have ended with more questions than concluding statements. Yet with these additional questions, this dissertation has accomplished its key goal: to use Mad Studies and Critical Craft Praxis to engage critically with the world around me. The point of this exercise is not to answer questions but to create ruptures, to open up space for exploration, and to engage with ideas and new lines of inquiry in ways that beg deeper scrutiny.

Chapter 2 – Creating Methods of Resistance

On a smaller scale, the *use* of a quilt may be as a bed cover, but its *functions* are greater than the sum of its component pieces to encompass the autobiographical story of its making, its maker, and the entire quilt tradition. Aside from its *use* as a bed cover, its function embraces the quilt as document (of a family's cast-off clothing), as metaphor (the double meaning of providing warmth, as ritual), in its use on special occasions, or as a talisman (a healing or protective cover). Thus the multiple functions of an object exist apart from its use and are made up of abstracted and layered intangible meaning, rather than physical properties alone. (Fariello, 2011, p. 38)

2.1 Introduction

This project draws on the skills and techniques of studio craft practice, with a focus on fibre art. Through my studio-based work and related exegetical writing, I explore how Critical Craft Praxis can engage with the historical context of Deaf, disability, and mad arts. My work focuses on the related but discrete histories of organizing, resistance, struggles, and cultural development unique to mad communities; I moreover turn specifically to the intersections of mad, feminist, and queer cultural production in situating my work in the methodological framework of research-creation. This dissertation fundamentally values craft as a “way of knowing in its own right” with the possibilities of “opening new ways of reconfiguring the relationship around knowledge while at the same time expanding the debates and modes of the learning process” (Ferraro, White, Cox, Bebbington & Wilson, 2011, p. 79). This project addresses key themes such as the problems with focusing on inclusion and access, the limitations of identity politics, and the radical possibilities of the aesthetic markers of mad art. Through exploring these key topics, my studio practice investigates ways to subvert the co-optation of mad art and the stories generated about the often-romanticized pathological mentally ill artist.

As an interdisciplinary project, the work of this dissertation exists in both creative and written components. Both components weave themselves together in a way that is difficult to untwine, with the conceptual and written pieces informing the aesthetic development of the

creative work and vice versa. As such, neither element can be compartmentalized nor viewed as a representation of the other. The entirety of the project has been developed with this fusion in mind, similarly to how Sturm (2016) describes their own creative process of producing “layers of meaning” (p. 5). In reference to their use of illustration as a research tool, Sturm describes the process thus:

The appeal of producing figurative or representational images is that they offer the reader/viewer a concrete focus with which to connect. Abstract imagery is at the opposing end of the spectrum, where marks, visual gestures, and tonal variations create a mood and can indeed be said to be a true ‘response’ rather than an ‘illustration’ of the texts. In the end, I opted for an approach that nods to both figurative and abstract techniques in the hope that this avoids the trap of pure illustration, whilst simultaneously inviting the viewer to be drawn to explore elements of the text within the image, thus hopefully adding a layer of meaning to the text. (2016, p. 5)

In developing my own research practice based in creative methodologies, thinking about the form and function of the work has been helpful in terms of designing the project. What you will see unfold through the exegetical writing of this dissertation is the layers of meaning-making created through making as research.

As mentioned, I first learned to quilt as a preteen as a way to connect with my paternal family. Experiences of grief, intense nostalgia, and a deep respect for the feminist roots of quilt making have informed my use of quilting as my central creative practice. It was through my aunt that I learned the essential skills of the craft of quilt making. This included the fundamentals of construction and the significance of making the connections between her current practice both with her personal history and with the history of the social world around her. My own personal

practice as a fibre artist is intricately linked to my engagement with and contribution to the mad and disability communities around me. Through my training in the Fibre Arts Program at Haliburton School of the Arts, I worked toward developing my skills as a fibre artist by focusing my studies on quilt making and the processes of nature-based dyeing. As a maker, my creative work extends beyond these two practices; however, I primarily conceptualize my studio work through my training as a quilter. Working across the disciplines of Critical Disability Studies, Mad Studies, and Studio Craft, I am able to engage artistic practices as political and socially engaged expression, as a form of knowledge production, and as a research methodology. While interrelated and sometimes overlapping, these components of my creative work are not inherently one and the same.

2.2 Space as a Methodological Site



Figure 2: Studio space. Photo: Cat O'Neil
 (Image description: A view of the Contemporary Textile Studio Co-op looks from one end of the sewing table across the length of the printing table, with two large windows at the end of the studio space. In the foreground to the right is the corner of the sewing machine, and scattered throughout the workspace are various pieces of embroidery, quilting tools, and pieces of fibre art. At the far end of the table on the right is Jenna, ironing a patchwork block.)

At this point in my academic and artistic careers, my work happens predominantly in two² separate spaces, which I understand as my office and my studio. As a contract lecturer and PhD candidate, I have access to office space in two different universities in the city of Toronto, but as a mad person these are largely inaccessible to me for various reasons. Because of this, I do a large amount of my written work in my home office. Situated on the third floor of my rented apartment, my home office is in a room on the west side of the house. With a west-facing window, the sun seems to shine bright and hot into the office all day. On one wall I have my desk, which is littered with books, articles, magazines, and drawing materials. Here is where I sit to read and write. When the office gets too hot or I feel as if I am slogging through the workday, sometimes I move myself around my house – and one of the first places I go is my bed in the room across the hall. Writing in bed reminds me of my days in my undergraduate and my master's degrees; there is a nostalgic comfort I get when working on academic writing while wrapped up in the quilts that I have made. Another place you could expect to find me typing is at the dining room table, for no other reason than I feel less cut off from the rest of the happenings of the house while sitting in the middle of the main living spaces.

Alternatively, my studio is a space that has recently shifted from being inside my house to a cooperatively shared textile studio. The shift into rented studio space occurred when my creative endeavours expanded in a way that I felt I could not work efficiently in my home. This shift from creating art in my home to a shared studio outside of my home happened around the time that I began linking my creative work with my community and academic work. After taking

² At one point I considered the community to be a third site where my work happened, but the difficulty of navigating a doctorate degree as a mad student has meant that I have not been able to centralize that component of my work for a long time. This can feel both very isolating and deeply disheartening. At best I deal with this disconnection and incongruence by rooting most of my professional contract work in community-based projects.

a natural dye printing textile workshop in the studio, it made sense for me to join a cooperative that fostered community and learning while sharing equipment I would not have had access to on my own. In the centre of the 1,200-square-foot studio is a full-length printing table. At the end of this table is where I have my sewing table – an Ikea drafting table fashioned into a drop-down tabletop, which allows my sewing machine to sit flush with the work surface. Surrounding the perimeter of the room are the shelves where members store their individual materials and tools. Also available on site is an exposure unit, light table, dye area, washer, and dryer, among other amenities.

There is a crossover of tools between my workspaces. In my home office I have cutting mats on my desk, a hand quilting frame in front of my office window, and various fabrics and sewing tools such as pins, needles, and cutting utensils. In my studio I also have books and articles, and I often bring with me my computer and manuscripts-in-progress. My sketchbook contains just as many illustrations and visual sketches as it does notes from readings and written sketches. While the spaces are geographically separate, the work that happens in one bleeds into my work in the other. This is a significant aspect of my methodology – understanding that the creative work informs and unsettles the written work and vice versa. Not only is it impossible to separate one from the other, there is no clear beginning or end. Some ideas start in my office and transform in the studio, while others begin with the act of making and completely change as they interact with the reading and writing.

I've spent years gathering resources; books have piled up on and around my desk, articles are saved in countless folders on various USB drives, meetings are journalled in notebooks, and community conversations are scrawled on random pads of paper. My work stations – my desk in my home office, my bed, and my constantly rotating offices on the various university campuses

at which I work look much like my studio shelves: covered in material at various stages in the processes of de/re/construction.



Figure 3: Studio shelves. Photo: Cat O'Neil (Image description: Metal shelves; on the lower shelf are two clear plastic containers filled with naturally dyed cotton. On the middle shelf are books, sketchbooks, a tea cup, various sewing notions, and fabric scraps. On the next shelf up is an assortment of dried flowers, mordants in powder form, and plastic containers. On the top shelf, just out of sight, are dye pots, rinsing bowls, rulers, and hot plates.)

The practice-based component of this dissertation develops knowledge through studio-based work. With this component I explore what it means to create knowledge primarily through the processes of 1) nature-based dyeing (the use of natural materials to dye unbleached cotton muslin) and 2) quilt making. I have integrated other fibre-based techniques in less central ways to add depth and complexity to the aesthetic elements of my work. I've hoarded specific pieces of fabric for years, waiting to cut into them until just the right moment. Similarly, I have containers full of scrap pieces, used again and again, until only very little remains of the original yardage of material. I have jars full of carefully foraged dried plant matter waiting to be processed into dye liquors. And I have yards of fabric moving through the countless steps it takes me to get from thought to pattern to finished object.

This is not unlike the way that I work with the research that happens outside of and alongside my studio work. There are books that sit waiting to be read, articles that are heavily dog-eared, and those that are pulled apart into tiny scraps – quotes, ideas, themes, and concepts. Much like quilting, I oscillate between relative antipodes: first, an obsession with learning the skills, techniques, and patterns that set out clearly defined rules and ways of doing things the “right way.” I spend months and years reading works start to finish, pouring over every last word so as not to miss an important point or a necessary lesson. And then I reach a state of saturation where I become so overloaded with the “how-tos” that I experience a rupture.

2.3 Making Meaning with Research-Creation

So what happens when I allow my training in fibre arts to create ruptures in the way I approach research? Using the language of quilt making as an analogy or metaphor to situate my research work does a disservice to understanding how I approach knowledge creation and translation. Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) explore research-creation in a way that marries the methodological theory with the practices employed in the research work. In their writing, Chapman and Sawchuk look at research-creation as being a broad set of methodological practices, outlining four related yet discrete categories of research that occur through the possibilities that can be found in the in-between spaces in projects that employ research-creation. The distinctions between these practices – using creative methodologies in research or research methodologies in creative practices – help to determine each category’s purpose, approaches, end results, and ways of assessing research-creation. They are described by Chapman and Sawchuk as being “research-for-creation,” “research-from-creation,” “creative presentations of research,” and “creation-as-research” (p. 7).

All four typologies named by Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) emphasize how creative production is used to shift and unsettle conventional research methodologies legitimized through quantitative and qualitative practices. Yet Chapman and Sawchuk warn against a dichotomous positioning of research-creation as opposite to conventional research practices. Doing so, they explain, has many researchers folding creative work into more conventional practices in order to claim the ability for research-creation projects to meet standards of rigour and credibility. Instead, the aims of articulating the field of research-creation pertaining to its own methodological standards allows for a disruption of typically acceptable efforts of knowledge creation and translation.

In order to make meaning within and through art projects, it is helpful to unpack how both the process and the product are valued. Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) encourage artist-researchers to think about art as a performative act as opposed to an object. Shifting the framework this way helps artist-researchers to think about their practice more holistically, taking into account the significance of the entire process, which includes the conceptual and technical research, the studio-based exploration, the act of making, the writing, as well as the various ways the work might be presented to an audience (through exhibition, studio visit, publication, and performances). When we take up the art practice in this way, the meaning materializes through any or all aspects of the project. It has us reconsidering the need to position art objects as communicative pieces to be translated and understood as reflective of our social world. Arguably, this is a space where research-creation and Disability Studies might inform one another through mutual goals of destabilizing the commonly perceived genius of the artist. Reorienting to embrace research-creation as being performative allows us to see art as action-

based, which many artist-researchers discuss as demonstrating the relevance of focusing our engagement with art around questions of “what is it doing” and not “what is it saying.”

And so, in light of understanding art as a unique methodology, this project refuses to hold itself up to comparisons with more orthodox practices that fall under qualitative and quantitative paradigms. This dissertation has no intentions of discovering universal truths, uncomplicated stories, and/or quantifiable experiences (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012). As Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) point out, to attempt to make arts-based research fit into methodological forms for the sake of legitimacy only limits the potential of art to contribute something new to the research field. While it is true that art has the capacity to reflect the world around us and can act as an agent to communicate important issues, it also has the potential to raise questions and create movement in unique ways. Arguably, it is these unique elements of research-creation that are overlooked and undervalued in the attempt to make sense of art through the frameworks of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Situating myself in a Critical Disability Studies program while doing a studio-based project provides an interesting vantage point as a researcher. Much of the literature that I am turning to in order to understand creative methodologies is based in creative programs and/or written by faculty members from fine arts programs. These works have been immensely helpful in opening up ways of thinking about research and expanding on my training, which is largely based in qualitative paradigms. Stretching and shifting my own paradigms and approaches, I notice that the conversations in regard to proving the rigour and approach to research do not resonate with me in the same way. As McNamara (2012) explains, it is common for arts-based researchers to struggle to communicate and justify their research methodology. This difficulty can come from a multitude of issues – such as a lack of training and familiarity with dominant research

methodologies as well as the newness of arts-based research within academic traditions. As a person who has a fair amount of practical and theoretical knowledge on qualitative research methodologies, I am less concerned with justifying the rigour of arts-based methodologies. While sometimes difficult to translate, I believe the strength of these methodologies is that they add something new to our research approaches. McNamara describes this as methodologically providing researchers with a way to “confront the tension between research uncertainty and concrete research methods” (p. 4). Further, as McNamara warns, sometimes in the quest to justify arts-based research using standards designed for qualitative and quantitative projects – such as the innovation of knowledge – doctoral candidates end up limiting the possibilities that can be created through artistic interventions. As a queer, feminist, and mad scholar, I find this almost obvious. To focus on having spent a large portion of my academic life trying to make myself fit into boxes designed by those who do not experience the world in the same ways that I do misses the point entirely. Making art as research is a way to create what McNamara refers to as “newly established critical parameters of the research” (p. 5). The beauty of knowledge created through art making is that it is expansive and moves us to learn in visceral ways. When I engage with art that I consider to be significant in its cultural contribution, I *feel* it in my entire being. Translating that into a dominant research paradigm removes the very magic of it all.

Pushing deeper into the question of *how* to make meaning requires that we think about what meaning we intend to make. As Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) highlight, this requires (re)positioning from approaching art practices as epistemological in nature and instead to seeing the work as an “ethics of ontology” (p. 53). This repositioning completely reframes the very purpose of art as research. In doing this, the artist-researcher makes meaning through the asking of questions as opposed to the answering of them. This moves the purpose of art beyond the goal

of narrating, illustrating, or demonstrating the genius of the artist – the last point being particularly problematic in the context of the hyper-fetishization of the mad creative genius. Jagodzinski and Wallin explain that this is an active way of the “undoing of art as communication” (p. 8). It is not to say that art does not (or cannot) find answers, communicate messages, and/or reflect the world around us. It is, however, an acknowledgement that there is an overwhelming amount of art that primarily aims to be representative, and this is but one of a complex set of ways that art can make meaning. It is through this liminal space – in-between epistemological versus ontological framings of art – that I hope to address the role of Critical Craft Praxis.

2.3.1 Making Meaning with Critical Craft Theory

One of the difficulties in the design of this project is working at the nexus of under-theorized interdisciplinary fields – that of Mad Studies and Critical Craft Theory. For this reason, a lot of my theoretical justification develops through parallel fields that are building but nonetheless fall short of providing adequate theoretical positions. When designing a project methodologically situated in studio craft practice, it first makes sense to turn to the literature of arts and arts-based research in order to establish a framework. Even when turning to these works, though, I find myself stitching together a number of bodies of literature that both overlap and yet are also distinct from one another. I base my work first and foremost alongside the theoretical context of research-creation. Beyond this, I draw on other scholarly work such as a/r/tography and studio-based research in order to complicate my framework and see the possibilities that exist when working in the liminal spaces between disciplines. This way of designing my methodological approach and analysis is in line with the values of studio craft practices as well

as the conceptual underpinnings of Mad Studies – a field at times referred to as being an in/discipline (Ingram, 2008).

Returning to my musings on a studio-based dissertation necessitates an acknowledgement of the issues with relying on the language of fine arts when working specifically with the practices of craft. The use of fine art to legitimize the making and exhibiting of quilts has a complicated and problematic history. Thinking specifically about the curatorial and exhibition-based practices of fine arts institutions like galleries and museums, we can see that the various social and historical contexts unique to the making and using of quilts are erased, dismissed, devalued, and reframed (Peterson, 2011). This reveals a core issue with simply including the object of the quilt into the canon of art history: in so doing, the quilt is not able to disrupt the values and frameworks that exist within the established field of fine arts. The object of the quilt and the audience become removed from one another, which re-stories the piece and disconnects it from its traditions and communities of origin (Peterson, 2011). Through these efforts, the quilt as object, quilting as process, and the community as subject become both hyper-visible and invisible (Peterson, 2011), which leads to a problematic engagement with each and with all three.

On the other hand, the conceptualization of craft as knowledge production and translation has a long and complicated history. As Adamson (2013) explores, the process of crafting has a way of materializing knowledge from concept to design to finished product. However, craft as a process and a product is often undervalued and devalued. The socio-historical context of fibre-based crafts is commonly positioned as gendered in ways that lead to a celebration of the value of craft while considering only how white middle-class women are read through and contribute to knowledge through craft work. When we whitewash the histories of craft, we often leave out

of the conversation the histories of craft as a tool within processes of imperialism, and how class, race, disability, madness, and sexuality are constituted and mediated through and by craft.

What does this mean for the development of a Critical Craft Praxis in this dissertation project? It informs my approach to how I make, helps me think through why I make, and allows me to engage in a theorization of my studio work – through process, content, product, and exhibition – that is rooted in an analysis of community and systemic issues. My understanding of community necessitates framing these issues as relational and organized around a politic that centres notions of justice, histories of struggle, and movements of resistance. It requires a questioning of the romanticized celebration of the values and benefits of crafting, what I perceive as a swinging of the pendulum in response to its history of being dismissed and discredited. Instead of investing in an idealized notion of craft work as inherently subversive, I suggest that we dig deeper. Through what we make, how we make it, and under what conditions, I posit that the act of making requires a process of interrogation in order to see its contributions to knowledge production, translation, and dissemination. This interrogation needs to happen before one can make claims of the capacity of craft to disrupt the status quo.

Not wholly different from how Deaf, disability, and mad art is often (mistakenly) taken up, craft is often seen as nonverbal and intuitive (Adamson, 2013). Further, the craft of the Other is often framed through notions of savageness, likening colonial perceptions of non-Western cultures as being primitive and lacking in agency and complex thought. This links craft, through its position as a tool of research, to imperialism and the colonization of Indigenous cultures, lands, and bodies. This is an important element of craft history to note in juxtaposition to when the maker, as a subject with white privilege, discursively shifts the framework, positioning craft work as inherently subversive. How do we acknowledge these varied histories of craft and

position them among their contemporary impacts? How do we decolonize our craft practices? What does that look like and how does that impact our relationship with our studio practices?

For me, questions around decolonizing my craft practice figure prominently in the work that I do as a cisgender, white, middle-class, queer, mad woman working in the field of fibre art. It necessitates a constant and active practice of critical reflection that has me thinking through the contemporary impacts of the violent histories of craft work. It is a refusal to centre white feminist histories and contemporary stories of craft that lay claim to the inherently political role of craft work without a contextualization of its positioning in larger socio-historical contexts. To me, this work is in line with how I make meaning through craft. It creates spaces and opens up possibilities for more complex and less flattened stories and dialogues. It has me asking questions and making room for the re-storying of craft – historically and in contemporary practices. Shifting our understandings and focus of craft from object to process allows us to challenge understandings of the sole purpose of studio craft practices as being communicative and translatable in the fashion of a linear narrative.

When, as Adamson (2013) suggests, we take up craft as collective memory work, I posit that we need to think critically about how this takes shape in our practice. Running the risk of romanticizing and commodifying cultures, our collective memory work needs to happen in a way that considers the politics of constructing both the memory and the collective (Kansteiner, 2002). Without destabilizing the white supremacist foundations in the rhetoric of citizenship linked to our notions of community – in terms of craft communities and otherwise – our engagement with collective memory work will undoubtedly act as a tool within larger imperatives of ongoing settler colonialism. So, while craft allows for the work of collective memory making to take shape as a methodology, helping us to negotiate the role of the individual and collective, we have

to be careful not to romanticize it in a way that maintains problematic power structures and systems of violence.

2.4 Critical Craft Praxis as Research Methodology

So here we move into a space that values the discourse, aesthetics, and practices that come from the discipline of craft. While I have no interest in getting overly bogged down with specific terminology, the framework of studio craft referred to by Fariello (2011) situates the work of makers who are committed to the aesthetics of craft but do not fit into the roles of hobby or wholesale makers. Craft aesthetics, in the studio and beyond, “includes naming objects as hand-marked, holistic, social, functional, tactile, material, and spiritual. Its meaning, whether in the production studio or the classroom, is rooted in multiple values, including the physical process of making, an intimacy of tactile experience, the ‘truth’ of its materials, the discipline of daily practice, and the skill of the hand” (Fariello, 2011, p. 40). According to Fariello, these practices are concerned not just with the process or the final object, but with the relationship between the maker and the materials, the use and function of the made object, and the layered and complex material culture that permeate the work. As Fariello explains, “Craft’s multiple interpretations – as document, ritual, metaphor, and talisman – depend on attributes that define core values that makers bring to the studio” (p. 40). As such, we cannot ignore the materiality of craft-based work.

One of the difficulties of developing research through a Critical Craft Praxis is the dearth of literature that exists within the field. Not only does this make for a scarcity of work to reference, but it also, as Roberts (2011) points out, continuously positions it as less-than or in constant reference to more dominant practices within the visual arts. Much like Roberts’s use of queer theory to unsettle normative discourses within the field of craft, within my practice I draw

on Mad Studies as a critical theoretical standpoint. Through Roberts's queer read on craft praxis, they aim to "relocate craft as an aesthetic category that embraces an enormous range of multiple and seemingly contradictory practices, as well as an agent to challenge existing systems that define materiality and makers" (p. 248). Further, Roberts in fact celebrates the lack of identity that some feel in relation to craft work by stating:

Having a lack or loss of identity creates the opportunity for identity to be invented anew. Much of craft is about making. By not declaring a fixed identity for craft, it could always be *in the making*. If craft were constantly in formation, it could resist being stereotyped and could include many different types of makers. Its inability to be defined could be transformed into an asset and an agent of power to challenge systems that use definition to limit. Instead of being ignored or denied, stereotypes can be made into raw material and transformed. (2011, pp. 257–258)

This somewhat radical shift in approach to craft, which in turn sets up a Critical Craft Praxis, positions the methodological site as one of transformation and ultimately reform. This methodological approach anticipates an opening up of space, practice, questions, and ways of making. Through my Critical Craft Praxis, I begin with processes of making that are intelligible within more narrowly defined craft praxis – through techniques of quilt making, nature-based dyeing, and other textile-based processes – and then move outward.

2.4.1 Crafting Research Like Crazy

I do not think that I research better than those who have not been subjected to psychiatric treatment, but I certainly do it in a different way. (Russo, 2009, p. 174)

Working from a methodological approach informed by critical craft theorists and makers as well as mad activists and scholars, my studio practice makes meaning through asking critical

questions, attending to the tensions, shifts, and ruptures that become apparent through the act of making, and creating movement in the aims of contributing to social change. I start from a place of inquiry rooted in the politics and organizing of the Mad Movement, and, from this, I turn to the history of survivor research in order to inform the development of my methodological praxis. Turning to both Canadian and UK-based literature, I understand survivor research as being methodologically in line with the history of struggles and resistance within Mad Movement organizing over the years. Survivor research is informed by values such as empowerment, emancipation, participation, equality, and anti-discrimination (Sweeney, 2009). As Beresford and Rose (2009) outline, survivor research shifts the methodological positioning of mad people as data sources to be mined and instead sees experiential knowledge as having “value” and “integrity” (p. 13). While the distinction, for some, might be difficult to comprehend, this disruption in research values not only treats the survivor ethically within the research process, but requires a shifting of power dynamics throughout the entire structure and design of the research project.

With this shift in the use and autonomy of mad people’s knowledge, survivor research highlights how traditional research paradigms typically consider the subjectivity of experiential knowledge to negatively impact the rigour and ethics of research projects. In calling attention to this value, survivor researchers resist the view that their standpoint weakens the design and implementation of a research program. Further, when mad people take part in research projects as researchers themselves, there is constant concern with the researcher becoming too close to the subject, and at times even confusion over if the researcher is themselves the subject/object of study. Following this, Rose (2009) emphasizes the value of disrupting these concerns by creating

an entirely new research paradigm; in this way, survivor research produces alternative knowledge.

A critical finding that Landry (2017) articulates in her analysis of twenty-five years of Canadian survivor research is that determining what *is* and what *is not* survivor research is not easy. While the politics of the research is informed by the history of Mad Movement organizing, simply determining survivor research based on the identity of the author and/or researcher is not enough. As Landry points out, Canadian survivor research covers a wide range of topics. However, one striking thread throughout the studied projects was that they “turn the reader’s attention out to the world experienced by consumer/survivors” (p. 16). As Landry asserts, survivor research not only develops critical alternative knowledge, but it also engages this knowledge production as a tool toward social change – what Landry refers to as “creating methods of resistance” (p. 17). These points are helpful in outlining the elements of my methodological framework that are not attended to through critical craft theory – even with the radical shifts created through the consideration of queer and feminist epistemologies.

While this dissertation might (mistakenly) be seen as rooted in my mad identity, in fact it is not. Stemming from justice-oriented concerns, my methodological framework hinges on the act of not looking inward toward my individualized mad experiences but instead taking those experiences and looking outward to the world around me. While I foundationally view my perspectives as a queer, feminist, mad scholar as critical knowledge within my theoretical explorations, this project creates a method of resistance in that it looks to bigger issues in order to ask questions about structural and systemic power imbalances. As a quilt maker, my survivor research is collective in that it starts in the community – referring to issues that I see take shape

in response to the creation of collective efforts of resistance – and it materializes in the studio as I create resistance through the methods of making in my studio practice.

2.5 How to Make a (Traditional North American) Quilt



Figure 4: Free motion machine embroidery. Photo: Cat O'Neil (Image description: Jenna sitting in front of her sewing machine looking down at the embroidery hoop she is holding. On the desk to the right is her sketchbook, and some embroidered ants, maggots, and a mushroom.)

It took me over a decade to consider the possibility that I craft research like I make a quilt. When I began to centralize creative practices in my research, I saw the relationship between these two seemingly distinct practices as the development of a meaningful methodology, a praxis that is created across and in between my training as a quilt maker, a fibre artist, a queer, feminist, mad activist, and scholar. In order to clearly articulate my Critical Craft Praxis as a methodology, it is important to start with the foundations of my creative practice, which is deeply rooted in the methods used to make a quilt. Not unlike other craft-based skills, quilt making has no one methodology to reference. Yet there are various clear and distinct methods, tested over time, that are familiar to quilt makers regardless of where and how they learned to quilt. My paternal aunt passed down most of what I have learned. However, in the

formal and informal training I have received elsewhere – in workshops, courses, and programs – from quilt makers other than my aunt, I note an overwhelming overlap between the shared basis of our knowledge of the skills and techniques used.

In fact, as I have continued to develop both my research and studio practice, I have realized that I actually do not craft my research *like* I make a quilt. Instead, through the practices of research-creation, the making of my quilts is a method through which I *make my research*. As a studio-based researcher, it is important to clarify that I do not reference my creative praxis as an analogy or as a metaphor. Understanding the skills and techniques used to make a quilt helps to situate the skills and techniques that are central within my research practice – they do not demonstrate or represent something that is *like* my research, they *are* my research. Not all of my creative practices are built out of the traditions of quilt making. However, being the first area of creative practice that I developed, the training that shaped my creative processes – whether I am dyeing fabric, screen printing, doing embroidery, or felting – I find that the decisions I make are rooted in the way that I was trained to approach and understand the methods of quilt making. Because of this, before I go into the specifics regarding how I have designed this specific research project, it is helpful to outline a general understanding of what it means to make a quilt.

2.5.1 The Quilt Top

Typically quilts are constituted by three layers of material. The upper layer is commonly referred to as the quilt top; this is the layer that many people think of when they refer to the entirety of the quilt. Many quilt tops are made of pieced blocks, also known as patchwork. In historical and contemporary traditions of North American quilting, many quilters work from predesigned patterns that outline the amount of fabric needed, the types of shapes to cut, and the techniques needed to piece together the quilt top. Quilt tops can be pieced together by hand or

machine and can consist of both straight and/or curved seams – almost always insisted on being a scant quarter of an inch wide. It is possible for the design of the quilt top to be developed through the technique of appliqué – either hand or machine – which allows for more intricate shapes to be constructed by sewing the shapes on top of one another as opposed to piecing the shapes together in the style of patchwork. Keep in mind that quilt tops do not need to be pieced together or embellished. For instance, when making a whole cloth quilt, the top is a single piece of cloth, typically cotton, large enough for the desired finished product. The design on a whole cloth quilt materializes through the process of quilting the three layers of the quilt together.

2.5.2 The Process of Quilting

Those who do not make quilts, often or at all, lack an understanding that the word quilt can be used both as a noun and a verb. The noun, quilt, refers to the finished product while the verb, to quilt, describes the stitching technique used to hold the three layers of a quilt together – the quilt top, the batting in the centre that creates loft and provides warmth, and the backing fabric. Decisions regarding quilting are made both for utilitarian and aesthetic reasons. For instance, the type of material used for the batting will determine how far or close your lines of stitching need to be for overall structure and stability. Regarding the aesthetics of the quilt design, these can be just as varied and complex as the aesthetics developed for the design of the quilt top. The stitching can be done by hand or machine and can be used to highlight, embellish, or disappear within the patterns already existing in the design of the quilt top. Once the quilting is finished, the excess fabric is squared off and cut away, and a binding is sewn around the perimeter of the quilt to secure in the raw edges.

2.6 Designing the Research

Looking toward guidelines for PhD research in fine arts degrees has provided helpful resources in order to clearly understand the ways in which studio craft practices can develop meaningful contributions as projects in their designated fields (see Appendix A and Appendix B). These resources, for reasons mentioned above, are not necessarily useful in thinking through aesthetic values of craft practice. However, it has to be acknowledged that much of the history of studio-based PhD programs, and thus dissertation projects, has occurred in fine arts programs. Looking to the historical trajectory and resulting learning that can be gleaned from this history is a useful place to start, provided the values are considered in relation to the field of craft. This, however, is also true for my project when starting from dominant framings of any form of creative practices, in order to unsettle it through a Mad Studies framework. Examination guidelines from the University of Victoria (n.d.) point to the necessity of developing both original creative works as well as connecting the creative process to wider contexts to consider social, cultural, and theoretical aspects. So, while studio-based PhD research *can* mirror quantitative and qualitative research that “systematically pursues new knowledge” (University of Victoria, n.d.), it does so with methods, final products, and presentations of the new knowledge that are unique to the field of the arts or, in the case of this project, studio craft.

Pushing this sentiment further, I see the worldview and values of socially engaged artists as the best way to promote and nurture the values of Deaf, disability, and mad art. Thus, my project aims to work from a transdisciplinary praxis that intersects with studio craft praxis and Mad Studies – merging disciplinary values and practices yet not disappearing into either one. As both

Bourke and Nielsen (2004) and Messer (2012) point out, this necessitates that the artist-researcher bring together both practice-based research and research-led practice.³

As Biggs and Büchler (2009) suggest, the most effective way to develop research practices in the creative arts is to work from the worldview and values of those in the arts community. This challenges the need to mirror orthodox research projects, in goals and processes that fall within qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) point out that when we consider projects that position creative work as research, artist-researchers are not inherently producing work that delivers new knowledges in a way that aims to mirror traditional research practices.

Until now, this project has discussed the relevance of shifting our value of craft-based work from object to process. Here too I want to consider the impacts of thinking about this performative process as being evaluated for its qualities as a site of intervention. This, according to Chapman and Sawchuk (2012), replaces questions regarding the contribution to knowledge in content, method, and outcomes with questions regarding the ability of a project to create movement and change. This allows for the project to be evaluated in method, form, and content, and in the context of its surrounding communities. Considering all of this moves us into a space that values creative work through its multidimensional elements and incorporates an awareness of elements, such as the impact on the audience and the future possibilities for action and reaction, that are not so easily communicated as project deliverables.

The primary component of the methodology will be practice-based research. Therefore, the work that takes place in the studio, resulting in the final photographic documentation, will be a central output of this PhD project. Studio-based methodologies are commonly found within

³ For definitions of practice-based and practice-led research, see Candy, 2006.

studio-based fine arts degrees. Petelin (n.d.) summarizes the criteria, describing how it is outlined and assessed for studio-based methodology:

1. Whether its content, form, or technique demonstrates significant innovation within its genre of practice
2. Whether it is significantly relevant to its social context and to other visual discourse
3. Whether its process of creation has rigorously incorporated inquiry, critical analysis, and experiment
4. Whether it can effectively engage an intended audience
5. Whether its form of presentation demonstrates an appropriate level of professional accomplishment

Second, as is common within practice-based research projects, the written component will develop through the methodology of an exegetical document. The methodological style and purposes of the exegetical piece vary from program to program: differing as a result of program-based values; strengths and weaknesses; faculty and student background; familiarity with qualitative research; and, finally, views and values regarding the purpose of the written document. Exegetical writing exists on a spectrum that includes self-reflexive writing, explanation of the studio work through a written narrative, and research that is both studio-based and studio-led.

2.6.1 The Function and Form of the Exegesis

As a reference point for thinking through the function and form of my exegetical writing, I turned to the scholarship in *TEXT*. In particular, *TEXT* produced a special issue in 2017 that provided a “complex discussion of the purpose, form, function, conceptual, aesthetic, [and] stylistic illuminations of the ongoing shifts in exegetical writing” (Batty & Brien, 2017). The

very design of my research methodology had me entering and exiting my writing throughout the entirety of my project. Being an academic who is primarily trained within the humanities, qualitative research methodologies are familiar to me. It has been fascinating for me throughout the research process to fully explore the various positions on both the overall methodology of arts-based research as well as more specifically thoughts regarding exegesis. Drawing from a breadth of perspectives – considering different programs, and geographical and historical contexts – I have come to piece together a model that works best for my project. This was harder than I expected, because unlike other dissertations (such as in the field of Disability Studies), there are no standard models. While it is true that there is not one way to write a dissertation regardless of your field, the newness of arts-based research in doctoral programs creates a very specific difficulty in justifying decisions around the structure of the research project and the outcomes of the research (including but not limited to the written dissertation). Outlining my decisions regarding the function and form of the exegesis will help to make sense of the entire project.

Alberts, Drummond, and Freeman (2017) state: “the exegesis is particular in that you are not writing a dissertation like in other fields” (p. 6). An important element of the design of a studio-based research project is, as Alberts, Drummond, and Freeman explain, the “need to forge some kind of relationship between the exegesis and creative text” (p. 6). While the authors are referring specifically to creative text written in creative writing-based doctoral programs, the same could be said for the connections made between the exegesis and other styles of creative work. This becomes more apparent as the research process unfolds. The reflections of the authors outline how they started out with the assumption that the various components of their own projects would happen in different ways using different methods of working and even

completing the work within different spaces. And yet, the blurring of these lines happens very naturally – something that the authors conclude, and which has become apparent in the work that I undertake. In fact, I would argue that the blurring of these lines is precisely what helps to determine a creative project that marries function and form in both the written and creative elements. To separate the two, having them exist in discrete spheres of space and cognition, fails to allow either of the practices to truly interact, inform, and expand in relation to the other.

For me, the relationship between my written component and creative practice was a central issue that often helped me engage with my project at many stages of the work, and yet I was not present to the centrality of this issue until near the end of my writing process. It was natural for me to oscillate between my studio space and office space throughout the project. When I would work my way through a technical or aesthetic challenge, I would find myself in need of reading and writing, a practice that helped as the various conceptual elements of my project were flooding my consciousness. The opposite also held true; at times I would become saturated with reading and writing, needing to escape into the studio to work on my creative practice. Knowing that the two spaces are interconnected, I had a general awareness of how this helped to work through these liminal spaces of the research I was developing. Yet there were also multiple forces that inhibited the ease of this process. For instance, the pressures of designing and completing a research-creation project within the confines of a humanities doctoral program have stifled my ease in laying into my creative practice. Constantly feeling like I have had to justify both my process and my practice has materialized a nervousness in my creative process that has been difficult to separate from the labour of completing a doctoral degree. This is not entirely unusual, as many graduate students – formally and informally – outline the emotional labour that is a taken-for-granted element of completing a doctoral research

project. Add into this intermittent and at times prolonged experiences of significant crisis and distress, and the doctoral project becomes a list of tasks in need of completion. While this proves difficult regardless of the style of research, within creative-based projects this can take a serious toll on both the student and the project. An important point to keep in mind, though, is that while iterative processes are not inherently unique to studio-based projects, they are an important element to nurture in an open, flexible, and intentional way. Integrating this aspect reinforces that not only do the creative and written outputs of the research hold equal importance in the project, they also inform the very creation of one another (Alberts, Drummond & Freeman, 2017).

Another point that Alberts, Drummond, and Freeman (2017) clearly outline is how the structure of the exegesis manifests its aims and goals. For instance, they state:

Writing the exegesis is less about ‘mapping’ of one’s own creative writing against other literary works in terms of craft and structure, or reflecting on one’s own practice, although these might be included in the thesis. Rather, as ‘exegetical thinking’, it aims to generate further knowledge and creative work on which to then rebuild ideas, and also changes how we think of research, encourages creative thinking there too. (p. 12)

This is a point that Brien, Owens, Pittaway, and Waters (2017) bring up as one of the few agreements of exegetical writing – specifically, what it is not (that is, explanation, explication, or commentary on the creative work). An important point here, which is not overlooked by the authors, is that in fact over the years many exegesises have been written in the aforementioned style. They go on to explain that in the ongoing development of creative arts doctoral programs, exegesises that are explanatory or heavily self-reflexive in nature tend to be weaker conceptually, theoretically, and aesthetically. Referencing the work of Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010) as well as

Ings (2009), Brien et al. (2017) refer to the connective model as being one that is emergent in the field, placing the role of the exegesis as looking both outward and inward. Here the exegesis is seen as both turning to established fields of research, theories, and discourses and also reflecting on methods, processes, and outcomes of the creative work. The authors then explain how this style of arts-based research informs the way the exegesis is approached.

The development of this research project has been in the style that Milech and Schilo (2004) refer to as the Research-Question model. This model helps to bridge theory and practice by hinging both the exegetical writing as well as the studio work on a central research question (Milech & Schilo, 2004). In many ways, this style of research-creation helps me to make sense of my creative work in a way that is not completely disparate from my training as a Disability Studies scholar. As Brien et al. (2017) outline, this style of creative research can lead to exegetical writing that highlights the:

- statement of initial interest and motivation of researcher
- questions to be investigated
- context for the investigation
- framework for this investigation
- record of the experimentation undertaken
- findings/scholarship generated
- contributions to knowledge

These components, however, do not occur in completely discrete sections throughout my exegesis. This project intends to approach the exegetical writing, commonly referred to as the dissertation within Critical Disability Studies programs, as an interwoven written document. Both pieces of the research work alongside one another, complementing the research findings,

while neither component of the project is able to replace the other. Petelin (n.d.) describes this methodological approach as serving particular purposes:

1. It articulates the research question with which the studio work engages, and the nature of the visual practice and theoretical framework adopted for this engagement.
 - a. It explains key terms within the research question and of the theoretical frameworks or methodologies adopted.
 - b. It explains how historical principles pertaining to the chosen genre of practice are relevant for engaging with the question.
2. It provides an account of why the research question is significant in terms of:
 - a. the debates that have taken place about it, or related themes, in the literature;
 - b. forms of art practice that have engaged with the question or related issues. (This is a literature and image survey, i.e., a “context survey.”)
3. It identifies how the work to be examined will contribute something new and valid to the previously described field, by means of a critical examination of:
 - a. the work itself and its potential meaning in contexts that it will encounter;
 - b. how it relates to the work of other contemporary visual artists who respond to this, or to a related, question.
4. It allows discussion of the process of its creation and development, the strategic choices, direction changes, and breakthroughs that were made by the candidate in consideration of potential meanings and contexts, and the strategies of other artists. (This could be termed the “studio methodology” section.)
5. It provides a conclusion and summation of what has been achieved and what future directions could be explored.

6. It documents the work submitted and the notes on its gallery installation for examination.

I found that much of my initial writing attended to my creative practice by weaving it throughout the text in order to make sense of the various projects that are photographically documented in my studio. Some of the photographs are of textile objects that are finished pieces and have shown in exhibits, while others are textile-based studies and sketches that led to learning. The latter aesthetic explorations are where ruptures for new work begin to emerge. All of this work organically takes shape alongside my conceptual (written) explorations. Nearing the end of my project, I began to map out a chapter that was solely devoted to documenting my creative experimentation and labour. Almost immediately I became stuck in the writing process. I turned to my process notes, my sketchbooks, and my journals. Perplexed at the difficulty I was experiencing, I spent time in my studio, surrounded by my creative work, trying and failing to map out my chapter. In frustration my response was to read. Slightly aimlessly I engaged in various academic and popular writing on research-creation and other arts-based research projects. After two weeks of reading and note taking, plus a semi-regular revisiting of my own work, it dawned on me that the function and the form of the chapter was in direct contradiction to the overall aims and goals of my project. Separating out my creative process from the rest of my text was difficult, as I was trying to make sense of how the exegetical writing and creative pieces work together – seeing them not just as related but enmeshed with one another.

This experience taught me a key lesson on the importance of the theoretically informed aesthetic decisions I make throughout this project. Working in the liminal spaces between Mad Studies and Critical Craft Praxis can be uncomfortable. I often feel like I am trying to make sense of my work, which puts me in the defensive position of trying to translate. Translation,

however, is not in fact the role I see myself best suited for in relation to this project. Both Mad Studies and creative practices are not fields that really ever make *sense*. My experiences within Mad Movement organizing have shown me the need to deeply question what it means to value “sense” – or logic and reason – as necessary to validate knowledge. By disrupting the drive to make sense, we can disrupt the rational logic that psychiatry and related fields have used to define, manage, and contain madness. I often find that when we talk about mad identities as social identities, formed through the politics of a social movement, that the general public just cannot make sense of it as a political issue. A result of this is that the justice-oriented organizing that is foundational to the Mad Movement is unintelligible to folks who think the conversation should begin and end with individual healing. Similarly, I find that arts-based research that relies too heavily on skill sets that are intelligible within qualitative or quantitative methodologies do themselves a disservice. Instead of trying to make sense by translating it into the framework of another field, I see this project as strongest when it frames research and creates knowledge that values the expansiveness of its approach (Quayson, 2007). And so, here, the exegetical writing aesthetically is less concerned with being organized in a way that can be taken up as a “contribution to knowledge”; instead, I am more interested in positioning it as a meaningful and significant “cultural contribution” (Nelson, 2004) through how it disrupts and intervenes in knowledge.

2.7 Research Questions

Below are the research questions that guide my theoretical and aesthetic explorations in both the written and the creative components of my work.

2.7.1 Thesis Question

- How might the historical and contemporary context of mad art help to produce new and innovative forms of a fibre-based craft studio practice?

2.7.2 Secondary Questions

- Through a review of forty-five years of existing Deaf, disability, and mad art in Canada, how does an engagement with mad politics inform aesthetic development within a craft studio practice and how does this differ from apolitical and ahistorical approaches to mad aesthetics?
- What models and definitions of creativity and aesthetic value might help us theorize and learn from politicized fibre art?
- How can a socially engaged art practice contribute to community and cultural production as opposed to generating the spectacle of the mad experience?
- What is the nature of the ways in which theoretical and craft-based pursuits inform creative production?
 - What are the connections between craft practices and mad people?
 - How do craft practices materialize the mad subject – as maker, as creative process, as aesthetic value, and as subject matter or conceptual content?
- In what ways does the rhetoric of inclusion, both generally as well as in disability-positive arts discourses, lead to the consumption, co-optation, and appropriation of the mad artist, the mad identity, and the mad story?

- What role does a mad, queer, feminist aesthetic play in the disruption of depoliticized aesthetic values?
- What does a politicized approach to practice-based research contribute to the fields of Disability Studies, Disability Arts and Culture, and fine arts?

2.8 Conclusion – Crafting Survivor Research

I consider this project to be survivor research. Naming it as such helps to build onto the canon of survivor research, which roots itself methodologically as creating methods of resistance. While seemingly only influential on a theoretical level, the traditions of survivor research teach us that how we approach knowledge exploration and creation matters just as much as what type of knowledge gets produced. And so I lean on survivor research as a way to critically situate my role as a researcher: throughout this dissertation project, you will see the ways in which mad people are positioned as insider-outsider, and I see this role as being integral to my methodological framework. When mad people take up the position of researcher, they often cause a great deal of confusion, most commonly leading to a line of questioning that demands to know if the mad person is the subject-object of research, and if not, how they intend to keep themselves distanced from the work. Survivor research resists dominant paradigms that require professional distance, but not in expected ways. Standing the feminist platitude on its head, when survivor research espouses that the personal is political, it very rarely intends to give you any insight into the personal story of madness. Somehow, the rare occasion that mad experiences are seen as valuable is when they provide an inward gaze for others to assess. This leads to a flattening of survivor research as a method through which collective and institutional memory are evaporated and social context is denied almost entirely.

Within my methodological framework, I maintain that the telling of personal stories is neither inherently political nor necessarily relevant in theoretical exploration. Shifting the value of experiential knowledge necessitates a decentring of the singularity of the individual case. This project starts from a place that looks outward, and it asks questions informed by the social and historical context of struggles and resistance developed through Mad Movement organizing. Seeing both my studio and the office as sites of research references, I've found both the creative and written components as equally meaningful in the development of the project. The investigative and methodological frameworks of research-creation, survivor research, and Critical Craft Praxis inform the research design. Both the written document and the creative work are guided by the primary and secondary research questions. Working in the new spaces created between the methodological frameworks of survivor research and the arts-based research allows for fissures to happen as new practices burst open. While there are many ways to position arts-based research, I look to McNamara (2012) in his view that creative research can help us to turn away from the need to resolve and instead use our research to "render problematic" (p. 12). Questioning the epistemological assumptions that see the researcher's subjectivity as a weakness to be avoided, for fear of designing a research project that turns psychotherapeutic (McNamara, 2012), I craft research in a way that calls on experiential knowledge in order to create a method of resistance.

Chapter 3 – Auditing an Aesthetic Framework

3.1 Introduction

The goal of the artistic audit is to establish prior work done in the field of fibre art that sets a foundation for presenting the relevance of my studio-based creative work. Reviewing the exhibitions, artefacts, and studio practices of artists who engage with themes, mediums, and identities that relate directly to my research helps to determine a theoretical framework – aesthetically, conceptually, and practice-based – for both my studio and my written work. The artistic audit will explore the broader field of fibre art while considering the context of creative production, the processes and practices of the artists, and the significance of conceptual issues in the relationship between the artist, creative work, and audience. The artists I have selected inform the development of my own practice through the techniques of fibre-based creative work as both political and conceptual mediums. Relying on artist websites, online images, edited or self-authored books, online articles, and attending exhibitions, I discuss the artists and their work in relation to the field of socially engaged fibre art. Following the traditions of Swanwick (as cited in Haseman, 2006) these interrogations will express more than a neutral gathering of sensory impressions. As Haseman endorses, I use my experienced and informed view of the artists and their work to detect and discuss the relevant nuances of their creative practices. To do so, I draw on my knowledge of Critical Disability Theory, Mad Studies, Critical Craft Praxis (Fariello, 2011), and mad art that is intertwined with radical queer and feminist politics.

3.2 Judith Scott

As a sculptural artist, Judith Scott (1943–2005) used both fibre and found objects to create her three-dimensional forms. At the age of thirty-five, after having grown up in an institutional setting, Scott moved from Ohio to California when she reunited with her twin sister. Upon

moving to Oakland, Scott developed her art practice at the Creative Growth Art Center – an art program developed for people with developmental and physical disabilities (Morris and Higgs, 2014). Scott’s work is commonly positioned as Outsider Art (Morris and Higgs, 2014); this has had a profound impact on the way I have taken up and engaged with Scott’s work, yet it does so in a way that contrasts many people’s reactions to work and artists typically defined in relation to the movement of Outsider Art. To me, the ways in which Outsider Artists are talked and written about, defined, exhibited, and responded to say more about the people outside of the means of production and less about the artists and their artwork. For this reason, I will set aside this point for a second and return to it later in my discussion regarding Scott. First I want to talk about the aesthetic and process-based qualities of Scott’s work that interest me most.

I have had the opportunity to see the work of Judith Scott in person at the Brooklyn Museum in the exhibit titled “Bound and Unbound” (October 2014–March 2015) (Morris and Higgs, 2014). “Bound and Unbound” was a comprehensive retrospective of Scott’s work, with a focus on her textile-wrapped sculptural pieces. Seeing the breadth of work that spans Scott’s career helped me to understand the trajectory of her technical skills, which included the development of her style, aesthetic choices, processes, and technique.

One of the main elements of Judith’s work that I am drawn to is the ways in which both the fibre as well as the found objects are transformed within the process of creating the sculpture. Scott often used pieces of yarn, cloth or paper towel to wrap objects that varied in their recognizability in the final products. In some sculptures the viewer can clearly identify the use of a shopping cart, a table fan, or sticks, while in others the objects disappear except to produce form in a way that can completely conceal what is encased within. The materials used are ones that are familiar and often encountered in everyday life. Yet, in person, I found myself

mesmerized with the sculptures as entities with their own unique properties – not deducible to the familiarity of the fibre materials used. This transformation in many ways moved beyond the notion that the sculpture was a sum of its parts. Instead, each sculpture drew me in based on its elements of design – the shape of the form, the use of colour (whether chaotic or monochromatic), the size and scale. Both in the moment of witnessing and in reflection, each piece has had me thinking through the meticulous manipulation of the fibre and the ways in which process transforms. It pushes me to think beyond literal representations, which is an area in which I am often more comfortable within my own studio practice.

The text that accompanied the exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum (“Bound and Unbound,” 2014–2015) focused heavily on the biographical information of the artist. Being positioned as an Outsider Artist – or in this particular case, an artist with a disability – seemed to necessitate framing the artist as such. There was not a piece of text that did not reference disability. As an artist I consistently tie my work and practice to my experiences as a mad person, although doing so has me conflicted. Traditionally when art is exhibited within the paradigm of Outsider Art, which focuses on dominant discourses when defining the Otherness of the artist, the artist is not seen as anything but their difference. Scott’s work is often described with terms such as “erratic,” “instinctive,” “innate,” “natural,” and “apolitical” (Morris and Higgs, 2014). I am troubled by the implications of using these concepts to frame the work of an artist who is never understood outside of her experience of being disabled. What does this say about the connections made between disability, disabled people, art, and artists (Fraser, 2010)? In what ways does this position the formal art world as a site that reproduces harmful disability tropes? Further, how does this impact the development of cultural production within disability and mad communities?

3.3 Richard Boulet

Canadian artist Richard Boulet is a fibre artist who has been hugely influential in my own art career. In December of 2012, I went to see Boulet's solo exhibit "Stitched and Drawn" at the Textile Museum of Canada. It was early in my days as a PhD student and I was becoming disinterested in the research topic I thought would be the focus of my future dissertation work. As a result of my waning interest, I began to question why I was enrolled in academia at all. While walking around the exhibit, I was particularly taken by Boulet's integration of fibre techniques, such as quilting and patchwork – skills that I had been developing since the age of thirteen – with the raw critiques of the day-to-day lived experiences of a queer person who has been psychiatrized.

I remember having a conversation not too long after taking in the Boulet exhibit in which I declared my desire to "quit academia" and become a full-time quilt maker. Facing a combination of shifting research interests and apathy toward my schoolwork at the time, I increasingly found myself yearning to spend more and more time working on the craft that has often brought me solace in times of change and discomfort. I continued to make these comments to various friends and colleagues, who, for the most part, brushed it off as a mid-academic life crisis, and I was assured that I would make it through to the other side.

However, it was my continued revisiting of the images of Boulet's fibre pieces that had me (and in turn others) taking my shift in interests increasingly seriously. Included in the exhibit at the Textile Museum of Canada ("Stitched and Drawn," 2012) were pieces that incorporated techniques such as patchwork, quilting, cross-stitch, embroidery, appliqué, weaving, and braiding. The pieces ranged from pillows to wall hangings and ranged in size and style. Some of the pieces resembled banners, others fit more closely to the conventions of traditional quilted

wall hangings, while still others took on a more sculptural feel. I find myself taken by Boulet's process in developing fibre pieces, which utilizes what are dominantly understood as craft-based techniques. I am struck by the political messages stitched and embroidered into his work that move his personal experiences of madness and homelessness into a critique of systems, institutions, and dominant practices and beliefs – Boulet did this by referencing psychiatric drugs, structural experiences of oppression, negative experiences with systems, and critiques of linear progressions in relation to experiences of madness, queer identities, and homelessness.

As with Scott's work, I am fascinated by the ways in which Boulet is defined and exhibited in relation to his experiences with the mental health system. As a result of his explicit self-reflexive practices, his work is framed predominantly within the ideological framework of mental illness often linked with the notion of art as therapeutic practice. This has me thinking about the ways in which Boulet's art, while providing at times scathing reviews of experiences in the system, can be (and is) used as a tool within processes of mental health literacy.

3.4 Josh Faught

As I have only experienced the work of Josh Faught, a California-based artist, through online and print publications, my visual reference points are limited to photographic images and in-depth written descriptions. Faught's work draws largely on textile techniques such as weaving, crochet, dyeing, and embellishment with sequins, nail polish, and paints. Often taking on sculptural qualities, the textile pieces are draped over freestanding armatures or affixed to canvases (Faught, n.d.).

As I take in and integrate Josh Faught's artistic facility, I am impressed with how he seamlessly incorporates the varied conceptually driven aspects of his practice. In my own studio practice, I often have a difficult time discussing with others my work's ability to translate the

varied conceptually driven influences in a way that does not overcomplicate the conversation. I have found the written descriptions of Faught's work to be helpful in distilling these influences and conceptualizing them under the main themes of the history of textiles, a social/political history, and a personal history.

As a quilt maker and nature-based dyer, the work that I do is deeply connected to a history of textile work that I understand as being informed by feminist and queer politics. Like many quilt makers and fibre artists before me, I took up the craft of quilting through informal instruction. I learned the techniques and skills during extended visits with my aunt. This aspect of my practice and training is an integral part of my process. Acknowledging the devalued history of textiles as central to my work helps me to unsettle how women artists – often positioned as crafters – are taken up and (de)valued in the contemporary art world. Further silenced are the legacies of women who are marginalized in relation to their race, Indigeneity, class, sexuality, ability, and experiences of madness.

Like Faught, and as a fibre artist who does the labour of dyeing the textiles I work with using nature-based dyes, I have integrated an environmentally responsive component into my practice. It is important to me to acknowledge that no aesthetic decision is made void of politics. I am drawn to the aesthetic outcomes of working with cloth dyed with mostly plant materials instead of commercially dyed or using fibre reactive dyes. Yet I am also aware of the complicated politics involved in negotiating this practice. There is a contemporary notion that handmade, do-it-yourself, and natural are inherently more ethical practices. This simply is not the case, and in fact this is often used as a way of branding products and commodifying natural resources that furthers capitalist and imperialist agendas.

The work that I create addresses socially contextualized histories through more than just process and choice of medium, and through Faught's body of work I have been able to make sense of this element of my practice. Through my quilted pieces – which vary in form from functional daily objects such as quilts and pillows to objects intended to hang on walls – I explore subject matter that is explicitly rooted in issues of social justice. Taking up experiences of madness, gender, disability, race, class, and more, I create artwork that considers experiences of oppression, discrimination, barriers, cultural development, social justice, and social movements.

Finally, as a mad, queer, radical feminist I see all of my work as being simultaneously deeply personal and profoundly political. I create based on what I experience in the world around me, how I engage with what is happening in society, and situate those personal experiences within a mad queer feminist politic. I am conscious of the ways in which mad women artists are positioned as making art solely about their personal experience. I am cautious of the ways in which my work can and will be read as an expression of my madness through an individualized lens. Yet I feel it necessary to create simultaneously from the position of “I” as well as the collective “we.”

3.5 Al Loving

Reflecting on the ways in which Loving and his work are written about, it is important to consider how race has come to form a central framework in how his art is understood. In 1968 Loving was the first Black male artist to have a solo exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Loving's early career as an abstract artist has been positioned as a highly unusual body of work for him, because of how race is read and governed in formal art circles. Not unlike other artists positioned on the margins of the hegemonic art world, most Black artists were

encouraged to develop work that spoke to their identities as African Americans. Some have considered the later shift in his art career to be revolutionary because it had him put down the “tools of the oppressor” and create with self-taught skills that were understood to have liberated him. In that way, the framing of Loving’s practice, in how it is taken up, taken in, mediated, and responded to has been deeply tied to his identity and his Otherness (Yau, 2012).

I can remember walking through the Museum of Modern Art in New York and pausing in front of one of Loving’s torn-canvas paintings. In this particular series, Loving worked with strips of coloured or painted canvas, sewing them together to create structurally abstract pieces that appear to be both painting and wall-hanging. What drew me in was the use of fibre techniques that, to me, created an instant parallel between his work and the quilting techniques that he was referencing. In this set of pieces, Loving was attempting to move beyond the initial famed qualities that were found in his abstract paintings earlier in his career. Imagining the act of Loving tearing up the canvas – much of which came from earlier work – as well as his use of techniques learned from his mother, who was a quilt maker, has influenced my views on the role of process and progression in the valuing and evaluating of art practices.

In the moments where Loving felt as though he was stuck in a box (Yau, 2012), he looked backwards for inspiration. While speaking of Loving’s process as one that destroyed his previous work, I can look at the newer pieces and see how Loving built his new body of work with and from the old. This happens both literally through the use of the old canvases, but also through the use of old and new techniques.

3.6 Line Bruntse

As a Danish sculptor based in Pennsylvania, Line Bruntse is engaged with the ways in which women artists are subverting the fibre practices that have historically been used to define

and enforce gender roles. Using structure, form, and non-traditional materials, Bruntse subverts these fibre practices in a way that goes beyond aesthetic, technical, and design-based decisions. Bruntse is known for valuing the relationship between her audience and her artwork. As Bruntse declares: “I really want my work to touch people, not just be beautiful to look at, so they can get some of that story that inspired the work but with their own information plugged in” (May, 2014, p. 89).

While I am drawn to the various ways in which Bruntse subverts historically feminine creative practices, I am moved by the attention and agency she gives to her audience in the final product of her work – this helps to transition the art from object to intervention. While Bruntse works in various mediums and forms, I am particularly drawn to her various large-scale installations that play with the scale and form of the textiles, which at times are juxtaposed against steel structures. Within her various pieces, Bruntse often has her installations interact with elements of architecture – strips of cloth suspended from a quilt-like object in the rafters, or tentacle and appendage-like forms extending off of canvases affixed to walls or cascading out of architectural forms and pooling on the floor (Bruntse, n.d.). As I think through, practice, and make work that largely represents a counter-hegemonic discourse in regard to madness, femininity, queerness, and other aspects of my privileged and oppressed subjective identities, I am constantly thinking about the audience. Admittedly I more often place my concerns around the accessibility and clarity of my expression, which positions the audience as passive recipients of what I intend to be translated. Bruntse reminds me of the importance of considering the experiences, identities, and realities that an audience inherently brings to their unique experiences of artwork. Not only does this reposition the value of the audience, but it shifts the

ways in which we evaluate the art as we consider what impact the art has on the audience and what impact the audience has on the art.

As I challenge myself through this thought process in accepting the presence of the audience, I am forced to value the relationship with the audience. Being present with the inherently varied, complicated, complex, differing positions of the viewer has me thinking of my practice as being more collective in process. What I make does not depend solely on my experience(s), my perspective(s), and my message. What I make does not have to be limited by perceiving it as a reflection of my engagement with the social world around me. If I intend for others to engage with and respond to what I make, I am beginning to see that I have to take up the audience as a valuable part of my creative process. As I develop the concepts of my work, I am challenged to think about the audience as having an integral role within a working relationship.

3.7 LJ Roberts

As a fibre artist I have often struggled with positioning myself between the world of art and craft. At policy, societal, and institutional levels, artists and craftspeople are often forced into boxes that define fine art and craft practices as dichotomous. One of the reasons that I struggle with this is because I find the distinctions between the two to be problematic.⁴ However, there are examples of creative practices where makers are both subverting these categories and refusing to allow the designations to boundary their creative processes. For me, LJ Roberts is an

⁴ The social and historical trajectory of the development of art versus the development of craft as creative practice is a topic that is beyond the scope of this artistic audit. See, for instance: Buszek, M.E. (2011). *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

example of how creative work that is exhibited in galleries and other artistic institutions can unsettle these limiting definitions of art and craft.

With a master of fine arts degree and a master of arts in Visual and Critical Studies, LJ Roberts defines their practice thusly:

I approach working in textiles with a political urgency. Activism entwined with critical queer/transgender politics, feminist histories, and the on-going AIDS epidemic deeply drives my work. From the shirts worn during protest marches, to the AIDS quilt, to punk zines and patches, I am interested in materialities that mark political histories. The socio-economic-political and laborial circumstances of textiles, both in concept and material, become the root of re-imagining queer representation and alternative histories. My practice employs a wide spectrum of textile methods positioning highly technical skills alongside amateur techniques to (re)imagine ideas of mastery and utility. Recent works include large scale quilted and knitted installations, single-strand four by six inch embroidered portraits and jacquard-woven banners. (n.d.)

When I think of Roberts's work I envision hot pink yarn, multicoloured knitting, wire, steel poles, and embroidery. In their pieces *Build It Up To Tear It Down* and *We Couldn't Get In. We Couldn't Get Out.*, Roberts uses crank-knit yarn, wire, and steel poles to construct large-scale multicoloured and hot pink fence structures – an incredibly striking, repeating yet ever changing motif in their work. In contrast, Roberts recreates activist buttons through embroidery in *Portrait of Deb (1988–199?)* (Roberts, n.d.). The fluidity between high and low cultural production adds to Roberts's work instead of detracting from it. The aesthetic, technical, and design elements of the sculpture and installation are striking and the content explored is thought provoking. Through medium, method, and concept, Roberts combines seemingly opposing elements of simplicity and

complexity. I find this encouraging as it pushes me to continue to evolve in my creative processes. Often I find the work of having to prove the legitimacy of my “craft” (quilt making) or to fill the requirements to fit into the box of “fine art” can be both exhausting and stifling. Additionally, I constantly struggle to connect my counter-hegemonic ideas with mainstream audiences. LJ Roberts demonstrates how drawing on skills, techniques, and values from various disciplines can help to enhance and open up practice-based boundaries.

3.8 Chawne Kimber

Chawne Kimber documents her quilt making and fibre practices through her various social media accounts (Kimber, n.d.). Kimber’s brightly coloured modern quilts are distinguishable through her use of solid coloured quilting cottons. In her quilting practice, Kimber is known for working with small-scale patchwork, improvisational piecing, text-based designs, and conceptual content that is social justice-oriented. In *Self Study # 4: The one for T*, Kimber mimics an Andy Warhol styled collage with four self-images taken while wearing a hoodie. On a red and white queen-sized quilt, Kimber creates a patchwork text box that reads: “legit rape here.” Both quilts engage with contemporary social issues – police violence, rape culture, racism, sexism, class – as they unfold in the American context (Kimber, n.d.).

The Modern Quilt movement is a creative community marked by historical and aesthetic qualities. As one of the more contemporary quilting movements, the Modern Quilt Guild has been part of the quilting revival in newer generations of quilters. Existing predominantly in the United States with smaller factions worldwide, the Modern Quilting community is often connected through online participation in blogs, Instagram, Flickr and other social media platforms. There has been debate among members regarding the aesthetic characteristics of a modern quilt(er). The Modern Quilt Guild (founded in 2009) describes modern quilting as

“includ[ing], but [...] not limited to: the use of bold colors and prints, high contrast and graphic areas of solid color, improvisational piecing, minimalism, expansive negative space, and alternate grid work” (Modern Quilt Guild, n.d.).

On the one hand, the modern quilt community is not wholly separate from the contemporary do-it-yourself (DIY) movement in which making and/or creating things for oneself is taken up as inherently progressive, political, and socially responsible. I myself have struggled to find relevance with the DIY movement because of people’s unwillingness to socially and historically contextualize the movement and lack of critical thinking regarding its ways of perpetuating capitalist values. For instance, at times I find myself reading modern quilting blogs as a way to engage with new techniques or to simply visually satiate my interest in what is being made by other contemporary quilters. Yet I have found that white middle-to-upper-class women who predominantly identify as mothers and makers are overwhelmingly represented in the modern quilting community through various social media outlets. The conversations are generally about buying the “right” fabric made by the “right” designer and valuing the hands of the individual maker without questioning the continued exploitation of transnational textile labourers through DIY culture.

However, this is not to say that the entire movement of modern (or contemporary) quilters and makers is made up of just one homogenous group. I can remember stumbling across Kimber’s blog (Kimber, n.d.) less than a decade before I began my dissertation project. I was immediately captured by the marrying of the development of a fibre practice with a critical analysis of the surrounding social world – both through the content of the quilts as well as through the commentary on the blog. It was then that I had a bit of an “aha” moment in which I began to understand how it is possible to be influenced by and in conversation with

contemporary craftspeople, makers, and quilt communities without divorcing from my politics in relation to madness, gender, sexuality, class, race, capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Kimber demonstrated that one can focus on the development of skills and techniques while also engaging with critical and controversial subject matter – it became clear to me that it did not have to be one or the other; it could be both (simultaneously and separately) and still be a cohesive body of work. When Kimber made quilts that took up issues such as the use of the n-word in public graffiti, the Trayvon Martin case, the f-word, and the notion of “legitimate rape” within conservative American politics, there was both an immense amount of support as well as a backlash of anger expressed by fellow quilt makers. What was striking, though, was that people were engaging with contemporary and historical social issues in a way that was not happening in significant ways elsewhere in the modern quilting world.

3.9 Sanford Biggers

Conceptually, Sanford Biggers has explored issues of “identity, race, African American history, and spirituality” (Biggers, n.d.) through many of his artistic pieces. These themes are central in his series known as “Quilt Drawings” from 2012 (Biggers, n.d.). “Quilt Drawings” consists of a series of vintage quilts on which Biggers paints. Through his mark making, Biggers explores images linked to star maps in an effort to engage with the history of the Underground Railroad, which has been storied to use both the stars and quilt blocks to guide slaves to freedom. Adding an extra layer of depth to the expression of these pieces, many of the quilts used by Biggers are donated by descendants of slave owners (Biggers, n.d.).

Often it is the creation of the quilt that draws me into the artistic piece. I am a person who is driven by process. I deeply value the knowledge development tied to the work of creating. As a quilt maker, this often has me intrigued by the textile-based techniques utilized to construct

fibre projects. However, with Biggers's work I am reminded, through his artistic process (and products), of the social history behind these material objects. So as Biggers uses illustration and painting techniques to add to, interact with, and mark up the quilts, I am likewise reminded of the complicated history of quilts. On the one hand, quilts have been linked with the Underground Railroad as a possible way of communicating safe pathways for the liberation of people – although it is important to note that this way of storying quilts is a contested history. It is also important to think about the use of quilt making as a way that maintained power and structures of oppression from the production of cotton through to the labour of producing the quilts themselves. Seeing the creative process in its entirety as being a site of politics necessitates that neither the history nor the contemporary circumstances in which creative production happens should be romanticized or positioned as void of socio-political context. Biggers's pieces, in which the quilts are both central to and yet also in the background of his artistic expression, create the possibility for a complex engagement with fibre practices as an art form.

3.10 Ginger Brooks Takahashi

Born in 1977, Brooklyn-based artist Ginger Brooks Takahashi has taken the age-old tradition of community quilting bees and explicitly connected them to intentionally political engagement through her ongoing work *An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail*. Likening the ideals connected to community quilting meetings to those experienced in the queer community, Brooks Takahashi defines and redefines both historical and contemporary elements of the social aspect of quilting. This explicit discussion regarding the potential political possibilities of quilting has been influential in my own practice (Brooks Takahashi, n.d.).

Further, Brooks Takahashi refers to quilting forums as being both an artwork through process as well as an end product. Accordingly, it is pertinent to think about the different

locations in which the partially quilted, well-handled quilt travels and takes up space. Through the performance of stitching, communal story sharing, directed readings, and teach-ins, this unprecious piece of art both travels to the formal exhibiting museums and gallery spaces as well as the less formal gardens and living spaces (Brooks Takahashi, n.d.). As a direct link to the literature that explores the studio as being a site of knowledge production, it has helped me to conceptualize quilt making as a valuable aspect of studio-based knowledge production. By focusing on the process of making through the community-based quilting bee, in *An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail*, Brooks Takahashi urges us to move beyond the notion that knowledge is developed through the interpretation of the finished artwork. Instead, taking in the process – including the dialogue that develops through the community of quilters – as a necessary product within the act of making sees the work of the artist as a central component of the product. As an artist with an academic practice (or an academic with an art practice), this is an important piece in conceptualizing art as valid and valuable knowledge production with its own unique methods and methodologies, which counters the current trend in using art as an “add-on” to either quantitative- or qualitative-based methods of knowledge creation.

3.11 Yoshiko Jinzenji

Having worked with fibres for over forty years, Japanese artist Yoshiko Jinzenji was first inspired by Canadian Mennonite quilters while living in Toronto in the 1960s and '70s. Jinzenji is a quilter who is well known for her minimalist designs with an aesthetic that relies on a limited use of colour juxtaposed with intricate quilting. Jinzenji's unique style of quilting gives off the essence of embossed paper (May, 2014). I am moved by the minimalism found in Jinzenji's work and the influence that it has had on quilters over the years. While Jinzenji's work utilizes various traditional quilting techniques such as patchwork, dye work, and quilting, her aesthetic

seems to transcend both genre and craft. Jinzenji's quilt and textile designs often occur on predominantly white backgrounds with asymmetrical designs made up of dashes, dots, and geometrical shapes, showing high contrasts between the minimalist visual design elements and her heavily textured quilting.

A key element of Jinzenji's conceptual process is the ways in which she locates her work within environmental contexts, thinking about geographical, historical, and cultural elements. Whether working with nature-based dyes or incorporating synthetic materials, Jinzenji believes that her quilts are best framed through understanding the place that they are made – typically Bali or Japan. Further, Jinzenji frames her use of various materials as the balancing of modern technological advances with work done by hand and using more natural elements. These aspects of Jinzenji's work – thinking through historical, geographical, and cultural context as well as balancing between modern and traditional techniques – have informed my own practice. As I ground my practice in craft techniques yet simultaneously engage with the world of fine art, I look to artists like Jinzenji to learn how to balance a respect for the craft, a recognition and honouring of the social context in which I make, and a commitment to pushing the elements of my work both conceptually and aesthetically.

3.12 Kyoung Ae Cho

Receiving her bachelor of fine arts in South Korea and her master of fine arts in the United States, Kyoung Ae Cho has been an exhibiting artist since 1984, showing her quilts both as art and as art quilts (May, 2014). Cho refers to her practice as playful as well as a collaboration with nature in which she values her responsibility to the environment and the natural resources with which she works (May, 2014). In her quilts, Cho sandwiches found natural resources, such as

wood and leaves, between the layers of fabric, understanding that over time her pieces will shift and change based on the natural degradation that takes place.

What I find impactful about Cho's quilts are their minimalist yet complex designs. As she explores the conceptualization of the ever-changing aspects of nature, art, and physical things, I experience her work as being consistent through process, medium, and idea. Within art, there is often an importance laid on the preservation and protection of the physical object – expecting to prolong the integrity of material things. However in both mediums with which I work, quilting and nature-based dyes, there is an inherent vulnerability and lifespan. When I dye fabric and make a quilt, I intend for it to be used, to be touched, to be part of people's lives. Whether a quilt is hanging on a wall, draped over a couch or wrapped around a body, I expect for the fibres to show wear and the colours to shift and fade over time. As Cho investigates through her work, the cycles of life and the deterioration of art (and material things) do not have to bring with them a devaluation of the object.

3.13 Conclusion – Fibre Art as Critical Praxis

Throughout this chapter I have engaged with the work of other artists in order to develop an aesthetic framework for the work of my dissertation project. Looking more broadly at textile artists, I have mostly selected artists outside of the field of Deaf, Disability, and Mad Art. This was not an entirely purposeful decision. However, in so doing, I am avoiding the positioning of my work as *only* being relevant in the context of other mad artists. While there is much to learn from the history of the field, I think it is equally important to connect my work outside and beyond those parameters. As such, I hope to bolster my conceptual and technical aesthetics through a more extensive framework.

From the artists explored in this audit, I have drawn aesthetic markers that I see as influential in the development of my studio practice. Thinking about fibre art as being sculptural and process-oriented helps me to expand the way I approach quilt making. Drawing on the role of identity in my work with an understanding of how the hegemonic art world uses identity to determine both what is expected of as well as what is allowed in our practices has me thinking critically about what it means to be a mad artist. Drawing on the relational elements of construction and destruction, I am interested in thinking about the vulnerability of making work that is based in the elements of nature. This has me reconsidering a shift in valuing my work as being process-oriented as opposed to just a finished object. This artistic audit has helped me to position the role of the audience as constantly in play and not something over which I have (or want) control. Finally, moving in and out of the written and studio-based components of this dissertation, I am compelled to think carefully about the politics of aesthetic decisions.

Chapter 4 – Making (Space) for Theoretical Exploration

Art should be, then, a place where boundaries can be transgressed, where visionary insights can be revealed within the context of the everyday, the familiar, the mundane. (hooks, 1995, p. 138)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will identify key theoretical points of exploration that are integral to the overall dissertation; through this process, it will also be possible to discern the resulting gaps in current debates in relation to the broader field and movements of Deaf, disability, and mad art. Both my exegetical writing and creative work explore these gaps as a way to reflect on the greater social context of Deaf, disability, and mad art. In the preface to *Method Meets Art*, Patricia Leavy (2009) calls on the utility of art to greatly impact people in a way that encourages different perspectives on the world around us. She also talks about art, both the process of creating and the end product, as having the capability to not just move between differences, but to bridge them as well. Through the work of this dissertation, I forge the bridges needed in order to move across many differences. Theoretically I work across fields and frameworks like Disability Studies, Mad Studies, and Critical Craft Praxis. In doing so, I explore the overlaps and spaces in between mad, queer, and feminist movements.

This dissertation is an unusual one in that it does not fit comfortably into any one program. On the one hand, this project is developed through the field of Disability Studies and is therefore rooted in theoretically based explorations of issues like access, inclusion, and the processes known as “cripping the arts.” While there have been shifts, including an increasing focus on the role of art making within Disability Studies, to date Disability Studies programs have typically approached knowledge creation through the practices of qualitative and quantitative research. Most arts-based projects tend to include creative work within these

research paradigms as opposed to seeing it as a wholly separate methodology. Using predominantly qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodologies not only impacts how the theoretical exploration takes shape, but also, through design, informs what theoretical concepts forefront the exploration. Thus, with its focus on critical theory and situated through mad, queer, feminist politics, this studio-based project is not an easy fit for Disability Studies in terms of what the program is currently practicing. Alternatively, with a studio craft praxis that is informed by the struggles and resistance of the Mad Movement, this project is not easily taken up in a fine arts program, either. Often the practice of making art has a heavy focus on just that, the making. When the focus is on learning skills and techniques to improve our aesthetic practices, the relevance of positioning our art in a larger theoretical and political context can get forgotten, devalued, or seen as irrelevant. So, as I outline the theoretical content of this project stemming from the guiding research questions outlined in Chapter 2, the focus is not on how to learn *about* a mad aesthetic. Instead I will centralize the problem of how to *make art* that engages in a dialogue *with* and in exploration of a mad aesthetic. In this way, the project affirms art as a valid way of producing knowledge that both engages with the world around us and is informed by an exploration of key theoretical concepts, outlined below.

4.2 Exploration as (Making) Theory

One doesn't arrive – in words or in art – by necessarily knowing where one is going. In every work of art something appears that does not previously exist, and so, by default, you work from what you know to what you don't know. (Hamilton, 2009, p. 68)

At the heart of it, this project is one of discovery and exploration. This dissertation works to understand new and critical perspectives that are informed by the theoretical underpinnings of Disability and Mad Studies by using of innovative research and creative methods. Through practice I have come to understand that art making is well suited for discovery and exploration.

Art making can help in the exploration of “consciousness raising efforts, raising critical awareness, social justice-oriented work, relating/portraying power relations, building coalitions and challenging dominant ideologies” (Leavy, 2009, p. 13). Positioning art in this way materializes my craft praxis – the connections between how I practice art, how I draw on critical theory, and how these stitch together to inform what I make and how I make it. Instead of having clear distinctions between the creative methods and the written (theoretical) content, the lines have blurred. The art practice and the theoretical foundations work symbiotically. This investigation of the emergence and fluidity of process illuminates the ways in which new knowledge is created *as* art is made and is not just mined through looking *at* or bearing witness *to* a piece of art (McNiff, 2013).

Through the overarching ideas of using art as a consciousness raising tool and developing a critical analysis as well as a method of social justice-oriented work, my focus within this project has been informed by both arts-based research and an unpacking of a mad, queer, feminist aesthetic. Through this creative exploration, I have worked with an understanding of the ways in which the theoretical foundations of the emerging field of Mad Studies as well as the practical basis of my creative work come together by mutually enhancing and moving beyond these initial theoretical foundations.

4.2.1 A Semester at Haliburton School of the Arts

I understand the origins of my creative practice as being very typical for a fibre artist. Quilting is a practice that is seldom taught through formal institutions. In many ways this felt congruous with the histories of Deaf, disability, and mad art that I have learned about. As movements, these art practices are tied to histories of political struggles and resistance ... or they are storied as cultural practices linked to identities of difference – art was developed as a way to

express pride or respond to oppression. So, on the one hand, my practice as quilter made sense to me in relation to situating my work alongside social movement organizing. Yet due to the fact that I came to see my creative work as an artistic practice late in my scholarly career, the feeling of not having “the right kind of training” became very present to me. So, I chose to take a semester off from my PhD studies in order to further my fibre training in the condensed Fibre Arts program at the Haliburton School of the Arts, through Fleming College.

Haliburton School of the Arts is situated on the traditional homeland of the Ojibway Nation and the Huron/Wendat Nation, and the territory now includes communities from the Mohawk Nation, the Pottawatomi Nation, and the Métis Nation of Ontario. Many people know Haliburton School of the Arts for their extensive summer programming. According to Watt, who reported on the fifty-year anniversary of the school in 2017, thousands of students take classes through the summer programming. The school was developed in the mid-1960s by a small group of artists as well as the Haliburton Highlands Guild of Fine Arts:

Ron McCaw, an avid photographer, came to Haliburton in 1966 to be the Minister of the United Church. He quickly gained an appreciation for the inspiring nature of the Highlands and envisioned an art school that would become the Banff of the East. His vision became a mission and his enthusiasm became infectious. In 1966 a small but fiercely dedicated group of people gathered in a Haliburton living room. (“A Story of,” n.d.)

Unsurprisingly, this storying of the inspiration for the school reads much like any other colonial project. The land is discovered, mined for its beauty and resources, commodified, marketed, and exploited for the well-meaning white colonial settler. These narratives of empty landscapes in waiting are ones that not only inform the positioning of many of the celebrated Canadian (read

white settler) artists (and craftspeople), but they have helped to build a national identity around our cultural institutions. Weavers and potters were some of the initial groups of artists, more specifically craftspeople, who became interested in the organizing of the school. The initial planning for Haliburton School of the Arts (now known as Haliburton School of Art and Design) coincided with the development of Sir Sandford Fleming College, which led to the creation of the school as a satellite program to the college.

There were three things that drew me to the Fibre Arts program at Haliburton: its proximity to my home, its condensed program, and its intensive focus on a broad curriculum of fibre practices. Although I was not able to live at home while attending the course, I was close enough that I was still able to return regularly, which was important in order to maintain employment. Cost of living in Haliburton is low, and with the aid of a bursary I was able to afford to take on the extra studies while still being engaged in my scholarship for my PhD. Seeing as the program was condensed, it only required me to commit to one semester of learning. For the most part this was preferable to me, as I was already multiple years into my PhD and was not able to conceive of extending my studies beyond one semester. However, the intensive style of the program also made it difficult, if not impossible, to attend to issues of accommodations in any type of meaningful way; this was a point not lost on me. As a graduate student and a university instructor, I have both formally and informally learned the ways to meet my accommodations needs within systems that are not set up to meet them for me. This is not a privilege that most Deaf, mad, and disabled students have. And so, while the programming is seen as being innovative in setup, it is important to consider how the small and remote characteristics of the school position it both as under-resourced in its ability to attend to issues of access and accommodation and perhaps as “flying under the radar” in that the number of

students reporting these needs is seen as insignificant due primarily to the school's overall smaller attendance.

And so the program is built around, as Watt (2017) reports, a sense of camaraderie and community. Who is envisioned as the community, however, is representational of those who feel a sense of belonging in the communities that are positioned at the centre of arts and craft worlds. As such, all of my instructors at the college were white creative types who did not engage a politics of making in their pedagogy. While I cannot entirely presuppose each instructor's ways of self-identifying, I do know that there were no connections made between our training in fibre arts and the struggles of resistance that I have come to learn inform my peers' aesthetics. On our field trip to Toronto, we were asked to marvel at the textiles in an area of Toronto referred to as Little India, in a way that wholly fetishized and exoticized a culture, and with no contextualization of the material reality of racism in Canada. The trip to the ROM incorporated a reflection on the work of Anatsui without a conversation around the politics of global imperialism, capitalism, and colonization. Nor did it situate the political context of museums and their far-from-neutral histories in the field of arts and culture. Our lessons on techniques and aesthetics related to fibre practices were entirely ahistorical and apolitical. Perhaps this is not representative of all of the programming at the school, yet with a focus on rigour and innovation, it is clear that instructors are hired for their roles as recognized artists and not for what their aesthetics contribute to our social world.

What I learned from my experiences in a Fibre Arts program was that there is an element of formal training that can help an artist "pass" in the formal art world. Through day-to-day instruction in a classroom that was in effect set up to be a studio, I learned what it meant to frame my practice as studio work. I learned the language and culture of creating through the

perspectives of various creative workers who came with professional, scholarly, and informal training. I was able to witness the different ways that all of these elements of a person's artistic journey inform the work that they do. Most if not all of these lessons I could have learned informally – through relationships with people who had their own fibre practices. Having completed the program puts a recognizable credential on my CV, and it has helped me to frame my praxis in a way that is intelligible to funders and curators. It gave me access to a studio that I did not even know was possible, which allowed me to add to the technical aspects of my practice and helped me to determine what was needed to move me in the creative direction I was interested to go.

Perhaps most importantly it gave me space, and space matters. On the one hand, the consideration of the physical space matters a great deal. As I outline in Chapter 2, I approach space as an element of my methodological framework. This is in line with a critical read on how space, and the programming that occurs in it, has historically informed the making and marketing of Deaf, disability, and mad art. But I also want to clarify that the space to which I refer here is not the physical space I could point to in regard to the studio, but the time to explore. This freedom to dedicate an entire semester to creative exploration was invaluable to my creative growth. While aesthetically I was turning to the things I knew for inspiration – artists, movements, and struggles that I connected to over the years I had previously lived in Toronto – the Disability Studies Program in which I was and am enrolled is not currently resourced in a way to support or even encourage this type of creative practice. The more that research-creation is being integrated into various humanities programs, the more I am hopeful that studio-based researchers will be supported in this element of their work. However, on this matter, it should be noted that my fears are as follows: in the same way that the art program was not able to hold

space for the theoretical and political underpinnings of my aesthetic exploration, I fear that in the ways that we are institutionalizing research-creation in humanities programs, the technical and aesthetic elements of our theoretical exploration are not being adequately supported. I see these fears as materializing through the lack of availability of practicing artists to supervise students doing research-creation, my perception of the increase of tenured faculty with no previous art practice taking up research-creation as a primary element of their research programs, and an ongoing support of arts-based research projects that simply perpetuates the folding in of creative work to enhance, innovate, or translate dominant research paradigms.

4.2.2 Attending to the Land as Anti-Colonial Process



Figure 5: Nature-based dyeing. Photo: Cat O'Neil (Image description: Sketchbooks that document dye recipes through the use of writing and yellow colour swatches. These sketchbooks are layered on top of an Ontario dye recipe book and an ocean waves patchwork block made out of naturally dyed cotton.)

The curriculum in the fibre arts program incorporated an entire unit on the processes of nature-based dyeing. Somewhat of a trending practice within ethically engaged fibre art, working with dye stuffs that come from the land – as opposed to acid dyes and fibre reactive dyes, which are chemically composed – is at a base level understood as an environmentally engaged practice. As was explained in the course, this is not in fact a universal truth; natural does not always mean environmentally safe. At an introductory level, we were taught that the processes of both

acquiring the dyestuffs as well as affixing the colour to cloth necessitate decisions that in various ways can be unsustainable and harmful to the larger environment.

Apart from a superficial engagement with how to think through the environmental impact of natural dyeing, the course focused on the skill sets necessary to affix colour that was both lightfast and colourfast onto various fibres – both plant- and animal-based. The lessons began in the fall before the in-class component started. The instructor initially tasked us with spending our lunch breaks in the neighbouring fields collecting goldenrod for our upcoming unit of study. Being a particularly temperate fall, the goldenrod was experiencing a longer growing season and so we were easily able to forage enough for the class to work with, and we were carefully instructed to never take more than 10 per cent of what we could see growing. For a plant like goldenrod, abundant in a weed-like manner, this was an easy task. Because our schedule had us learning about dyeing in the winter months, we were instructed to dry the goldenrod so that it would keep until we were ready to use it.

The course on nature-based dyeing was perhaps the most impactful one for my own creative development while at Haliburton School of the Arts. A practice I had a general interest in learning became much more accessible with hands-on intensive instruction and a properly equipped dye kitchen. The process of natural dyeing is a slow and involved one (Haines, 2014). As noted, it begins with the land. Whether foraging the dyestuff yourself or sourcing it through the few companies that sell both nationally and internationally, the consideration of the imprint you make on the environment by taking something in the prime of its season is a careful one. If I am not foraging the dyestuff myself, further consideration needs to be put into the relationship between the business from which I am buying and the community that is harvesting the supply. After the dyestuff is sourced, the next step is to scour the cloth – the process through which you

remove any chemicals or dirt that would prevent the dyestuff from affixing to the fibres. Once the cloth is scoured, you must mordant your cloth in order to prepare the fibre to receive the dye. Mordanting is a process that differs based on the type of fibre; natural dyestuff more readily affixes to proteins, so it takes extra steps in order to help it bond with the plant-based cotton that I typically use in my work. Finally, the dye liquor is prepared by steeping the dyestuff in a large pot of water, which is then used for the submersion dyeing.

Dyestuffs readily available in the growing climate of Ontario are well known for producing shades of yellow with ease and abundance. At best these yellows can be shifted – through mordants and modifiers – to olives. Browns and beiges are also easily obtained. While other colours are available – whether as a direct result of using a particular plant or through the tested recipes of shifting colours with modifiers like iron, calcium, and citric acid, these are less usual and at times require carefully planned cultivation. For a range of colours, such as reds, purples, and blues, I typically rely on companies that build relationships with growers and gatherers from around the world. While difficult to determine fully, I select companies that have upfront and transparent documentation regarding their ethics of sourcing and working with outside communities in the cultivation and harvesting of natural resources.

Dyeing, like all of the work that I do, is a slow process. Each yard of fabric can take upwards of one full week to dye – not including the time to forage the material and let the colour cure or rest before the final washout. The slowness of the process has me reflecting deeply on my role within the practice. I am forced to attend to my relationship with the land, and through my own journey I have come to understand this as an anti-colonial process – an ongoing practice in continual development. As Zinga and Styres (2011) explain, seeing the land as pedagogy allows for an iterative process of knowing and learning in order to inform our practice. As a white

settler living and working on this land, I recognize my role in the continuation of the myth that this land is open for the taking; a way to justify the ongoing efforts of colonialism. Instead, I pause and consider that the very use of land as dyestuff places me in a tenuous space of thinking through the environmental aspect of my craft praxis at the potential of being complicit in colonial efforts. I push myself further in order to clearly understand the land as a place where my very practice gets turned on its head. Deeply tied to settler colonialism, I attempt to disrupt the notion that this land is “nobody’s” and available for exploitation; subverting the all-too-prevalent narrative, I understand the land to be deeply tied to the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. By carefully attending to the land through Indigenous values and perspectives, I approach my role as a part of, but not exemplary of, anti-colonial work.

At this point in my practice I do not claim to know how to best shape anti-colonial efforts in relation to natural dyeing. I am not convinced that that will ever be the point for my work. For starters, I hesitate to claim that my work can in fact contribute to anti-colonial efforts in ways that might unsettle or undo settler colonialism; making such claims of my own work feels like a contradictory centring of my practice and myself as a white settler. Instead, I position my work as an ongoing practice that requires an undoing of a lifetime of learning that typically centres colonial narratives of the land and her stewards. Like the process of nature-based dyeing, this is slow, reflective, and active work. It requires destabilizing the things we know and questioning the very ways we have come to know them.

4.3 Making (Space for) Mad Studies

While my scholarship has been situated within a Disability Studies program, my work has developed alongside the emergence of the field of Mad Studies. As a Mad Studies lecturer within a Disability Studies program, I have faced head on how Mad Studies and Disability

Studies have become uneasy bedfellows at both practical and conceptual levels (Church, 2015). Mad Studies, as an academic endeavour, has always been deeply rooted in Mad Movement organizing. Similarly, much of Disability Studies has been closely linked to organizing in disability movements. Mad Studies has only recently been taken up in more meaningful ways in academic institutions and thus it is helpful to consider how the allying of these two fields, and different stages of their acceptance and co-optation, has political implications between the movements as well as regarding the theoretical issues.

In the recent edited book *Madness, Distress and the Politics of Disablement* (2015), numerous authors explore the issues that come up through the linking of Mad and Disability Studies. In the introduction, the editors outline how historically the theorization of madness and disability have been both allied as well as subjects of conversations that have been scattered at best. At the heart of it, conflating Mad and Disability Studies does not work, in large part because madness and disability are socially constructed in different ways (Jones and Kelly, 2015) and have distinctly different histories of political organizing. Historically, at the policy level, issues of madness and disability were taken up together. However, mad people have found their experiences to be treated as side issues within the field of Disability Studies and disability movements in ways that are depoliticized and uncritical of the biomedical model. So, while Mad Studies scholars are often encouraged to join efforts with Disability Studies for strength in numbers, authors within this collection echo one another when highlighting the need to have self-determination in the definition, theorization, and direction of both Mad Studies and Mad Movement organizing (Russo and Shulkes, 2015; Jones and Kelly, 2015; Costa, 2014).

At the institutional and systemic level, focusing on efforts of diversity is both palatable and in vogue. Yet within diversity efforts, which take shape in the model of inclusion, Mad

Studies is often responded to as both confusing and defiant. Resisting the continual celebration and reliance on discourses of diversity – which repeatedly reject the inclusion of experiences of madness – I turn to Church (2015) in order to suggest that in using Mad Studies, this dissertation project subverts the dominant paradigms of mental illness and is instead rooted in politicized histories of mad people. Through a development of theory and practice based in the political roots of the movement, this dissertation will “shock you, make you stop and say WHAT? In that interruption, that space of sudden confusion, we can invoke a strand of human experience and history that pre-dates and challenges psychiatric dominance. We can seize an opening into ‘something otherwise’ – something we could call Mad Studies” (Church, 2015, p. 261). It is in this space – the interruptions caused by the politics, and thus the theoretical and aesthetic disruptions of madness, as articulated through Mad Studies – that my work seeks to problematize the value of inclusion in a world full of systems built on principles of exclusion.

4.3.1 The Propagation of the Mad Artist

In creating work informed by the field of Mad Studies, it is helpful to unpack how the mad artist is materialized through social and historical context, and in turn question what these narratives invoke. Whether through identity-based art or not, interest in the biography of the artist has persisted throughout art history. As Davis (2006) points out, the popular logic can be seen through the common belief that an artist’s life and biology are an element of the artistic work as well as a way for the audience to understand the art. However, held up through notions such as the mad creative genius and the tortured artist, this logical fallacy has historically taken shape through a hyper-focus on “biopathology” – the reading of pathology in biography (Davis, 2006, p. 244) – which ties the uptake of mad art with the legacies of the asylum. Accordingly, the aesthetic markers of the mentally ill artist are represented through symptomatology as read

through the medical model of madness. By reading mad art in this way, we disconnect it from art history and instead place it alongside therapeutic tools and processes of mental health literacy. Considering the historical context of how this viewpoint has developed demonstrates that in fact it is not a reductionist perspective, as Davis (2006) suggests, but instead is strongly tied into the complex matrix that exists in the medicalizing of madness, mad experiences, and mad people.

Here, presented with a possible impasse, I argue that perceiving madness to be a natural cause of creativity is flawed logic at best, and it is an all-too-common way that we conceptualize the mad artist. Understanding the development of movements such as Outsider Art and Art Brut substantiates how a fascination with the mad artist as naïve, impulsive, and compulsive has come to the forefront of aesthetically positioning mad art both as a marker of difference and as pathology. While movements such as Outsider Art and Art Brut bring mad artists into dialogue with art history, the artists are continually positioned as the Other. Through this, the mad artist is taken up as peripheral to the art world in terms of aesthetic and technical values. The impasse occurs at my efforts – within my project – to decentre disease as being a necessary element of taking up mad art and yet creating my work in conversation with an identity-based position. However, I argue that through a careful consideration of theoretical, social, and historical context, I instead centralize (my) mad experiences as being a key component to developing a mad aesthetic as a way to politicize the role of the mad artist. Eventually this brings me to a process of dis/identifying as a mad artist and/or a process of destabilizing the notion of mad aesthetics.

To work through this difficult task of decentring disease while creating in dialogue with an identity-based position, I turn to storytelling as a critical site of theoretical exploration. Costa et al. (2012) contextualizes the use of stories within the mad community as being tied historically

to movement organizing, which highlights the political use of stories in efforts of resistance. Over time, the act of storytelling has in turn shifted to depoliticized sites where mad stories are often commodified and appropriated in order to co-opt their messages of social change, sanitizing them into processes of mental health literacy. This co-optation can be seen, as Russo (2012) explains, in how madness and mad artists get storied. Through research and art history, mad art is taken up, responded to, and written about in ways that depoliticize both the process and final product of making art. Russo has us consider questions of both the authority of lived experience as well as how the use of mad narratives can have negative impacts on Mad Movement organizing.

For instance, when mad stories get either repackaged or retold, they have the potential to cause damage to those who embody those lived experiences (Russo, 2012). While Russo specifically explores this in relation to Hornstein's academic retelling of Agnes Richter's experiences through the interpretation of her textile work most commonly referred to as *Agnes's Jacket*, Russo further outlines how this can be considered more widely. Calling into question any work that might utilize mad narratives without incorporating meaningful as opposed to tokenistic contributions of mad people, Russo requires us to consider the impact when stating:

[A]t a time when service users/survivors write more than just their personal stories, the exclusive focus on our narratives and on our self-help groups becomes a way to suppress our research and our academic work, which in consequence slows down the process of the development of users/survivors' theories. (2012, p. 29)

In line with this questioning, Russo requires that we think through more than just the inclusion of mad people in established theoretical standpoints. Instead, Russo is requiring that we destabilize the way that we approach knowledge creation in order to work from a theoretical standpoint that

is not just informed by mad experiences, but that is connected into the histories of the political organizing of the Mad Movement. For the purpose of this project, I want to push this sentiment further, as it pertains to research-creation. Not only do we need to incorporate theoretical standpoints informed by Mad Movement organizing, but we also need to consider the difference between traditional academic researchers incorporating creative practices into their methodological toolkits and actually turning to practising artists to design and disseminate the research projects from art practices that are centralized within the work that they do. In the same way that Russo asserts that Hornstein's work does not "change the way that knowledge about madness is produced," I assert that much of the arts-based research currently being funded by both research and arts grants is not changing the way that knowledge about mad art is being produced.

While Russo focuses their exploration on the storying of Agnes Richter's jacket, I want to turn to the storying of internationally renowned artist Yayoi Kusama. Kusama provides us with an example of how the storying of artists becomes so intertwined with the medical model that mental illness is materialized through the packaging of their artistic practices. While I was writing this dissertation, Kusama was attracting attention worldwide through the exhibit titled "Infinity Mirrors." Exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario between March 3 and May 27, 2018, the show and the artist received significant local press and other coverage meant to stir further excitement. While the fantastical aesthetics and the politics of the selfie were well documented, Claudette Abrams – visual arts manager at Workman Arts, which was one of the first Canadian arts organizations to support mad artists – was quoted in the *Toronto Star* (Whyte, 2018) for questioning why nothing was written about Kusama's experiences of mental health. Given the positionality of Workman Arts, this question of course makes sense. For Abrams, the silencing

of Kusama's mental health experiences was significant, stemming from the rhetoric that the general public is not comfortable enough talking about mental health. This particular narrative, according to the processes of mental health literacy, invokes a grave situation, as the silence is both a product of and contributor to stigma and creates barriers to accessing appropriate mental health treatments (White & Pike, 2013). Further, connecting an artist's mental health experiences to their creative work presupposes that there is some kind of causal link to be made, one that proliferates the concept of the mad creative genius and romanticizes the relationship between madness and creativity.

However, what is not considered within this rhetoric is that the history of storying Kusama's mental illness as a way to repackage her creative work is both troubling and problematic. Borggreen (2001) outlines both the trajectory and implications of reading Kusama through a psychopathological lens. As Borggreen explains, while Kusama did not reference psychopathology in the early stages of her career, it has now become so pervasive that it is overwhelmingly the way that her entire body of work gets interpreted. The dominance of mental illness in the storying of both Kusama's life and body of work is historically influenced by a significantly small number of academic and popular publications. These connections can be seen, as Borggreen explains, through the increase in "frequent mentions of her hospitalization, art as a kind of therapy, a way to control inner turmoil, objectifying/representing hallucinations and symptoms, [and] expos[ing a] primal source of psyche, origin of creativity" (p. 11–13).

What is notable is that the timeframe of the early 1980s, when Kusama first made self-referential links between her art and her experiences of mental illness, overlaps with the heightened interest in naïve and Outsider Art in Japan, where Kusama was living at the time. It is important to keep in mind that while Kusama did reflect on the influence that mental illness had

on her creativity as well as positioning her art as therapeutic, this was not done extensively nor was it done until this specific time period. So, with this renewed interest, Kusama's work was explicitly exhibited as Outsider Art, which Borggreen determines is inaccurate based on Kusama's formal training and extensive relationship with the formal art world. Due to the social context in the '80s, the art world in Japan positioned Kusama's work as being insider/outsider, which in turn has resulted in Kusama doing the same. And thus:

From the 80s onwards accounts of her mental condition began to dominate the story of her life and art work, and pathological terms such as obsession, auditory and visual hallucinations, manic-depressive insanity, and so on, are used to describe her childhood as well as her artistic background. (p. 37)

This shift is seen by Borggreen as denigrating Kusama's training and conscious aesthetic decisions; in turn, this removes Kusama's work from the particular artistic techniques and aesthetics through which she most commonly identified it, and it also depoliticizes the art by positioning it as ahistorical and asocial. Borggreen contends that the shift in reading Kusama's work through a psychopathological lens "obscure[s] our understandings of her work" (p. 15).

Movements such as those in Deaf, disability, and mad art often focus on issues of representation, access, and inclusion, issues that could be seen as addressed through the work, curation, and exhibition of art like Kusama's. Instead, drawing on the theoretical explorations of the Mad Movement, as documented through the field of Mad Studies and the movements of Deaf, disability, and mad art, this dissertation considers how efforts that focus on representation and inclusion only make room for narratives of madness that uphold biomedical perspectives that frame mad experiences as mental illness. For even when these narratives are read through a critical lens – for instance, Kusama's madness has been seen through feminist critiques as an

effort of dissent (Borggreen, 2001) – the pervasiveness of the discourse of mental illness makes it impossible to contend with the pathologizing of both the artist and their artwork. The impact of this is important to contemplate alongside what it means to develop a mad aesthetic, one that transgresses the propagation of the mad artist as mentally ill.

In many ways this has led me to work through my artistic process as a way of dis/identifying with a mad identity. Doing this is not actually a new process for me, though. As an educator, an academic, and an activist, I am often asked to speak at events about mental health. Having publicly identified myself as mad early on in various elements of my work, it has become difficult to separate that aspect from the work that I do now. When my mad experiences are centralized, I often preface my stance on sharing my story, which is that I refuse to share the story arc that most audiences are expecting. I do not speak to my histories of trauma and distress or reveal my various psychiatric diagnoses. I do not provide detailed information regarding my descent into madness, my process of seeking treatment, and my journey of recovery – as a highly educated, middle-class white woman, this is the story the public has come to expect. This is the story that anti-stigma campaigns, mental health organizations, and other mad people have taught us is the one that will address the issue of mental illness. Instead, I take the time to refuse an individualized account of my story, indicating that my personal stories are not for consumption and that the recovery narrative obscures the issues. I thus collectivize the narrative, naming institutions and systems of power as the location of the problem and storying my lived experience as part of this process of dis/identifying while referencing the politics and organizing history of the Mad Movement. Not only does this help me to disrupt the consumption and commodification of my own mad experiences, but it also requires that the audience think more broadly about what the issue is – shifting the conversations from individual to structural.

4.4 Making (Another) Shift – Creative Work as Transgressive Practice

The initial shift occurred from the theoretical underpinnings of Disability Studies into those set up through the field of Mad Studies. Yet as I work through a process of dis/identifying with being positioned as a mad artist, this requires another shift in the theoretical and aesthetic elements of my work. In this transition, I refocus myself by considering what it means to take up mad art as expansive and transgressive. How can a politically and theoretically informed art practice lead to more progressive ways of taking up and taking in mad artists and their artwork? In this project I have been looking to art as a method to bring together, challenge, critique, and engage with imposed boundaries found throughout the social world. For many Disability Studies scholars, the starting point for theorizing the progressive potentials of Deaf, disability, and mad art is Disability Arts and Culture. As Gorman (2007) highlights, what is understood as Disability Culture is both a response to and a way of existing in institutional spaces. For Disability Arts and Culture, artistic practices and arts programming must be intricately connected with the disability rights movement (or, similarly, aligned with disability justice movements). To disconnect it from the politics of the movement is to replicate the ways in which institutions separate and individualize the stories, messages, and lives of the artists/activists.

Kuppers (2011) and Gorman (2005) explain the role of raising consciousness in regard to how we approach accessibility in art spaces and culture. Often accessibility is talked about as simple inclusion – work space, equipment, buildings, stages that physically are accessible to people who wish to train or perform. Instead we need to critically reflect on what it means to merely alter environments, programs, and institutions with the end goal of including Deaf, disabled, and mad artists into the art world. Raising a critical consciousness would mean unpacking the content and technique taken up through art (Gorman, 2005) within a socio-

historical context. When we do this, we begin to shift and change both the assumptions of the various practices and institutions of art as well our approach to marginalized artists.

Accessibility, then, is concerned with technical and aesthetic space, opening it up in order to value cultural framings that come from marginalized artists (Kuppers, 2000).

Within this effort of raising critical awareness of difference through art, we can both enhance and unsettle materialist notions of aesthetic. In order to do that, we must consider how difference – as a subject, experience, material reality – can be taken up as an aesthetic value. Accordingly, experiences such as disability and madness are positioned both as a critical framework used to ask questions as well as a way of moving forward in reconceptualizing art practices and values (Siebers, 2006). Building on and moving beyond the theoretical underpinnings of Disability Arts and Culture, I position my practice in a way that stretches past a simple celebration of mad identities or goals of more inclusive access to art production, and I instead begin to generate and create a dialogue based on new knowledge creation.

Arguably, working from a place that conflates mad and disabled identities makes it difficult to attend to the unique histories of mad cultural development. Through an engagement with experiences of madness, gender, and sexuality, as well as developing a critical analysis situated alongside a Mad Studies framework, my artwork brings to life Garland-Thomson's (2001) assertion that art, regardless of the intention, has political and social consequences. Yet, different from many artists, I explicitly unpack, contextualize, and develop this social engagement with intent and purpose.

4.4.1 Social Justice-Oriented (Art)Work

What activist quilting – in textile, clothing, in digital images – does is to make issues intimate, understandable, but never solely comforting. (Robertson, 2014)

People make art for a variety of reasons and purposes. However, within this project, I focus on the history and relevance of art that is made as a method of social engagement, an act of political expression, and an element of social justice-oriented work. Typically, when talking about art made by mad-identified artists, there is a heavy focus on therapeutic art. This is a direct result of the long history of using art within institutions such as asylums, group homes, and other therapeutic spaces where mad people are locked up, rehabilitated, treated, and contained (Gorman, 2007). The use of art as a therapeutic tool has been positioned through the process and product of art as an occupation or therapy that can help reveal symptoms, act as a method of self-expression, and in some cases help patients recover. As such, therapeutic art is often praised for its inspirational qualities that tell individualized stories of overcoming and recovery (Wheelchair Dancer, 2010). Alternatively, positioning art as social justice work within and alongside Mad Movement organizing considers the role of artistic work as an act of collective resistance. These acts of resistance can be taken up as relationships that exist dialectically between mad artists and their allies. The artistic pieces invite mad and allied artists to open up, add to, and further conversations that critically de/re/construct these relationships and our approaches to understanding and being implicated in experiences of difference (Gabel & Peters, 2004).

For me, a key quality found in social justice-oriented art is the ability of the work to provoke and compel. Through the lens of feminist and critical race theory, hooks (1995) teaches us the importance of taking up art through a consideration of both the process of creating and the act of sharing art. The acts of making and exhibiting art are intertwined with and necessary components of efforts of social engagement. With this dissertation, I push my work to grow into places that feel urgent, dangerous, and intricately connected to pressing social issues as taken up through a mad perspective.

4.4.2 Project One: *Comrade* (and the Feminist Art Conference Residency)



Figure 6: *Comrade*. Photo: Cat O’Neil (Image description: A naturally dyed red quilt with banner-style letters cut out to spell “comrade.” The quilt is 30” x 60”.)

In March of 2015, CUPE 3903 – the union at York that represents teaching assistants, contract faculty, and graduate and research assistants – went on strike in a campaign known as #BetterYork. CUPE 3903 aimed to address issues of equity, accessibility, and safety on campus. Roughly a month into the strike, all three units represented by CUPE 3903 ratified their contracts, claiming success in their resolve to strike to win. In the spring of 2015, I applied to the Feminist Art Conference Residency in order to explore the broader picture of what was at stake in the struggles, organizing, conflicts, and resolutions tied up in the campaign for a #BetterYork. While some members found themselves occupying space on the seven picket lines set up around York’s campus, many members found themselves excluded, devalued, turned down, and fighting to contribute to and be recognized within the strike efforts for reasons tied to disability, sex, gender, health, race, and class.

During my time at the Feminist Artist Conference Residency, I crafted a quilt that explored the spaces of violence and discrimination that occur when the rights of some are seen as

burdensome and too political. Through the process of making the quilt – beginning with the dyeing of the fabric, working out the patchwork, and quilting it together – I was particularly interested in working through the notion that the union as an institution abuses its power to deepen the insecurity of some of their most precarious and marginalized members. As a result of the union’s oversight regarding accommodations for the labour necessary in strike action, as well as an inability to resolve deep-seated experiences of institutional discrimination and violence, many of the most precariously positioned members of CUPE 3903 found themselves in a place of struggle simultaneously with their employer and with their union. This quilt invokes a critique of social justice organizing that fails to start from a place where all are recognized and empowered in the various aspects of mobilization.

4.5 Conclusion – Making Sense of That Which is Imperceptible

Positioning art socially, historically, and politically, I have developed an understanding of art and creative production as a relationship. Likewise, through the writing, making, and documenting of this dissertation, I am unpacking the direct ways that art makes meaning (D’Alleva, 2005). This engages the act of art making as a response to the call from Disability Studies, in which art is seen as a key methodological tool through which critical perspectives of disability are best understood and expressed (Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). However, my work continues to move beyond this call as it uses the theoretical foundations of Mad Studies to help shift aesthetic articulations and contribute to their development in both the art world and the social world around us (Owen, 2005). I create work that is engaged with a mad aesthetic, that works through a social justice-oriented process, and that incorporates critical theory in content.

Chapter 5 – Reifying Mental Illness Through Aesthetic Values

5.1 Introduction

My craft praxis has evolved drastically over the years. Initially I saw quilt making as a hobby, something tied to specific materials and techniques taught to me by my paternal aunt. Living far from her necessitated that my training happened in clusters of intensive sessions. The times that I could visit, I would pick a week or two to stay with my aunt and we would quilt from the time we woke up until we went to bed. We often stayed in our pyjamas all day, unless there was a local quilt guild meeting to attend, and my aunt would help me pick projects that offered a range of techniques and skills to learn.

From hobby to dissertation focus was a large leap – one that was decades in the making. This allowed me to take my practice more seriously, and in many ways opened up my approach to making. When quilting was a hobby, I considered it my guilty pleasure – reading about and making quilts were things that I did on the side and it was often considered a distraction. The shifting roles meant that a constant immersion in my craft became my job. I began to actively seek out opportunities to study fibre art through various avenues. I took college programs, applied to residencies, invested in tools, exhibited my work, and lost myself in reading.

For me, quilt making has always been a political act. When I was young my aunt would share with me stories that linked quilts to activist histories. As Robertson (2014) points out, “quilts, quilting and quilt scholarship have long been tied to activism, ranging from abolitionist causes in the nineteenth century to feminist reclamation of an undervalued pastime in the twentieth, and incorporating economic, pacifist, environmental, labour and numerous issues” (p. 197). These histories that Robertson references are ones that are often taken up across the various communities that identify with the process of quilt making. It was this entry point that helped me

to understand the practice of quilt making as being inherently political (at least in possibility) and yet had me considering the limitations of the oversimplification of this approach to my own craft praxis, both rooted in the processes of quilt making and spanning beyond into other fibre-based techniques.

More recently I have begun to approach my craft praxis through a studio-based methodology. Turning to Fariello (2011), we can see how doing this decentres technique and medium, instead relying on the approach to materials that is taken up through creative practices. Discursively, then, studio craft, according to Fariello, is “rooted in multiple values, including the physical process of making, an intimacy of tactile experience, the ‘truth’ of its materials, the discipline of daily practice, and the skill of the hand” (p. 40). Similarly, Mazanti (2011) questions the limitations of the insistence of positing material and process as part of the core identity of craft. Instead, Mazanti suggests that we consider a relational appraisal of craft, asking not about the “making” of craft but instead about what craft is “doing” in a world of objects (2011, p. 60). Positioning craft beyond its materiality allows for an aesthetic consideration independent of fine arts in which it embodies both art and life through its existence in the social world (Mazanti, 2011). Theoretically, this shift allows for a positioning of craft as providing a unique aesthetic role for both the maker and the audience.

In this chapter I unpack the key critical concepts that have arisen out of the research questions outlined in Chapter 2, the aesthetic markers framed in the artistic audit in Chapter 3, and the theoretical gaps determined in the explorations of Chapter 4. Given the structure of this dissertation, context matters a great deal. As I have pointed to earlier in this project, Disability Studies has a long history of supporting the arts. However, when it comes to research within Disability Studies programs, there is not a lot of scholarship that has valued the role of studio

practices, beyond the ability to translate knowledge from the final products. This project exists at the conceptual and methodological nexus of research-creation, studio craft praxis, and Mad Studies. By the nature of more general parameters for a doctoral dissertation, our projects are expected to develop something new and novel. As a result, we too often abandon, ignore, or do not attend to history in our constant drive to move forward. Innovation has been co-opted across sectors, having fields outside of the arts championing methods that are creative and findings that advance dialogue forward in a linear fashion. I have serious reservations about our capacity to actually achieve these goals, and I suggest that this approach to knowledge creation and translation is limited and flawed at best, and ultimately this approach contradicts the theoretical underpinnings of a studio-based project. In the following sections I draw on research-creation, Critical Craft Praxis, and Mad Studies to make space for studio-based research projects positing that the strength of craft is looking at the spaces in between the new and the old and engaging with them in a way that provokes change and movement. In order to create movement, I contend that we must understand the role of aesthetic markers and their histories, which are both informing and compelling us toward social change. Below I outline how it is necessary to understand the aesthetic markers of mental illness in order to activate change through a shift into mad aesthetics.

5.2 Aesthetic Regimes

Stop asking criteria for political art; politics of works of art plays out in reconfiguration of worlds of experiences ... modes of narration or new forms of visibility established by art enter into politics field of possibilities. (Rancière, 2013, p. 60)

There is a multitude of ways to understand aesthetics, and here I turn to Rancière to think through the concept and its relation to both labour and politics. For Rancière (2013), aesthetic practices can be understood as ways of doing and making that intervene in the general ways of

doing and making in society. Accordingly, creative work can be seen as active, relational, rooted in context, and implicating both the maker/doer and the surrounding community. Aesthetics, according to Rancière, can be understood through three major regimes: ethical, representational, and aesthetic. This dissertation purposefully uses Rancière's work to help us rethink our perspectives on art history and more specifically to unpack the framework of political art.

The work of Rancière offers us a more nuanced understanding of political art. As a starting point for this dissertation project, and specifically in my studio work, I am compelled by the complexity of the relationship between politics and aesthetics. In his seminal work, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2013), Rancière outlines that politics do indeed have aesthetics and conversely aesthetics also have politics, but the actual relationship between these is anything but formulaic. To me, this opens up the possibilities for creation, in that it makes distinct links between political and creative work and yet it inevitably does so with the need to think through the various components that impact how the creative work *and* the political work take shape and form, are read and understood, and are situated and responded to by the audience. Again, in relation to my own studio practice, this allows me to move beyond a simple consideration of my intentions as a creative worker. For, as Rancière outlines, the work of the artist may be to implement their ideas, but once the work goes out into the world, the political effect is outside of the scope of the maker. This leads me into my next thoughts, which involve unpacking the conceptual elements of the aesthetic markers of what I understand to be mad art.

In no uncertain terms, there is not a working definition of mad art, or not one that is universally agreed upon. When situating my own creative work, which I understand to be an example of mad art, I start with a general definition that broadly defines mad art as the works of art made by and about mad people's experiences. That said, leaving the definition there is wholly

unsatisfying to the relationship I see between cultural production and the political and cultural efforts of the Mad Movement. This very broad and simple definition, while helpful as a starting point, often evokes images of Van Gogh, Yayoi Kusama, or countless other artists who have been psychiatrized. For some with academic and/or professional fine arts training, this definition might make us think of Outsider Artists like Adolf Wölfli or Seraphine de Senlis, or even possibly Judith Scott. But what I am particularly interested in moves beyond the limitations of how aesthetic values are ascribed to artists who are read as mad.

And so here I narrow in my reckoning of mad art by positioning it specifically as artistic and creative production that happens within and alongside the Mad Movement. This opens up a dialogue about the nuances of the relationship between the work of mad art and the work of Mad Movement organizing. Further, through the writing of Rancière, we can assert that the politics of Mad Movement organizing are themselves aesthetic, and the aesthetics of mad creative work are also political, but in a complex and untidy ways. This relationship occurs in a way that relates to the intentions of the maker/doer but also is read and framed through the surrounding context. This is the beauty as well as the inevitably exasperating reality of mad art.

Mad art, though, I contend, is different than the art of the mentally ill, in terms of the aesthetic regimes that are used to make sense of it. The following will, in turn, try to make sense of what I mean by this statement. Mad art, as I have outlined, is necessarily connected to the political and creative work of the Mad Movement. This in and of itself is a tricky classification. As with other politically situated art, as Rancière explains, the classification can happen both based on the intention of the artist or by the way that the art is read. Decottignies (2016) outlines this well when she says:

Not every woman artist produces feminist art, and not every disabled artist creates disability-identified art ... Disability politics mark the difference between an artist with a disability who produces disability-inclusive forms of art and a Deaf, mad, or disabled artist who produces disability-identified art. (p. 46)

Thus, mad art is not mad art *just* because a mad person makes it nor because it is made about mad experiences.

In fact, arguably, as a result of the dominance of the biomedical model and the pervasiveness of societal positioning of all experiences of mental and psychological difference under the domain of mental illness, it is most accurate to view art through this lens. Accordingly, when mad folks make art and/or respond to art, they are engaging in what I understand as the art of the mentally ill. Artists, intentionally and not, position their work discursively alongside our biomedical understandings of mental illness. This too is most commonly how the art is taken up; whether based on the identity of the artist and/or the content of the art, madness is almost solely read, interpreted, and responded to through the biomedical model. We can position this as an extension of White's (2011) argumentation demonstrating how popular culture does not simply represent mental illness, it *is* mental illness. As an artist who has their work read through their lived experience of the psychiatric system, I would contend that this is overwhelmingly the case regardless of how central or relevant the biomedical model is to the work under consideration. This phenomenon demonstrates an overwhelming investment in the biomedical model, the reach of the fetishization of the mentally ill artist – or the mad creative genius – and the lack of autonomy of the political intentions of the artist. It likewise then points to a number of significant issues that are necessary for both the artist and audience to consider when engaging with mad art. In the following sections, I explore the various aesthetic markers that are ascribed

to and/or taken up by the art of the mentally ill and posit my practice as a disruption of these. In essence, I frame my art as one example of a larger body of work that we can understand as mad art.

5.3 Understanding Aesthetic Markers of the Mentally Ill

I will begin with the work of Prinzhorn (1972), as art history typically references his scholarship as the first to take up the art of the mentally ill through aesthetic criteria. Thévoz (1976) theorizes that Prinzhorn explored creative process by understanding it as stemming directly from the life experience of the artist. This analysis is in line with the heavy reliance on biographical information within Prinzhorn's writing. Maclagan (2009) brings our awareness to two strong examples of why the life history of the mentally ill artist is pushed to the forefront of the literature. On the one hand, the life story is a necessary component in determining the authenticity of the Outsider Artist as being genuinely outside of the dominant culture and the mainstream art world. Second, the disturbed, traumatic or Othered experience, in the way that it is exoticized and in some cases fetishized, lures people into believing that the piece of art reveals and narrates intimate parts of these life stories.

Much of the literature that theorizes the work of the mentally ill artist talks about the romanticization of the experience of madness in relation to creative freedom. Rhodes (2000) explains how madness, for surrealist artists, signified true freedom as well as a goading of the mainstream art world (which they found to be complacent). Maclagan (2009) describes this fascination with the image of the mad artist and their life story in its entirety as a way of focusing on the constructed notion of the artist and their torturous gifts.

Of importance is how Prinzhorn (1972) points out that the artistic and creative endeavours of the mentally ill were not generally well known to the public at his time of writing.

This can be tied to the historical implications of discouraging such activity and then eventually seeing its value as only diagnostic in nature. One of the ways in which the general public was made aware of the creative pursuits of the mentally ill was through the work of Lombroso, who, Prinzhorn maintains, highlighted them as proof of the pathological component of genius. While Lombroso's work digresses from the scope of this dissertation, the significance of the conceptual development of the mad creative genius cannot go overlooked as a meaningful aesthetic marker ascribed to the art of the mentally ill. Due to the accessibility of Lombroso's (Kornfeld, 1997) work in society at the time, the idea that geniuses are more or less insane and that this insanity is a direct causal link to creativity has had longstanding implications.

The aesthetic of the mad creative genius leads us to consider the relevance of the aesthetic of absence. Developed through the work of Gorman (2007), the aesthetic of absence is understood as "the imaginary innocence of the artists" directly related to the "assumed absence of technical ability of the artists" (p. 50). Further, any technical ability that might be recognized in the artist or the artistic work is seen as being an "inherent and conscious mode of vision" created with a lack of "stylistic choices" (p. 50). This aesthetic marker not only demonstrates the contemporary implications of the vision of the mad creative genius, but further shows the influence of contemporary art and cultural institutions on the work of the mentally ill. While there have been significant changes in social and institutional context over the years, what remains the same is the presence of the therapeutic institution in relation to the art of the mentally ill. Often through the centring of therapeutic-based programming, the art of the mentally ill is read almost solely through the lens of recovery and self-improvement, and the aesthetic elements of the art of the mentally ill are depoliticized. This often overlooked history has multiple relevant implications. First of all, the sanitizing of the histories of violence directly

tied to the psy industries is rarely discussed. Further, these sanitized histories of art therapy continue to justify control over both the lives of the mentally ill as well as the framing and use of their works of art.

From here we can begin to appreciate how the art of the mentally ill is directly linked to what I understand as an aesthetic philosophy revolving around practices of inclusion. This arguably is an aesthetic marker that results from the long-term depoliticization and appropriation of mad art, to the point where it is difficult even within social justice-oriented spaces to come across conversations about art and madness that do anything but perpetuate the healing imperative. In turn, there is the proliferation of the view of the mentally ill artist as tortured creative subject. Art objects are seen as reflecting the lived experience of the artist's mental illness to such an extent that the two become almost indistinguishable from one another. Consequently, the art of the mentally ill is seen aesthetically as something to include into the already formed structures of the art historical canon, with little to no room to change our views about the maker or ways of seeing the processes of making and the resulting artworks. The aesthetic of inclusion sees value in the mentally ill artist so long as they uphold the narratives discursively made sense of through the psy industries. As a result of the pervasiveness of the biomedical model, the mentally ill artist is often just as invested in the frameworks as well as the systems of mental illness and thus does not need art institutions to affect any undue pressure. Below I will explore a few examples of how these aesthetic markers materialize in creative work.

5.3.1 No Heads, and While You're at it, Throw Out the Pill Bottles

I started teaching students how to think and work creatively before I had the confidence to take my own creative practice seriously. My first teaching job was in the team-taught course "History of Madness," in Ryerson University's Disability Studies undergraduate program.

Groundbreaking in both pedagogical style and content, this course taught from the framework that grew into Mad Studies before the field was named as such. As written elsewhere, the creative elements of the course have been integral to its very makeup. For instance, creative work is carefully woven into the lecture material. Students engage with anti-stigma campaigns, culture jamming ads, zines, and documentaries as a way to discern the prevalence of the biomedical model in the world around us as well as to recognize examples of how to respond to this through a Mad Studies framework. Throughout seminar work, students are encouraged to use creative practices such as visual mapping, drawing, zine making, culture jamming, and button making in order to work through concepts, think about things differently, and approach the classroom in a way that is non-normalizing. For some students this is exciting: an opportunity to approach their thinking, learning, and working through academic spaces and ideas differently. For other students this element of the course is confusing, uncomfortable, and is what I understand to be unintelligible. In my early years of teaching, this was baffling to me: why were students so upset about a shift in the status quo? Through the years I have come to learn that there are many reasons that students do not find the integration of creative practices as comfortable within academic classrooms.

The students are given an option to complete their final assignment as a creative project instead of a written essay. Providing students with the option of a creative assignment has many benefits. First, the use of creative assignments in humanities courses is seen as a way of approaching assessment strategies in a more open and flexible way. Allowing the students to develop a creative project, with guidance and support, is a way that creates more universally accessible spaces. Working in a Disability Studies program has me aware of the impossibility of creating learning environments that are entirely universal in terms of access and

accommodations. However, creating such openness in a final assignment allows students to work from a space of what Carmen Papalia (2018) describes as “open access.” As such, the student and instructor develop a trust that provides the student space to shape their knowledge translation in a way that makes sense to them. However, beyond notions of access and inclusion, the use of creative practices in a Mad Studies classroom is significant in other ways.

This, however, is all a bit of an aside, context to get into what I am really thinking about here. Information, because if I had started off this section by simply stating “no heads!,” you would probably be just as confused as my students often are when I make this declaration in the parameters of the creative assignment. The course has been taught by a succession of mad-identified and mad-allied instructors. For a variety of reasons, most of which can be related to the reality of the neoliberal university and the increasing reliance on precarious contract lecturers, there are constant shifts in the makeup of the team. With these shifts come academics with different research, academic, and pedagogical specialties, which help to build on and adapt the delivery of the course (including but not limited to the final assignment structure). A benefit of having taught the course for over ten semesters with my various team members is that I have seen a wide range of final creative projects. And one thing that has become overwhelmingly clear is that two of the most common aesthetic markers of art that explores issues of madness is 1) the imagery of the head (materialized in many different formats and mediums) and 2) pill bottles and/or pills. At the outset, these ideas can seem too simple, derivative, and cliché.

This is not a section about teaching or pedagogy. However, the above context is necessary in understanding the strength of cultural markers of madness that focus on the individual experience, contested scientific claims of the biological nature of madness, and the role of the psy industries in shaping how we frame mad people and our responses to them. Art made by and

about mad people needs to be examined for the ways it has been mobilized as what Foucault (1977) describes as a biopolitical tool. In essence, art can be understood as a method employed to control the lives of mad people. Further, we can see how art is used to inform how we define and respond to mad experiences. The connections between the psychiatric gaze, through art and occupational therapy, and the mad artist develop an inextricable link between the biopathography (the pathological biography) of the mad artist and their artistry. As a result, both the artwork and the artist are interpreted through biomedical models of madness. Through these efforts, we can come to see how mental illness is reified through the construction of the mad artist, as well as through societal responses and reactions to mad people's acts of creative production. In these ways the art is not simply representational of the mad experience but materializes mental illness into our social consciousness. As a result, the signs, symbols, and signifiers of the biomedical model become inextricably linked to our cultural understanding of mental illness through creative work. Mad art, as I interrupt with the following outlining of my project, destabilizes the continual referencing of mental illness by calling on new signs, symbols, and signifiers.

5.4 Project Two: *Pissing on Pity*



Figure 7: *Pissing on Pity*. Photo: Cat O’Neil (Image description: A queen-sized quilt suspended from metal shelves. The quilt has yellow natural dye splattered across the front with the words “fuck me” in velvet, appliquéd slightly off centre. On the top left corner and the bottom right corner are small black bee silhouettes cut out of felt and sewn onto the quilt top.)

Weeping to myself I lament aloud, “fuuuuuuuuck mee.”

With a sultry and inviting whisper I plea for you to “*fuck me.*”

Through a quick and forceful exhalation I cry out in anguish: “**FUCK! ME!**”

Playfully yet sternly I demand that you “fuck me!”

Throughout my adult life, the bed has been a place of refuge. A site of violence. A dank, piss-soaked tangled mess of shame. A deeply passionate site of desire. The bed has been a place of hopeless isolation as well as the intimately familiar terrain of lovers. While positioned on top of, underneath, and tangled in between the sheets, I have experienced pain as trauma, pain as pleasure, pleasure as pleasure, and pleasure as violence.

Through *Pissing on Pity*, I explore the ways in which we make sense of our experiences of pleasure and pain, and how they are blurred and complicated in relation to our histories of violence. While reflecting on my own sexual encounters and sexuality and how these have been mediated through the act of being both unknowingly drugged in social settings and professionally medicated, I open up the current conversations regarding rape and consent by placing it in dialogue with the often violent and physically invasive experiences of being psychiatrized.

5.4.1 How to Get Through an Artist Talk About Pissing the Bed as an Adult

[BREATH]

My name is Jenna Reid and I want to start this presentation with a content warning: I will be talking explicitly about sexual violence and institutional violence. Please take care of yourself in the way you need: get up and leave if you need, find a friend to process your feelings, be kind to yourself if this causes you distress.

Have you ever woken up in your bed, feeling slightly damp, only to realize that you're lying in a puddle of your own piss? Does your answer change if I ask you that question again but preface it with the condition that your age is anywhere from 18 years old (yes years, not months) to present day? I have. And yet I'm actually not going to spend any more time describing in

detail those deeply personal moments where I have found myself lying in a bed uttering the phrase: “fuck me,” “fuck me,” “fuck me”

[BREATH]

Instead I’m going to talk a little bit about the conceptual aspects of my piece *Pissing on Pity* as well as the ways in which my process informs my creative practice. Drawing on the phrase “piss on pity,” the origins of which stem from disability rights movements’ organizing, this piece positions the intersections of madness, gender, and sexuality as tied to experiences of structural and institutional violence. This moves us out of the individualized narratives of madness and sexual violence that see the process of recovery as inspirational and in which the medical model and psychiatric institutions do no harm. It requires that we move away from the commodification of individual recovery stories and into more complicated discussions that call on systemic violence. It also requires that we consider more complicated notions of community – a repurposing based on the critiques that mad queer experiences can contribute to these conceptualizations of why and how we come together and activate.

[BREATH]

As a mad queer woman currently in a hetero-passing relationship, I am constantly coming out. Except I’m not. My own past histories of rape and sexual violence are deeply tied to the violence I have experienced in relation to the psychiatric institution and inform the way I relate to my own sexuality and relate my sexuality to those around me.

[BREATH]

Since the age of seventeen, consent, sex, and the bedroom, for me, have been laced with drugs – those given to me knowingly and unknowingly by strangers, experts, professionals, often with the end goal of making me a quieter, more compliant, less present version of myself.

[BREATH]

When we talk about sex, sexuality, consent, and rape culture without a consideration of the institutions that play significant roles in promoting, perpetrating, supporting, and justifying the violence that we experience, the conversations remain superficial, are rarely constructive, and isolate our experiences as being both relational and yet simultaneously highly individualized.

[BREATH]

And yet the violence I've experienced through forced penetration and unwanted, non-consenting sexual intercourse and touching cannot be separated from the time my psychiatrist told me that wetting the bed was a reasonable medication side effect to deal with as he perceived me to be acting "more normal," the countless times my psychiatrist described the repeated sexually based attacks as delusions, or the time I recounted being raped to a psychiatrist only to have the experience explained by him as what was wrong with me; the result of my symptoms of being hypersexual.

[BREATH]

So while I live through my own experiences of trauma and violence in relation to my madness, my sexuality, and my gender on a daily basis I actually don't talk about them very often. Not because I'm full of shame or embarrassment or discomfort, but because I think to highlight my individual experiences and myself can risk missing the point. When sharing intimate details of the violence and trauma I have experienced, I am constantly positioned as the inspiration, fitting into the concept that disability activists call inspiration porn – just getting up and out of bed and on with life is, apparently, remarkable. Even more so, my personal story gets mined by others – professionals, institutions, and the general public – in order to position me as the "model patient" – the appropriation of my story gets used by those in power to further their

goals: “take drugs, see professionals, and you can have a normal life.” This positioning of me as a form of patient porn dismisses the great deal of violence and trauma I experienced just by nature of being a patient.

[BREATH]

In my creative practice I work primarily with dyestuffs that come from the natural world around me. In order to do this ethically I have to be considerate of the larger environment and ecologies, being aware that my imprint on the world around me is not a one-way relationship. I have to be thoughtful about the larger systems that exist and how my views of plant life as a resource for dye material need to be seen through a lens that considers more than just my own needs and experiences.

[BREATH]

In this way my process weaves into my aesthetic and informs the development of my conceptual ideas. Through my piece *Pissing on Pity*, you will see the juxtaposition of the mark making that comes as a result of painting with nature-based dyes alongside the imagery of the bee. This calls upon both the interdependent as well as individual aspects of our lives, our communities, and the complicated ways in which they form and function. It brings together and separates the spaces we hold to be both deeply personal and collectively political.

5.5 The Curative and Healing Imperative

Four years ago, the College of Art Association held their annual conference in New York. I presented research as part of a Disability Arts and Culture panel. Through an exploration of my role as an emerging artist, I presented on the appropriation of mad stories in community arts practices. With an air of disdain, an audience member posed the first question at the end of the panel, challenging: “...but don’t you find your art practice to be therapeutic?”

This is a common interjection that happens when I present and/or exhibit my artwork. In formal and informal conversations, when my art is read in relation to madness, the rhetoric of

mental health is inescapable. In turn, questions about the personally therapeutic benefits of my art are not just suggested but assumed. When I ask the audience to question this notion that my art is inherently curative I am met with contempt and defensiveness, for therapy and narratives of recovery are seen as benevolent and apolitical. Here it is important to understand that this taken-for-granted link between healing and art in relation to madness is not happenstance. The curative and healing imperative attached to the art of the mentally ill is a direct result of the relationship between the asylum and the formal art world.

Consequently, we must first turn to the asylum in order to understand the relationship between creative work and psychiatric containment. Before Pinel and the emergence of more therapeutic approaches in the asylum, art was mostly understood as wasteful activity (MacGregor, 1989). Ferrier (1998) gives us the example of how Aloïse (a now well-known name in the field of Outsider Art) had her earliest drawings destroyed by doctors, and so much of her work was done in secrecy. However, along with the shifts that were occurring in institutions during the time of Pinel, the value of art made by the inmates was focused on the rudimentary actions of making as opposed to the actual artistic process. So, for instance, psychiatrists would have been interested in charting the behaviours and symptoms that were observable when the inmate engaged in producing art, which is why in this time psychiatrists could justify supplying inmates with limited art materials.

A significant shift happened in France in 1907, when Marcel Réja (pseudonym for psychiatrist Dr. Paul Meunier) published the first book that looked at the aesthetic characteristics of mental patient art. This was noteworthy because until then, the focus of writing about mental patient art was on psychiatric charting. It was unusual that Réja set aside pathology, symptoms, and other concepts commonly linked to mental patient art and talked about it with the language,

terminology, and concepts of the art world (MacGregor, 1989). This, then, can be seen as a stepping stone between the creative work that happened in the asylum and its subsequent recognition in the formal art world.

Next, we can turn to the fields of Outsider Art and Art Brut as sites of connection between the asylum and the formal art world. Two important figures in the development of the concept of Outsider Art are Hans Prinzhorn and Walter Morgenthaler. Both men are largely understood as responsible for a pivotal change in the approach to insane art, moving away from symptomological assessments of work toward aesthetic inquiries (Peiry, 2001). Prinzhorn wanted to find painting in its natural state and looked for it specifically in the work of insane artists. And yet Prinzhorn, a psychiatrist and art historian, was critiqued by Ferrier (1998) as working with a misguided approach. What Ferrier proposed was that it was inappropriate to think that any person, regardless of how disconnected they were from society or the dominant culture, could separate themselves from the human network of words and gestures. For instance, Ferrier points out that a psychiatric patient is likely to receive encouragement from their psychiatrists or other people who are interested in their artwork. So, while Prinzhorn was instrumental in the development of valuing patient art for its aesthetic and artistic characteristics, his methods were problematic for their fetishization of the mental patient.

There is critique, like that coming from Maclagan (2009), of the methods through which art professionals like Dubuffet collected and controlled the work categorized as Art Brut. In essence, housing the pieces of Art Brut together in the way that Dubuffet did, he created, according to Maclagan, the epitome of Art Brut. This process of museumification resembles the more conservative efforts of the mainstream art world. Maclagan likens this act of collecting to a

process of assimilation of the work of Art Brut, which contradicts Dubuffet's driving force of providing a radical alternative to the dominant art culture of the day.

While Maclagan (2009) took issue with the methods used to curate Art Brut, Thévoz (preface to Peiry, 2001) saw it as the unsettling of the museum. For Thévoz, creating a museum that only housed Art Brut was an intentional act of defiance that challenged the rules of mainstream art. Further, Thévoz calls attention to the act of documentation, which was directly contrary to the ways in which this body of work was often ignored or even actively destroyed. By collecting and documenting this body of work, Dubuffet was considered by some to be introducing Art Brut into the "palaces of culture" (Thévoz, preface to Peiry, 2001, p. 8). Given this point of view, Dubuffet's creation of the anti-museum was a significant rebellious response toward the mainstream art world.

Outsider Art is an important field to explore for many reasons – one being the fact that it has challenged opinions of what we describe as art. In this sense, Maizels (1996) points out that Outsider Art challenges the notion of art history as occurring in a linear fashion. This encourages the understanding that art does not have to derive inspiration from what has come before it, but it can be created without any knowledge or formal training in art. In this sense, Maizels plays into the ideals of Outsider Art as a hopeful and radical challenge to the institution of mainstream art. Another important reason to explore the idea of Outsider Art is to engage with the implications of denying people access to the world of art. According to MacGregor (1989), the act of rejecting the art of a people by declaring it "not art" denies their very reality. MacGregor points to the history of denying the art of the insane – through definition, access to materials to create, destruction of art – and how this is intricately related to the denial of their very existence. So, in turn, to put ideological value in the art of the insane challenges the psychiatrist and the general

public to respect the psychotic experience. For MacGregor, this encourages a shift from a stance where interfering and manipulating is seen as the appropriate response to the lives and lived experiences of the insane to instead taking up positions of learning and listening. When we shift our approach in this way, it is expected that our attitudes change in a way that begins to value experiences of difference.

So, while the ideals of Outsider Art suggest a radical and progressive approach to the art produced in the margins – both by populations who are historically marginalized by and from society, as well as in the margins of the mainstream art world – it renders many important questions. First and foremost, we must attend to how the connections between Outsider Art and Art Brut and the asylum are directly linked to the ongoing curative and healing imperative within the art of the mentally ill. Through the continued reliance on the biopathography in order to position the Outsider Artist as outsider, the field continues to fail to disconnect the artistry of the mentally ill from their psychiatric charts and diagnoses. This maintains the perspective that in order to know the art, we must know the life of the artist. In the case of the Outsider Artist, this requires a direct link between artistry and mental illness as an episteme. This, in turn, fails to sever the link between the asylum (or in contemporary times, the psy industries) and the formal art world. As the medical model is so prevalent within our understandings of madness, the link between the therapeutic realm becomes seen as natural and is left unquestioned. As a result, the histories of violence that occur in these sites of carceral containment, and the direct relationships between art therapy and the depoliticization of mad art, become silenced and erased. Therapeutic interventions are seen as inherently benevolent and thus positioning mad art in this way is seen as a good-natured suggestion.

5.6 Conclusion – The Implications of the Aesthetic Markers of Mental Illness

As discussed in this chapter, the frameworks of understanding political aesthetics, and the aesthetics of politics, are complex. While some like to simplify political art as being tied to particular practices and/or creative movements, there needs to be more nuanced conversations that critically unpack the layers of context in order to fully comprehend the politics of any creative practice. This is true both in relation to my approach to studio craft work as well as in the conceptual positioning of my work as mad art. Robertson (2011) helps to tease apart some of the elements that inform the histories of feminist intentions with textile-based work when she states: “while some feminists called for the abandoning of sewing and knitting because they were emblems of conformity, others harnessed the feminine qualities that were used to dismiss textiles as art subverting it to demonstrate in peaceful protest in the 70s and 80s” (p. 185). She goes on to explain that “a connected history remains to be written, and it would seem that the history of craft activism is one of constant reinvention ... [examining what might be lost] through the erasure of a historical trajectory of radical practice” (p. 186). Most notably, Robertson speaks to the storying of craft as not just deradicalizing histories of practice but whitewashing them as well. Interestingly, Robertson outlines this erasure, in part, alongside the contemporary emergence of craft practices in places such as the formal art world, but also in contemporary sites of protest and activism. So how then can we use craft practices as a way to disrupt hegemonic aesthetic markers, such as the aesthetic markers of mental illness? Black and Burisch (2011) suggest that

the rise of craftivism and other politically engaged crafting practices – which value the radical potential of a particular craft activity other than its finished end-product – shift traditional emphasis away from polished, professionally made craft objects themselves

and toward a political and conceptual focus, positioning, and deployment of the work involved in making them. This emphasis has made room for reconsiderations of crafts(wo)manship, performativity, mindfulness, tacit knowledge, skill sharing, DIY, anti-capitalism, and activism. (p. 205)

This critical reappraisal calls for the purposeful positioning of craft, without a naïve claim that craft has intrinsic radical leanings. Instead, this approach to Critical Craft Praxis requires the maker to carefully consider the potential that craft has to contribute to hegemonic efforts, and instead actively re-locate the work in opposition.

This leads us to consider the current landscape for mad art in a time where Deaf, disability, and mad art is experiencing increasing support and interest from funders, policy-making institutions, curators, galleries, academic institutions, and the general public. While many folks maintain simple definitions of mad art as being any art made by and about people with lived experience of mental illness, I contend that mad art is creative and cultural production that happens within and alongside Mad Movement organizing. Amid this interest, first and foremost we must ask ourselves: in what ways are people interested in mad art, for what purposes, and how does this interest impact the lives and working conditions of mad artists themselves? More specifically, who is benefiting from the interest in and inclusion of mad art in the mainstream art world? These questions will be unpacked in greater detail in the following chapter.

By positioning my creative practice as happening in direct relation to Mad Movement organizing, this opens up a dialogue about the necessarily political roots of mad art, the role of the ally institution (or non-mad artist), and the importance of moving beyond the belief that simply including the mentally ill artist demonstrates meaningful support of mad artists and their

creative work. Inclusion, as mentioned above, simply makes room for those who can best fit into the existing structures within the different sectors of the art world. In the case of mad artists, this means not only that creative work that is easily read through the aesthetics of the art of the mentally ill is most valued, but further, that it is specifically those whose intersecting identities are palatable to dominant society. Thus, mentally ill artists who are predominantly white and can position themselves within the narrative arc of recovery are the ones that are celebrated and rewarded. This in turn exemplifies the overlap of our institutions – in this case, arts and culture institutions and the broader psy industries – with the goals of maintaining the systems that are promoted and valued through the efforts of the psy industries. Again, this demonstrates that popular culture – and, as this dissertation has outlined, creative work more widely – does not merely have to represent mental illness, as it in and of itself reifies mental illness as an episteme (White, 2011). As a response, the aesthetics of mad art function as a disruption to the aesthetic markers of the mentally ill.

Chapter 6 – Re-Crafting Mad Aesthetics

6.1 Introduction

Throughout this dissertation I have positioned the field of Disability Studies as an academic discipline that not only acknowledges the value of creative production, but also turns to it as a way to craft knowledge. My commitment to Deaf, disability, and mad art is demonstrated through an ongoing commitment to supporting the struggles and resistance of Mad Movement organizing, cross-movement relationship building informed by the politics of disability justice, and the commitment to a studio praxis informed by this ongoing political work. My predisposition to identify first and foremost as a mad artist is largely informed by the influence of the academic traditions of Critical Disability Studies on my academic, activist, and creative practices. And yet the academic disciplines of Critical Disability Studies, and in turn Mad Studies, have themselves grown significantly out of my political commitment to the social movement organizing of the psychiatric survivor movement.

Understanding Disability Studies as an academic field set within the institutional context of the neoliberal university is necessary in thinking through the limitations that exist in tying the movements of Deaf, disability, and mad art with an academic field of studies. Disability Studies, as a university program, cannot avoid the bureaucratic boundaries inherent in the neoliberal university. While universities house programs, like Disability Studies, that have strong commitments to unsettling knowledge production, dissemination, and preservation, the institution continuously interpellates the non-normative subject in a way that struggles to move beyond single-identity experiences. This is not to say that dissent and cross-movement organizing is not happening in the university and beyond. However, I caution against romanticizing movements such as Deaf, disability, and mad art in academic endeavours without

a critical appraisal of how the intellectualization of these movements continues to maintain the power and privilege of those who manage and define community, culture, and individual identities using top-down approaches.

In this chapter I explore three central questions, posed at the end of Chapter 5 in order to shape my final thoughts on my journey through this dissertation. As I reflect on my position within, alongside, and out the other side of this overall project, I am particularly concerned with 1) In what ways are people invested in mad art? 2) For what purpose are people interested in mad art? A secondary question here is 2.b) How does this interest materialize and impact the lives of mad people? And, finally, 3) Who benefits from the inclusion of mad art into the realm of cultural production? In answering this third question, I am also interested in reflecting on who does not benefit and/or who is not included.

In considering the aforementioned questions, I intend to look at a few overlapping and yet distinct sites of relevance. First, I will reflect on my own participation in two parallel symposia and a strategic planning retreat, all three of which highlight issues pertaining to Deaf, disability, and mad art. The first symposium, *Crippling the Arts in Canada*, happened in the spring of 2016 and was hosted by Tangled Arts + Disability in Toronto, Ontario. The second symposium, *#BigFeels: Making Space for Mental Health and the Arts*, took place in the spring of 2018 and was hosted by Workman Arts, also held in Toronto (Reid, 2016; Reid, 2018). Finally, *Dis/Engaged* was a solidarity building and strategic planning retreat for the Deaf, Disability, and Mad Arts domain in Canada, hosted by Deaf, Disability & Mad Arts Alliance Canada at the Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta. Looking at these symposia and planning retreat in relation to one another as well as alongside my own practice allows for an analysis of critical concepts in

relation to the broader field. This helps to make connections between my theoretical and aesthetic explorations, offering comparable points of analysis.

The initial symposium reports were written for *Canadian Art's* online content. Intended as quick-release reflections on each symposium, the reports were included in the online publication as part of their efforts to cover more diverse topics. The majority of readers were expected to be non-specialists in the area of Deaf, disability and mad art, which instantly set the tone for the writing. Much of the work in writing these reports required me to make sense of Deaf, disability, and mad art to an audience with little to no background information. Interestingly enough, this approach was perhaps just as useful to folks with current investment in the area, as it seems that many folks have limited knowledge of the depth and breadth of history that Canada has in the field. The reports were paid work and this influenced how I wrote about my engagement with the happenings of the symposia as well as how I reflected them to the public. The shift in my analysis within this dissertation allows me to centre my critical evaluation more fully, and in turn has me writing my way out of this work, processing my own relationship with the sites of struggle I am present to in Deaf, disability, and mad art organizing in Canada.

6.2 Questioning the Role of Community in Community Arts

In reference to Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch*, Hagedorn and Springgay (2013) signal an often-overlooked element of how the relationship between craft and carceral containment are related. As they quote Parker, "near the end of the 19th century embroidery was blamed for inducing in women what Freud named 'hysteria,' caused by the hours they spent in a hypnotic state" (Hagedorn & Springgay, 2013, p. 11). In outlining this quote, Hagedorn and Springgay argue that crafters, particularly women, were suspect for either thinking too much or becoming too hysterical because of the mindless nature of craftwork. Hagedorn and Springgay

go on to claim that “by reclaiming needlework as something healing and personally beneficial,” women are challenging “both a feminist and a patriarchal view of their chosen craft” (p. 14). This, however, fails to take into account the use of needlework to operationalize the “healing and personally beneficial” elements of needlework to control, contain, treat, manage, and diagnose mad women. The reclamation of these practices could in fact exist as a site of resistance while simultaneously being used as a method to oppress women.

However, when considering the dual possibilities of positioning the “healing and personally beneficial” elements of craft as simultaneously an act of reclamation and a process of oppression, it is my experience that the audience has a great deal of agency in determining what this means. So, for instance, what was distinctly apparent to me at both of the symposia was a sense of who the audience and stakeholders were and how that impacted the framing of the conversations. Both symposia had overwhelming representation from institutions, organizations, and programs – both mainstream and community – which resulted in limited space being taken up by artists and cultural producers. My sense from the dialogues and workshops was that the artists and cultural producers who were engaged experienced a disconnect from the political movements that inform Deaf, disability, and mad arts. At best, there was a general familiarity with things like the social model of disability, the role of identity politics in community organizing, and the celebration of pride in non-normative ways of being. This signals a familiarity with representational values and politics, which is more in line with first-wave efforts of Disability Arts and Culture organizing. There was very limited discussion about local, national, and international histories of social justice-oriented work in relation to our communities and limited room to engage in critical conversations that moved this work forward. While these elements were not completely absent, the scarcity made it seem as if those interested in these

conversations were either in the minority or for various reasons unwilling to discuss these issues openly.

Admittedly, for both symposia, my reflections on the politics of the discussions were difficult to write about publicly. At both symposia I had distinctly disappointing experiences in that the dialogues occurring seemed to be predictable and uninspiring. I hesitate to write these words, even here in my dissertation, because they come off as immensely negative and overly critical. But it is hard to show up to community events that market themselves as centring counter-hegemonic knowledge and yet in practice only perpetuate the conversations that are palatable to mainstream audiences.

It makes me wonder what is it about these events that gather a critical mass of folks who are invested in the programming and organizations that have historically contributed to the ongoing marginalization, discrimination, and oppression of Deaf, disabled, and mad people. Why is it that we continue to focus on conversations of access and inclusion decades after we have gained critical knowledge on how it fails to benefit our communities? How and why are radical conversations silenced and erased in our organizing efforts? Is it that all of the work that occurs through and from these symposia has no worth? Absolutely not. But it is worth noting the predictability of the central issues and the repetitive nature of the dialogues. I wonder what would happen if these symposia had centred the artists and cultural workers, purposefully starting from a place that was rooted in the radical movements of Deaf, disability, and mad arts. What lessons might we learn as a community through difficult yet productive conversations rooted in a radical commitment to justice-oriented politics?

And perhaps it is these very reflections that have me getting around to addressing the question of “for what purpose?” The question here brings together my critique of positioning

craft as therapeutic with my current inquiries on community. In order to parse my thoughts, I turn to the recent work of Frederick, Tarasoff, Voronka, Costa, and Kidd (2017) titled *The Problem with “Community” in the Mental Health Field*. While it might seem reaching to centralize work that analyzes mental health policy and practice in my summations regarding mad art, I have come to understand that in fact it is not so disparate. With the hyper-focus on positioning mad art as therapeutic, the continual centring of therapeutic programs, and the substantial presence that mental health institutions and professionals take up in the various locations where mad art is happening, mental health policy and practice is in fact a useful comparative field. In their work, Frederick et al. unpack the pervasiveness of the notion of community within policy documents and hold it against the vapid way it is operationalized. Turning to neoliberalism as a way to both understand and critique how community is employed, the authors state that

[t]he notion of communities as a naturally occurring alternative to the exclusion and marginalization of individuals with psychiatric disabilities shifts the responsibility for inclusion onto communities and individuals and does not attend to systemic issues such as sanism, racism, and poverty. (2017, p. 6)

Further, the authors go on to argue that this neoliberal framing and exploitation of the concept of community reinforces the expectations that people self-manage, and failure to do so is the failure of the individual. In their findings, the authors suggest a turn to the politics and organizing approaches exemplified in disability justice, in which social justice, intersectional, rights-based, and interdependent frameworks are valued.

These points help to unpack the discomfort I have felt throughout this project, at the many intersecting, overlapping, and distinct communities that can make sense of my work.

Whether through the lens of Deaf, disability, and mad art, or Critical Craft Praxis, or queer and feminist politics, I continually struggle with how the concept of community materializes. The prevailing notion of community is intended to make meaning for why we come together and to bring meaning to our creative work. Taken up in ways that are taken for granted, lacking definition, and vacuous, though, I find it comes up hollow and falls short of impact. This very issue leaves me in constant turmoil, quietly sorting through my discomfort and disappointment. It is through my realization that community, as it is taken up by the general public, is not synonymous with social movement, resistance, and justice-oriented struggle. It is this realization that leads me to the process of dis/identifying as a mad artist.

When I come to spaces that take up issues pertaining to mad artists, community is often at the forefront of the conversations. But community in this sense is specifically functioning through a neoliberal discourse. Artists identifying as mad are put in conversation with mental health programs and organizations, and these conversations highlight notions of self-care, mental well-being, and adequate access to treatment. Quite frankly, this to me is depressing. If I wanted to talk about access to therapy and treatment, I would go to service providers. I have no interest in conflating my creative practice with the psy-based interventions that deal with my daily experiences of crisis and distress. Placing these two spaces in conversation is a move backwards for the movements of Deaf, disability, and mad art – our practices should not be conflated with therapeutic programs nor should they be informed by the rhetoric of treatment and care. Instead, I want to talk about how our art is changing the world, not how the world is using our art to change us. But this ubiquitous notion of community has a stronghold on shaping the sites and spaces that we create; instead of being sites of struggle and resistance, they centre the discourses of access and well-being that maintain the hegemonic power structures of this world. Well

resourced, the mental health organizations carry out the processes of mental health literacy, and in these times do so in a way that frames them through practices that are espoused as creative and innovative. Through this, the general public is taught that the way to address the issue of madness is to contain, manage, and control it through Westernized medical model perspectives that co-constitute systems of racism, colonialism, sexism, sanism, transphobia, homophobia, and classism.

This leads me into a final consideration of the very issue of inclusion as being central in how we approach mad art. As Frederick et al. (2017) point out, mental health policy often refers to community as being a place, somewhere out there, where people can feel a sense of belonging. In the same sense, when attending both *Crippling the Arts* and #BigFeels, the Deaf, disability, and mad arts communities were framed as a place to celebrate difference, come together, and feel included – a way of belonging in a countercultural community while demanding access to the dominant hegemonic art world. There is nothing inherently wrong with fighting for inclusion and feeling a sense of togetherness in relation to shared community identities. But what happens when this inclusion only works so far as to make space for those who already make sense within the dominant framework of belonging? How do our struggles for belonging have us responsible for policing both our own bodies as well as the bodies around us? This very practice is what has many of our movements and communities reproducing the hierarchies of power and privilege that exist elsewhere in society. What it has made me realize is that it is not that my identity as a mad person is too expansive to be included into these community spaces; in fact, my experiences of being white, middle class, cisgender, highly educated, and upwardly mobile in terms of class allow my identity to be easily included – read with very minimal threat to destabilizing the power structures that exist in our world.

Instead, what I have come to learn is that my politics are what become difficult to translate within communities that organize around self-care, therapy, and reducing stigma. As Frederick et al. (2017) suggest, turning away from community and instead developing our practices around issues of disability justice is a constructive way forward. While Frederick et al. are talking about mental health practice, I argue that the same applies for our work in creative fields. I first learned about disability justice through arts collectives like Sins Invalid, artists like Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, and activists such as Mia Mingus – who further helped me to situate my understanding of the multiplicity of queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour who dreamed up these movements and frameworks, as did Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018), in spaces that extend beyond the academic industrial complex. Central to a disability justice approach is that it is organized around multi-issue politics and is intersectional by necessity (disability justice is not in fact just about disability). A disability justice approach turns to equality frameworks; while seeing rights-based models as approaching issues by “expanding and including,” disability justice has us re-envisioning entire systems. Consequently, disability justice asks questions such as “what does justice look like?” which allows for the collective dreaming and building of worlds and futures that can nurture the survival and flourishing of us all (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Envisioning interdependence as essential in this world-making, disability justice does not preclude notions of community. However, it does require that our sense of community – how we build it and what we expect it to do – be approached with a careful consideration of the structural issues that have given rise to the struggles and resistance of folks who are typically pushed to the periphery of our hegemonic neoliberal communities.

The issue with the development of the mad identity is taken up by Gorman (2013) through her consideration of the limitations of identity-based organizing. Gorman positions the construction of the mad identity, as articulated through Mad Movement organizing, both as one of privilege and as reproducing the white Western subject. Similarly, Tam (2013) calls attention to the use of intersectional frameworks that have us overly reliant on identity and approaching it in additive ways. Gorman and Tam likewise each point out how these processes implicate race in our theorization of madness and, perhaps more importantly, in our efforts at organizing within and alongside experiences in this realm.

With overlapping yet distinctly separate discussions, Gorman and Tam call us to a place where material realities are pushed to the forefront of our consideration. Gorman “urges us to see the political economy of mental health services” (p. 279) as a way to position our efforts as anti-colonial and anti-racist, while Tam outlines the need for considering “inter-institutional oppression” (p. 283) as a way to “transform our resistance to sanism and psychiatric violence” (p. 290). While both authors situate a necessary critique regarding the implications of identity-based politics in the Mad Movement – in ways that divorce from a critical mad politic – they also outline possibilities for bridge building and transformations in how we can come together and effect social change. Seeing madness as relational, then, is one way that we can situate our experiences as continually mediated by systems and institutions. This in turn necessitates, as Gorman and Tam suggest, a reconsideration of the impacts of taking on and working from a mad identity if this is not also done through an anti-colonial and anti-racist standpoint.

Circling back to the politics of identity formation in relation to mad art, I reflect on the growing visibility of the politics of madness and the mad identity as reflected both within the work of Gorman (2013) as well as in my own observations as an artist-activist-scholar. With this,

there is an increase in popularity in claiming a mad identity. Yet with the increase in mental health literacy efforts, anti-stigma campaigns, and presence of therapeutic responses, the reclamation of the mad identity becomes murky as a political act. When the reclamation of the mad identity begins and ends with a lived experience of madness, in fact the act does little more than normalize the identity. This in turn shapes the process, product, and purpose of mad art. In relation to the artist-activist, this is productive when the goal of Deaf, disability, and mad art is conceptualized as inclusion. However, to celebrate and include the mad identity as the modus operandi not only overlooks the history of mad cultural production but limits the revolutionary potential of mad futurities that work from an anti-colonial praxis.

6.3 Dis/Identifying as Political Aesthetic

This shift in focus is a key step in my process of dis/identifying as a mad artist. While not entirely casting off this identity, since it is entwined with the very development of my political engagement in Mad Movement organizing, I have realized that to identify as a mad artist comes with a set of stories that are impossible to disrupt. Even in the most progressive of places, when my mad identity is invoked and taken up, the discourse of mental illness (madness as positioned through the medical model) is the only way that my experiences are read. Regardless of how I frame my narrative, I am consumed as a story of hope and recovery. In my attempts to subvert these dangerously oversimplified understandings of mad experiences, my story in turn becomes too political, too angry, too cynical, and abrasive. While pride was a way that I came to terms with my madness, madness – and, in fact, anger – was the way that I felt any sense of healing, which, as Chapman (2013) explains, can be valued as part of the process of politicizing madness. Pride in my identity as a mad queer woman was an important way that I found community in the

early days of my organizing. However, my process of dis/identifying as a mad artist has been part of my journey in understanding the privilege I materialize through this identity.

Cognizant of over forty-five years of Deaf, disability, and mad art in Canada, I am interested in how the politics of Mad Movement organizing inform aesthetic development within my studio craft practice. Throughout the dissertation, I have outlined the ways in which this differs from apolitical and ahistorical approaches to mad aesthetics. What I have come to understand is that the propensity for framing aesthetic qualities of mad art as apolitical and ahistorical in fact is not a framing of mad aesthetics at all. Typically, when taking up art made by and about mad experiences, we are, as a general public, engaging with the aesthetics of mental illness. In particular, the aesthetic of mental illness highlights the biopathography of the mentally ill artist. This is where both the biography and the pathology of the artist become central in understanding both the subject and the object of the art. With an inability to separate the pathology from the life story of the artist, and then an inability to extricate either from how the art is read, it becomes difficult to ascertain what in fact is being put on exhibit, as the art and the artist start to merge together to generate a spectacle of the mad subject. In many ways, the art of the mentally ill is positioned as a window into the mad creative genius. The positioning of the mentally ill artist in this light stems from the phrenology work of Lombroso (Kornfeld, 1997) and continues through contemporary romanticizing of the relationship between mental illness, suffering, and creativity. Mental illness is centre stage in the construction and consumption of the story of the mad artist. This then informs the aesthetic lens through which the art of the mentally ill is framed. The logic of centring the discourse of mental illness leads to the aesthetic of the art of the mentally ill as being inherently healing and curative, for the medical model not only positions madness as an illness but requires that we respond to it by eliminating it through

treatment and therapy (or if not eliminating it, then at least controlling and managing it through policies and carceral containment).

The centrality of the discourse of mental illness, as understood through the medical model, is important in discerning how the aesthetic of absence comes into play. As defined by Gorman (2007), the aesthetic of absence explains the way that we read mentally ill artists as being naïve and incapable of making conscious aesthetic decisions in their work. This is relevant, as Gorman points out, because it validates the prevalence of therapeutic and day programs as the main artistic programming available to mentally ill artists. It also explains the depoliticization of the art of the mentally ill, disconnecting their creative practices from social engagement of any kind. The aesthetic of absence in fact opens up the conversation on the aesthetics of the mentally ill to consider how the preoccupation with inclusion is itself an aesthetic with the art of the mentally ill. Practices of inclusion take shape in the efforts of making room for mentally ill artists in various artistic training spaces. Inclusion is also a factor in our focus on shifting art historical canons and popular culture in order to incorporate more representation, better representation, accurate representation, and different representation of mental illness through both artwork and art objects. These efforts, while meaningful and important within the work that we do as artists, policy makers, and cultural workers, limit the aesthetic development of the mentally ill artist by constantly deferring to a normative aesthetic gaze as the framework from which we begin or continue a seemingly never-ending conversation.

What I have learned through both my writing and studio-based work is that what I make, and in turn what I am concerned with in writing, is not psychoanalytic by nature. In large part what I mean is that I am not an identity-based artist. I am not interested in reflecting or representing my mad identity, nor am I particularly interested in telling stories of madness,

specifically at the individual level. At the outset of this dissertation project, when I was composing the proposal, I kept coming up against the feeling that I wanted to have agency and autonomy over *how* I framed my story, with the feeling that if *I* do not tell my story then it will continually be told for me. What I have come to realize, though, is that both the audience and, overall, the pervasiveness of hegemonic discourses of mental illness play a major role in one's story regardless of *who* does the telling. Even when I frame my story through a politics of madness that resists the medical model, the hegemonic discourse results in a lens that makes it difficult to hear anything but an individualized account of crisis and distress. It is important to mention here that my work also is not about issues of identity as pertaining to the larger mad community. Making identity work at a community level faces all of the same issues of identity work that are focused on the individualized experience. I have thus found that when it comes to mad experiences, representation – whether critical, disruptive, or status quo – does not deal with structural inequities. At best, creative work that is focused on representations of madness simply mirrors, replicates, and expresses these inequities in ways that do not move us toward social change.

Through developing an understanding of the aesthetics of the mentally ill as it is focused on an aesthetics of biopathography, the aesthetics of absence, an aesthetics of inclusion, and the aesthetics of a curative and healing imperative, I have learned more about how I situate my own creative practice. As an explicitly socially engaged, political, and historical practice, I make work that is informed by the aesthetics of mad art. In my understanding, the aesthetic markers of mad art remember the history of struggles and resistance of Mad Movement organizing; cultivate mad pride; empower mad communities through the countering of discrimination, oppression, and

marginalization; organize across social movements; and are often unintelligible yet discernibly political.

6.3.1 Project Three: Reflecting on Process While Making (Within) *Movements*



Figure 8: A study in movements. Photo: Cat O'Neil (Image description: Jenna sitting cross-legged on top of the printing table. Jenna assertively faces the camera with her patchwork and explorations in nature-based screen printing laid out in front of her).

This final project is a reflection on the process of this dissertation as a space of meaning making. Instead of coming out of this dissertation with a distinct body of work or finished products that are mined for meaning, the end of this project is a place of beginnings. I find myself deep in reflection on some of the previously mentioned pieces in this exegesis (see *Pissing on Pity* and *Comrade*), the various skills and techniques explored to create this work, as well as newer pieces and techniques that are emerging and very much still in progress. The end

of this project creates an opening through which new bodies of work are beginning to actualize. In these ruptures I find myself engaging with this idea and the material experience of *Movements*, working toward a series of studies that draw on my participation in mad movement organizing.



Figure 9: Fragile movements. Photo: Cat O'Neil (Image description: A printing table with natural dyestuffs, burned screens, squeegees, bandanas printed with overlapping images and shapes, and scrap materials artfully displayed across it.)

I find myself exploring, through this new studio work, the possibilities of moving beyond both the neoliberalization and intellectualization of the movement and the shifts occurring in how the organizing gets located – think, for instance, of the discursive shifts in our understandings of recovery, the appropriation of experiential knowledge, and the depoliticization of how we employ self-care. I find myself considering artistic activation that makes connections between the knowledge that gets lost in the intellectualization of Deaf, disability, and mad art –

the knowledge that is known in the intimate spaces of community and which is often too messy or indiscernible for so-called community-based research. Within this study of *Movements*, I am blurring the lines between studio practice and movement organizing. Drawing on various fibre techniques and creative practices that are commonly used within community organizing – such as screen printing, bandanas, buttons, patches, and banners – I am reflecting on the tensions that exist in our collective organizing efforts. As a fibre artist and a maker, I see value in the presence of tension and how it materializes in our social environment. Within these pieces, my goal is to dig deeper into what seem to be opposing and contradictory elements in our social world by taking up the notion of tension as having both constructive and destructive possibilities. Through this series I am working with objects and symbols that are taken for granted in order to use them to engage with ideas of fragility, anger, desire, violence, healing, justice, and radical accountability. I am interested in the constructive and destructive aspects of the efforts we contribute as we struggle to co-create a better world where all can flourish.

The larger piece of the self-titled series, *Movements*, is a fibre sculpture in progress. Working with yards of hand-dyed cotton, the sculpture is made up primarily of the *Lost Ships* patchwork block and takes shape as a quilt in progress. With oddly shaped edges, this quilt takes its structural form as it is ripples across the wall. This work complicates and collectivizes notions of embodied knowledge, turning to an embodiment that roots itself in a community that does not fit neatly into the intellectual endeavours of the academy. This embodiment signals not one body or a lived experience, but the body of movements. As such, the overall work opens up a line of inquiry focused on issues of tokenism, which I understand to be a central element of inclusionism that is mobilized to sidestep justice-oriented demands for complete re-imaginings of the systems, institutions, and structures that maintain the current hegemonic rule.

6.4 Disrupting Inclusionism as an Insider/Outsider by Crafting New Worlds

In the world of Outsider Art, and in particular mental patient art, Agnes Richter is an iconoclast. Her jacket, as written about in Hornstein's (2009) book *Agnes's Jacket: A Psychologist's Search for the Meanings of Madness*, is an important cultural artefact in the historical context of mad art. As Hornstein explains in great detail, the jacket is an exceptional piece within the well-known collection of Hans Prinzhorn. Agnes's jacket, as described by Hornstein, was read as extraordinary in that it was "intensely personal both in message and design" (p. 236). Delivered to Prinzhorn from the Hubertusberg asylum in eastern Germany, there was very little context regarding the specifics of when, why, and how it was created (Hornstein, 2009). As was the case with much of the rest of Prinzhorn's collection, Agnes's jacket was overlooked, improperly stored, and uncared for after World War II.⁵ Upon discovery of the collection, curators, as Hornstein documents, began to archive and exhibit the work in a medical school. Of particular interest is the curatorial strategy of making sense of Prinzhorn's collection. Hornstein notes that as a result of the audience experiencing the work as having "great emotional intensity and ambiguity," curators feared that the audience might be expected to "confront the work on their own terms." To quell these fears, some curators believed the collection was required to be "encased in some framework" (p. 242). The framework imposed by the curators is one element of how the work has been received; the framework through which Hornstein stories the work of Agnes's jacket is another.

⁵ Leading up to and during World War II, the Nazi regime used mental patient art as propaganda, exhibiting it as a comparative point for what they determined to be undesirable cultural production. In some ways this saved a considerable amount of creative work that might have otherwise been destroyed during this time period.

As Hornstein explains, stigma results in the inability of mad people to tell their stories (about madness), and one of the benefits of publishing is that it allows for written accounts of mad experiences to reach the public (p. 235). The problem, Hornstein outlines, is that when people use creativity as a method to express “unusual states” and “extreme emotions,” there is a resulting general lack of representation, documentation, and visibility of the art. Seemingly, one of Hornstein’s goals in writing about Agnes’s jacket is to make visible to the world Agnes’s story of unusual states and extreme emotions.

Hornstein experiences Agnes’s jacket as being so powerful that it takes on a spiritual presence. Invoking the very body of Agnes, remnants of her bodily fluids (as evidenced through the traces of sweat stains in the armpits of her jacket), Hornstein feels transported in both time and place when studying the jacket. Both methodical and ritualistic in her examination, Hornstein repeatedly refers to Agnes’s jacket as otherworldly. Continually contradicting herself, Hornstein oscillates between declaring that the purpose of the jacket is not to be a translatable object while focusing almost the entirety of her exploration of the work on its decipherability. Perhaps most striking in terms of contradictions is Hornstein’s determination that it would be best to access and translate Agnes’s case files in order to provide her a “firm ground” by ascertaining “what Agnes’s doctors had to say about her” (p. 252). This is done, as Hornstein explains, not to better understand the jacket but to develop an understanding of Agnes herself.

The scrutiny that Hornstein uses when assessing the jacket admittedly makes me uncomfortable, as it all too closely resembles my encounters with the psy industrial complex. The jacket is approached with the professional care and distance of “white gloved hands” (p. 249) and yet is simultaneously earnestly pawed over in order to examine it at every possible angle. Hornstein takes photographs at all conceivable vantage points, with the help of a “high-

powered lens” and constant rearrangement of the lights and lamps; her workspace seems as unbearable as a psychiatrist’s office.

In the work that she does, Hornstein gives herself the position of being Agnes’s storyteller. Referring to the invisibility of mad art, Hornstein laments the lack of response to Agnes’s “shouting to be heard” during her time and declares that in her own quest to discern Agnes’s words, they are now “too faint to be heard” (p. 267). Here we see very clearly the way that Agnes’s jacket gets commodified as an artefact of patient porn (Costa et al., 2012). The appropriation of Agnes’s jacket into the framework determined by Hornstein is a clear example of how the art of the mentally ill is yet another way that psy professionals, mental health professionals, academic researchers, and the general public turn to art as a way to story madness through the medical model. On one hand, Hornstein makes claims that the jacket could never answer questions regarding what causes mental illness, and it will not provide for us the meaning of madness. Hornstein explicitly declares that what mad people have to say is meaningful. In a critical reading of the jacket, Hornstein places value in it as being a “powerful statement of defiance against the stereotypic image of the mad woman,” seeing the jacket as being an “angry testimony” that subverts femininity. And as a final thought, Hornstein leaves us with the question of: “What if deeply distressed people could be helped before they got to the point where we could no longer enter their worlds?” (p. 267).

As a mad person, I find Hornstein’s aesthetic framework – which I argue is the aesthetic of the mentally ill – deeply troubling. Taking up space by imposing interpretations on Agnes’s jacket, Hornstein superimposes the dominant biomedical model while attempting to take critical and empowering approaches to translating a story that is not her own. Positioning the “worlds” of mad people as being separate from the one inhabited by non-mad folks evades our ability to

unsettle the power imbalances that lead to the silencing and disempowering of mad folks at systemic and societal levels. When we take on the role of storyteller for someone else, it matters. The storyteller takes up a position of power in curating, presenting, framing, and assessing both the subject and object of the story. As a well-known cultural artefact, Agnes's jacket has influenced feminist artists such as Tracey Emin (Hornstein, 2009). And while the jacket continues to get taken up through the feminist lens that sees fibre art as creating worlds where women defy, resist, speak up, get angry, and make change, without a Mad Studies approach to the work, both the framing and the solution to the problem remain individualized: getting help and getting better.

This has been a pivotal lesson for me in both the creative and written elements of my theoretical explorations. While much of the work that asks critical questions about the commodification, consumption, and co-optation of mad stories is taken up in direct relation to mental health work, what we see here is the crossover of influence into both popular culture and the formal art world. The aesthetic of the mentally ill proliferates, while the mad artist continues to get positioned as the insider/outsider in the storying of their work. Insider/outsider is the role that mad people are given when their agency and autonomy over knowledge creation and translation threatens the hegemonic culture. Making not enough sense to the dominant ruling class, mad people continually get excommunicated and put into "a world of their own," which effectively silences our stories of madness. Here it is important to restate, as has been taken up throughout this dissertation, that in turning to survivor research to create a method of resistance, the stories of madness I am referring to have nothing to do with looking inward as a way to convey "the meanings of madness." This is decidedly not a request for the aesthetics of mad art to be included into the world through which storytellers like Hornstein exclude us. In fact, the

stories of madness, in line with Mad Movement organizing, the methodologies of survivor research, and the aesthetics of mad art have us looking outward from our mad experience. Storying madness thusly allows for us to ask critical questions about what is happening in the world around us and in turn offers a starting point through which we might create new worlds altogether.

6.5 Crafting a Mad Aesthetic Is Political...

...But You Have to Make It That Way

What activist quilting ... does is to make issues intimate, understandable, but never solely comforting. (Robertson, 2014, p. 202)

As I make my way out of this dissertation, I come to appreciate the benefit of working with disciplines such as Mad Studies and Critical Craft Theory. While *emergent* no longer best describes either, their bodies of literature are not as rooted with fully formed vocabularies, canons, or agreed-upon boundaries. This, in a sense, as Roberts points out, can be seen as them having no fixed identities – which allows possibilities for being spaces that are constantly being made and remade (Roberts, 2011). This, while difficult at times, also provides the benefit of freedom, space, and flexibility within my ability to theorize my own work. I do not feel as tied to canons of literature and/or a canon of art historical work, which I believe is important when questioning the politics of how these canons come to be. This is a distinct way of disrupting the colonial projects of Art History.

While interdisciplinary in nature, this space that I have been working in is not entirely outside of either discipline with which I align my work, nor is it contesting their boundaries completely. Instead, like Sefton's (2002) description of arts-based research, this dissertation has been a project of crafting something that is in many ways entirely new. Not being owned by any one discipline is in fact what I perceive as the way forward in crafting a mad aesthetic. Turning

to the building of relationships that are informed by issues of justice, new worlds can be envisioned together. This, to me, is not just an element of dis/identifying with a practice based in mad identities, but the shift that requires a decolonizing of my practice altogether and takes an anti-intellectual approach. As I have mentioned throughout this writing, the process of decolonizing my practice has been slow and difficult – not for lack of inclination to do this work, but because for me this process necessitates a slowness that demonstrates my commitment and genuine efforts that move beyond performative allyship. The lack of centrality that this theme has taken in my work is because I do not believe I am at the place in my relationships where I can make any meaningful claims toward an anti-colonial practice. I perceive this process as being inherently linked to how I build my craft praxis: a reflective, socially engaged, historically rooted practice that centres itself by attending to the land as an explicitly anti-colonial effort. In reference to the work of being a maker, Hamilton explains:

A life of making isn't a series of shows, or projects, or productions, or things: it is an everyday practice. It is a practice of questions more than answers, of waiting to find what you need more often than knowing what you need to do. Waiting, like listening and meandering, is best when it is an active and not a passive state. (2009, p. 69)

At this point I am committed to a constant role of listening and learning about how the current colonial system is impacting Indigenous, Black, and people-of-colour communities. I work toward not just decentring myself as a white person, but destabilizing the power structures that I benefit from and that uphold white supremacy. I think about what it means to not just listen to Indigenous, Black, and people-of-colour communities in determining what social justice-oriented efforts are needed to create better worlds for flourishing, but I also understand that this act of listening and holding space needs to be active. Holding space does not mean being passive.

There is action involved in listening, stepping back, standing beside, learning, and activating change. In the context of mad art, this involves the consideration of how our stories – about the art and the artists, as well as the movements of struggle and resistance – have been whitewashed, erased, and silenced by white supremacy (Gorman & Udegbe, 2010). These reflections are largely connected to the organizing work I did in connection with the Dis/Engaged strategic planning retreat hosted by Deaf, Disability & Mad Arts Alliance Canada. I entered the retreat with a feeling of hope in anticipation of collectively creating movement in the field of Deaf, Disability, and Mad Art at a national level from an anti-colonial framework. I had confidence in the values, knowledge, and approaches of the core organizing committee members. And while there was a lot of important relationship building that happened at the retreat, I left feeling defeated and disappointed with how whiteness took up all too much space and energy in the room. Instead of feeling like this was a (complete) failure, it has me reflecting on how much work there is to do in addressing these issues in the field of Deaf, Disability, and Mad Art.

In final reflection, I feel as though I have ended with more questions than concluding statements. And yet with more questions than answers, this dissertation has accomplished what it set out to do: use Mad Studies and Critical Craft Praxis to engage critically with the world around me. Not to answer questions but to create ruptures, open up space for exploration, engage with ideas and new lines of inquiry in ways that beg deeper questions. Craft, as Roberts (2011) describes, is a praxis that is “*in the making*” (p. 248). Instead of seeing the difficulty in defining craft as problematic, Roberts sees this as a strength, an ability to challenge the limitations imposed by fixed histories, boundaried definitions, possibilities for transformation. Pulling in Queer Theory, Roberts posits that a “radical, critical position would relocate craft as an aesthetic category that embraces an enormous range of multiple and seemingly contradictory practices, as

well as an agent to challenge existing systems that define materiality and makers” (2011, p. 248).

This is what I aim for in my Critical Craft Praxis, mad, and quilt-based aesthetic work:

expansiveness. I pause here to reflect on a standard framing of quilt aesthetics, so as to warn against the over-romanticizing of the possibilities of craft. In 2002, Ball described the subversive role of quilting as such:

Quilting has always provided women with a legitimate space within which to come together to talk, share community and create utilitarian objects. While working at this domestic necessity, women often used quilts as a silent text within which to communicate stories about their lives. Through the quilts, stories could be told that would exist beyond the life of the quilters who made them. Stories could be told, situations could be depicted and not a word needed to be said. In many respects quilts have been used as subversive material. Quilts had been used to communicate messages for hundreds of years. From the graveyard quilt, the murder quilt, family album quilts, wedding quilts, and the Aids Memorial quilt, they have been used as a medium in which to express resistance, rage, grief and celebration (2002, p. 15).

Here I point out that Ball suggests that the life stories told through quilting exist as “silent text.”

The types of stories told through quilts demonstrate resistance, proclaim rage, materialize grief, and mark celebration. Yet upon looking back at many of the quilts she references, I see how these messages are not as eternal as might be suggested. While the makers of the quilts may or may not intend these interpreted messages, the quilts also through time demonstrate many of the elements of society that constitute the power and privilege of those who have made them.

Without explicitly situating all of the elements of these silent texts, the stories we silence (or highlight) maintain how and why quilts get read as subversive in the first place. This polite

history of quilt aesthetics is rather uninspiring.

Much of my work starts from the conceptual framework that informs the field of Mad Studies and the histories of Mad Movement organizing. I make sense of my creative work through my scholarly and activist engagements. This is harder than it sounds. Mad Studies as a field is overwhelmingly disruptive. With the medical model being as dominant and pervasive as it is, there are few spaces that can make sense of madness through any other lens. I am familiar with the struggle of trying to make sense of something that is built around the politics of not making sense. The epistemological foundations of Mad Studies are decidedly unsettling. Because of this, it takes a lot of time and effort to invite people into a conversation around madness that refuses many of the paradigms that entangle our views, values, responses, and experiences. However, in this space I want to shift my methodological analysis in order to centre the role of my Critical Craft Praxis as opposed to working only from the framework of Mad Studies. In doing so, I am laying claim that my creative praxis is just as important in the work of making meaning as the other elements, such as scholarly and/or activist-based knowledge. Much of my career has centred Mad Studies, and so it is important to me to allow for some space to outline the values that come from my Critical Craft Praxis.

Craft is laden with complex and contradictory meanings, such as “resistance, skill, authenticity, benevolence, morality, and self-determination” (Morris, 2016, p. 7). As Morris explains: “craft has been cemented into the public imagination as a beloved symbol of the void left behind, commonly viewed through rose-colored glasses, and shrouded in nostalgia” (p. 7). More specifically, Robertson (2014) outlines how both quilts and quilting have a wide-ranging scholarship that roots itself in diverse forms of activism. Yet Robertson appropriately warns of how the reading of quilts and quilt making as inherently radical and political is not accurate; the

objects and process are as much tied to conservative politics as they are to more radical worldviews. This is a point to keep in mind when we think about the storying of both the quilt and the quilter. Particularly relevant to my project, Black and Burisch (2011) point out that “this current academic and popular interest in craftivism calls for a discussion of productive strategies to maintain its radical potential” (p. 204). So, whether framed as an analogy or material practice, fibre-based crafts such as quilting are often romanticized, flattening their historical and contemporary context as being tied to feminist values. While not wholly wrong, one way to begin to unpack this simplification is to think about the various limitations of the history of feminist values. In so doing, we can open up space to remember and re-story quilts and their makers as being a part of the social world around them, not impervious to histories of classism, racism, imperialism, and colonialism. Radical quilt makers, thus, are just as likely to be outside the norms both within society at large and within their smaller quilting communities as well.

So when I approach my own Critical Craft Praxis, I work through these tensions, making room for the inherent messiness of it all. Instead of taking for granted the marriage between any one particular method with methodological analysis, I allow for what Robertson refers to as “productive re-interpretation” (p. 202). As such, the romanticizing or over-politicization of the quilt, the quilt maker, and the act of quilt making is acknowledged and given space. The materials and processes of craft are necessarily implicated within capitalist structures that are deeply rooted in the contemporary and historical processes of imperialism and colonialism. Working through these tensions, then, requires a careful engagement with these issues – conceptually and at the level of praxis. Yet the possibility still exists that there are radical qualities that have materialized in direct relation to the meaning making attached to the processes, the makers, and the objects of craft practices. Making room for these contradictions

allows for less flattened stories to develop. Instead of seeing this as a limitation, I argue that in fact this critical appraisal – an acknowledgement of messiness – is part of the labour needed in order to make our way to a better future. This in turn allows us to make space for more radical possibilities.

The politics of my aesthetic practices inform the work that happens in my studio. I understand my political commitments to be much like a living organism; they grow and change, they take shape through seasons, and are alternately nourished, weakened, and strengthened by the weather they endure. My politics are messy, unapologetic, humble, and loud. As a cisgender, white, queer, mad woman, some of the most difficult work has been around the learning and unlearning of colonial settler white supremacist values. The work of not just decolonizing, but centring the beauty and magic of Indigenous, Black and people of colour communities has been a long journey, and an uncomfortable and necessary one. I live in a world that privileges and values white bodies. Knowing how to confidently make sense of this in my work without centring myself and my privileges is important to me, yet admittedly not always clear and straightforward. I work toward decentring white settler ways of positioning “the problem.” Often this means looking toward bigger pictures and thinking about things at institutional and systemic levels. I try to listen and learn about what those who are Indigenous, Black, trans, queer, mad, poor and people of colour need from me as an ally in their experience. I listen because I see that communities have built up knowledge and strategies across generations. I try to integrate these knowledges and requests into the work that I do in a way that highlights, values, and credits these communities – I believe there is a fine line between this and performative allyship and/or appropriating the knowledge because it is seen as the good thing to do. I see a large part of the

work that I am doing as necessitating relationship building, cross-movement organizing, and stepping back to let others lead, while still being present to do the work.

So, whether turning to theoretical foundations, given formal vocabularies in academia, or sites of organizing that take form through queer, feminist, and mad politics – and constantly working through the labour of decolonizing – the work that I do is provocative in that it engages in social change that considers more than just my own subject position. Instead of looking inward at my own experiences, as mediated through my identity, I *make* to look outward. I turn to craft, whether as a maker or an audience member, as a way to make sense of the world around me. Craft is what makes me *feel* things. It forces me to see big pictures, look outside of myself, get raw, question my long-held beliefs, be uncomfortable, and desire to do better in this world. Craft can be that space where we come together, commune with each other, hold one another, see the beauty and the ugly together, and struggle through the really tough shit. The injustice in this world swells in me a type of anger that creates movement. And while some are concerned with a politics of politeness that quiets and softens that anger, I turn to craft in hopes of doing something about it all. I approach my Critical Craft Praxis as an invitation, an evocation, a provocation: Don't heal me, "fuck me!" up. Led by artists looking outward and into this expansiveness, I hope to experience the periphery as the space where new worlds can open up through which we can craft our futures, in ways that we cannot yet even imagine.

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Appendix A

York University Faculty of Graduate Studies Graduate Program in Visual Arts Handbook 2015–2016 (pp. 16–17)

3. Dissertation Exhibition

Students must defend a dissertation that presents their research in the form of a significant solo exhibition, accompanied by a dissertation research support paper of a minimum of 100 pages. A key criterion for assessing the dissertation exhibition and research support paper in the final oral examination is their contribution to practice-based scholarship, which includes (but is not limited to), the following objectives:

- Formulate innovative research questions in the context of practice-based research.
- Implement studio-based conceptual, formal and technical skills in order to produce an original body of work and to develop an innovative art practice, of a calibre to be recognized by the art milieu locally and/or internationally.
- Integrate an interdisciplinary context for art practice (i.e. its relation to other fields of knowledge such as art history, philosophy, science, political activism, women’s studies) into practice-based research.
- Exhibit artworks professionally and engage in a critical dialogue with other contemporary artists and researchers.
- Clearly articulate and realize the role of writing within practice-based research.
- Communicate in visual, oral, and written modes for professional and critical discourse in visual arts.

PhD Supervisor and Supervisory Committee

To enable each student to assume the program of work from the time of his/her entry, a pro-tem supervisor is determined in relation to the research interests as well as media focus that are expressed in the candidate’s application. The pro-tem supervisor guides the student in forming the supervisory committee. Each student is required to choose a two person committee by the end of the second term, consisting of a supervisor and a second member who are both members of the Graduate Program in Visual Arts (full or associate members, as listed above – associate members cannot act as primary supervisors). A third committee member from the art world community, i.e., a curator, artist, or critic, is selected and added to the committee by the end of the fifth term (second term of PhD II). S/he will be a member of the Comprehensive Examination committee and continue as a member of the supervisory committee for the final two years of the program. The role of the third committee member is flexible and depends on available time. The minimum expectations are: one committee meeting per term, with the whole committee; reading and comments on the dissertation support paper in its final stages before defense, unless closer participation in studio visits and the writing process is desired.

Appendix B

Examining a Thesis in the Visual Arts, Petelin (n.d.)

2. What constitutes a Thesis in the Visual Arts?

- A practical or studio component and
- A written component—an exegesis or dissertation.

The studio component may be

- An exhibition of artefacts or images,
- A book of images,
- A performance, or site-specific installation
- A film,
- A script,
- A design,
- An online webpage, animation, or computer game,

... or something entirely unexpected.

Furthermore, it may be primarily artistic (fictional or metaphoric), or functional, or documentary, in nature,

... or any mix thereof.

The written component might be

- (Where policy permits) A Dissertation which addresses a question that informs the studio work, or ...
- An Exegesis that addresses how the studio work engages with its central research question.

The Dissertation can, within a ‘practice-based’ PhD, be the primary contribution to knowledge and the studio work a mere appendix.

- In the Doctorate of visual Arts, the Professional Doctorate at QCA, while an exegesis is preferred, a parallel study ‘unambiguously relevant’ to the studio work can also be submitted.

The Exegesis is considered intrinsic to the ‘practice-led’ Thesis and may have the character of either:

- A ‘poetic’ text that complements the studio work, or ...
- An academic text that directly supports the studio practice and reflects critically on its methodology and its relation to its context.

* **‘Practice-led’** and **‘practice-based’** are terms that are still being contested. Here, ‘practice-led’ will mean that a practical goal rather than gaining knowledge of an external phenomenon primarily drives the research.