Male Textile Artist Motivations in 1980s Britain: a practice-based enquiry

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PhD 2018
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University of Brighton for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2018
Abstract

Assumptions exist as to why men make art with textiles, but throughout history men have rarely been asked why they have made this choice. This research uses interviews to investigate male embroiders reasons: their causes, explanations, or justifications for choosing to make art textiles between 1980 and 1989 in Britain. It examines these reasons and combines an exegesis with art practice. This is the written work of a studio practitioner that is illustrated with artworks made during the research period. This study offers an understanding of why an apparently increased number of male artists took up or continued to make art textiles in 1980s Britain. Previous studies on twentieth century art textiles made by men have concerned themselves with the perceptions of textile artifacts within a cultural arena. They have tackled ways of understanding the objects without considering the reasons for men choosing to make them and the context in which these decisions were made. To date extensive searches have found no other studies on this subject, including ones that have employed art practice to investigate this phenomenon.

British exhibition reviews and catalogues do evidence men as more visible as makers of art textiles in Britain 1980 - 89. However, they do not explain why this should be the case or why some male artists appeared to affirm their commitment to the medium then, which is why the temporal scope of the research is wider than this decade. Academic literature concentrates on art textiles as a therapeutic activity with texts from other countries only nominally discussing men’s reasons. Contemporary studies on this subject have been collapsed into feminist readings of craft and textiles. Recognizing textiles as an art form that is shaped and disrupted by the personal goals or intentions of its makers, this research explores men’s previously unheard voices. The demographic, male embroiderers in 1980s Britain, was selected as a case study for its personal significance and recognition that it was a time of
great social change. In this research creative practice functions transcognitively as a process tool and not as an outcome, all findings are in the exegesis.
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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Mary Anne Francis and Philippa Lyon for their tremendous enthusiasm and support throughout the development of this research. Thank you also to all the research team in the School of Art at the University of Brighton. Much appreciation is also given to Rowan Bailey and Annebella Pollen for examining this thesis.

Thank you to Tony Rutherford for his love, encouragement, patience and support. Thanks also to those who participated in this study, and to Louisa Buck, Margaret Huber, James Hunting, Joseph McBrinn, Darren Newbury and Matt Smith for their support and valuable contributions to this research.

I am also grateful to the following people for their inspiration, contributions and support: Tadek Beutlich, Hieronymus Bosch, Helen Britton, Mary Cozens-Walker and Anthony Green, Angela Carter, Nigel Cheney, Wolfy Green, Linnet Hannan and Gary Clough, Jiří Kolář, Katherine Pogson, Oliver Sacks, Derek Jarman, Lucas Samaras, Alan Shields, Eirian and Denys Short, Ali Smith, Lola Stott, Angus Suttie, Dorothea Tanning, Vincent van Gogh, Jeanette Winterson, Lesley Whitworth, Gill Scott and Paul Wood.

Accompanying Photographs

Photography throughout the thesis records the artworks made over the duration of the research project. It includes snapshots of daily impressions that record things, feelings and territories. All the art practice included as photographs are chapter specific, were taken by the author and originally are printed in full colour.
Author's Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed Gavin Elliot Fry

Dated 01.09.2018
1. Introduction

In 1985 the ceramist Angus Suttie (1946 – 1993) reflected on how the making process for craftsmen was not formulaic. His views on creativity have chimed with my own since first being taught by him at night school in the 1980s. Suttie’s ideas on making have greatly influenced my approach to this research because he believed in the aquisitional and improvisational, he was in my view like a bowerbird setting up his display ground for courtship. Curator John Huston in his text on British abstract vessels eloquently described Suttie’s work as a form of cultural bricolage:

Some of the graspable bits are inexplicably alien and ordinary: apparently derived from emblematic animal-haunted vessels from South America. Suttie has a way of abstracting something of the gait and stance of such vessels: something precise about angle, scale and silhouette which gives a worrying credibility to the larger romping improvised event which is an object.¹

It is that ‘something of the gait and stance’ that this research is looking for in the reasons men have given for making art textiles, it is this Huston says when ending his description of Suttie’s work that results in ‘a brilliant mish-mash of emblem, psychic fragrance and fastidiousness’.²

Sutties’ primary inspiration arose from his own life and relationships, the difficult and often lonely years of his growing up as he struggled to come to terms with himself, and the experience of his failing health as he dealt with and ultimately succumbed to an HIV-related illness aged 47. In other words what he made and why he made it came from his life experience. The finding of oneself, life changes and relationships

² Ibid
are all present in the participant interviews in this research as is the relevance of the turbulent times in which the participants were making art textiles.

In my artworks there needed to be an absence of a linear narrative because here I hoped to give the reader a truer depiction of the research process as encyclopaedic and quixotic. Which is why the art practice is mainly un-codified as a vocabulary and differs from the written text, this allows for it to be read as non-narrative and nomadic. For the reader this fences off a space in which to witness the dialogue between researcher and research material. This philosophical approach is inspired by Suttie’s approach to making:

> It is expected that our work should show continuity from A to B, leading to C which evolves into d and so on. The changes should reflect a linear development and we must constantly renew our work and ‘advance’ stylistically. This progress is similar to capitalism’s demand for new products and new markets…I suggest that another way of understanding time and development would be to view the maker as the hub in the centre of lines radiating outwards. These ‘spokes’ are avenues of creativity which we may explore. The importance, however, is that ‘forward’ is not the only direction. By keeping the opportunity open of referring backwards (or sideways) in creative time, the idea of progress or perpetual revolution is not inexorable.³

There are however some fixed goalposts in this research, they are the terms and definitions I have used throughout and for clarity I have included them in this introduction, these are for embroidery, art textiles, art embroidery, active documentation and transcognition. These definitions were chosen to place the

³ Suttie, A (as Aeschylus Orton). (1985) *British Ceramics, het Kruithuis*, Hertenbosch
makers (interviewees and others) at the centre of their time and development, by doing this I wanted to anchor them at the centre of this project.

**Embroidery**

In 1985, embroiderer and educator Audrey Walker (b.1928 GB) defined embroidery as including both hand and machine techniques. This study uses this definition:

> Embroidery is a term now used to describe not only the craft in its traditional sense – that of embellishing a given surface with stitches – but also to cover such other stitched methods as applique, patchwork and quilting. It has always been the most popular and accessible of the textile crafts. Requiring the minimum of equipment, taught to most girls from primary school onwards and commercially available in the form of printed canvasses and ‘material kits’, it appears to be within reach of anyone who can wield a needle.⁴

**Art Textiles**

In her article ‘Defining a Movement: Textile and Fibre Art’ curator and historian Jessica Hemmings says that textile art is a broad term that can encompass many approaches to using textiles; it is not restricted to the creation of textiles or creation with textiles.⁵ Art textiles may use other media to reference textile construction, cultural location or historical identifications rather than actually use textile materials. A satisfactory universally accepted definition of textile art is hard to come by which is because defining art is difficult and is compounded when defining art textiles because its domestic associations and liminal nature further complicate this equation. However, the artists participating in this research made what they count as art with or

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about fabric or cloth and referred to it as such this study. The term textile art is the parallel term used outside the UK for the same phenomena.

Art embroidery is a specific branch of art textiles that focuses on embroidery technique, references the histories and making of embroidery or uses embroidery methods to make art. Art embroidery, like art textiles, is not restricted to the traditional outcomes of embroidery in which a cloth is decorated using a needle and thread.

Those invited to participate in this research were deliberately not given a definition of art textiles even though the term was included in the research questions sent to them. Interestingly, none asked for clarity or defined the term in their written responses but all interviewees discussed and framed their embroidery/textile practice as art in their replies to the research question. It can therefore be assumed that they saw their embroidery practice as art textiles. Following on from this the participants in this study all discussed their motivations to make embroidery in their responses so this is why it dominates this study. This research does not discuss the textile output of the interviewees it specifically examines their motivations for fashioning art in the way they did.

In British schools in the 1960s-70s, typically craft education had gendered boundaries. This continued into the 1980s when boys did woodwork and girls embroidered. Unusually my own comprehensive system education included domestic science and needlework as compulsory modules for both boys and girls (Denbigh High School, Luton, Bedfordshire 1974 – 1979). Here for me came the opportunity to make sculpture and collage within art as a curriculum and examination subject where textiles were welcomed. Ordinarily in schools masculinity

and art classes were cited as oppositional with craft considered feminine and needlework was perceived as the most extreme example of un-masculine artwork during these decades in Britain. If the reasons for access to and the acceptability of needlework for men and boys in British education had an impact on men’s motivations, this has not been previously explored and was an area that I was on the lookout for in this study.

According to craft theorist and curator Glenn Adamson the status of art embroidery in the 1980s mirrored a long-standing wider historical societal view of craft made by women being considered lesser and was discussed contemporarily as such. Men working in textiles were regarded as a novelty and their presence was less widely discussed for a number of reasons and the findings in this study highlight differences and similarities between these expectations.

Clare Doherty writing in her essay in the catalogue to the exhibition of Freddie Robbins exhibition Cosy in 2002 (Raft Consortium) discusses how women artists (and Robbins in particular who knits and stitches herself) have subverted the idea of textiles as ‘feminine’. This was and to some extent still is an expectation that is held cross-culturally. Explaining how textiles has been a site of representation fiercely contested by women since the beginning of an organised feminist art practice in the early 1970s, Doherty outlines strategies taken by which women artists valorised embroidery and stitch. History and textiles have been used as an art practice and a philosophical structural device to interrogate mainstream culture and hegemony to impressive affect since the late 1960s. In her excellent essay Doherty defines art textiles as ‘a discursive category which embodies difference, transgression, unfixity and ambiguity through the subversion of existing codes’. I agree and it is interesting

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9 Doherty, C. (2002) L’Art Feminine in Cosy; Firstsite
to note how men’s motivations for choosing textiles are either dissimilar or alike in the interviews used in this study to those listed by Doherty.

**Britain and Art Textiles**

In this study the decade of the 1980s in Britain was selected because exhibition catalogues, reviews and archival records from this time are evidence that men did become more visible as makers of art textiles, but these omit their reasons for doing so. There are records of men making and exhibiting art textiles prior to 1980 in Britain but this date marks an increase in those records which was established whilst undertaking this research. This could imply an increased uptake by men into this field or it could indicate that they became more visible then. The records do not indicate reasons for this uptake or visibility. What they also omit are the reasons for their visibility and the increase in recording the phenomena.

Adamson, in his preface to Alison Britton’s selected essay collection *Seeing Things*, says that the 1980s was a time of postmodern culture wars. Britton, too, highlights conflict when she says there was a craft surge in which overlaps, transgressions and experiments in art, craft and design were especially evident. Britton goes on to say that definitions of craft were ‘chewed up’ bringing new ideas to the fore and that art made using textiles at this time followed the same vein. Although the work of male embroiderers was later investigated as gender bending, still their reasons are largely unrecorded.

In Britain during the 1960s, 70s and 80s it was mainly women artists who were employing the performative language of textiles as a surrogate for political activism but men were also doing this. Most often artists of any gender solely using textile methods/approaches as their medium were doing so in the craft arena not in the art

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world, meaning that the hierarchy of fine art sculpture/painting being ranked above textile making continued to be enforced by a gallery system. So textiles by men were also seen in the art world as a feminized craft not art medium.

There were notable pioneering exhibitions of art textiles in Britain in which both men’s and women’s textile artworks were placed and discussed comparatively, but again this was in the context of craft and design, these are:

- *Men of the Cloth* (2010) at the Waterside Arts Center

There were other exhibitions in Britain but none that frame men’s art textiles with the same spirit of parity and inquisitiveness, and even so none of those listed here, other than *The New Spirit in Craft and Design*, discuss men’s reasons for choosing textiles, even minimally. Exhibitions abroad including or solely about male textile artists of note are *Wall Hangings* (1969) Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Men of the Cloth* (USA 1999), *Boys with Needles* (Canada 2002) but again none include in their catalogues material on men’s reasons for choosing this field.

The influence of men on the history of art textiles and specifically embroidery in Britain remained largely invisible until art theorist Roszika Parker wrote her seminal work *The Subversive Stitch* in 1984. Debates in the literature have largely been
restricted to perspectives discussing domesticity and the feminine in contemporary embroidery so *The Subversive Stitch* quickly became a hugely important text in this field. It was also the subject of an exhibition in 1988 that influenced my art practice greatly. Parker’s text is an in-depth unmasking of how stitch became a tool with which to control women. Very importantly Parker’s definition of embroidery as an art form from *The Subversive Stitch* is as important now as it was when she first wrote this text and is used in this research because it is still radically not gender restrictive:

I have decided to call embroidery art. It is, undoubtedly, a cultural practice-based involving iconography, style and a social function.\(^{11}\)

It is for this reason I was personally able to identify with Parker’s ideas and although men are not the tenet of her thesis they are present because they are not excluded. This could be seen as a vital oppositional metaphor for women’s absence in the histories of art written by men. In Parker’s text the act of stitching is not framed as female, it is discussed as the tool by which men arrange, confine and cage women and enthusiastically explains the boundaries, expectations and histories most often held and enforced by men to hold women societally. But despite its originality and ambition (and for the purposes of this research is an essential contextual but incomplete picture) it does not ask why men embroidered or made art textiles. This raises the question: what ideas and functions may have influenced or been imposed by others on to men in relation to them choosing textiles?

**The 1980s in Britain**

Journalist Andy McSmith, in his history of 1980s Britain *No Such Thing as Society*, discusses how material circumstances for all changed during this epoch. In this decade the British economy began and ended in recession: how people lived and

viewed their world materially, politically and socially changed greatly because of the divisive nature and affect of governmental policies. These major societal shifts helped to define the choices people made and, as McSmith says, these ‘upheavals’ profoundly affected people:

Anyone growing up in 1980 was entering a dangerously divided world, the long-term future of which seemed uncertain.12

How Britons would be governed and the choices they made were, McSmith says, defined by these ten years:

British history did not end during the 1980s, but it did slow down, because the events of that turbulent decade had settled the way that Britons would be ruled and the way they thought about the world for at least the next quarter century.13

Writer Malcolm Bradbury presents political events as agitations in his novel *Cuts*. This work fictionalises massive disruptions caused by real life cuts in government services in the 1980s in Britain. This quotation is taken from Bradbury’s novel set in the summer of 1986:

All this was helped by the useful ambiguity of the handy word ‘cut’. To trim, to prune, to shape; to pierce, to incise, to gash, to stab; to mow, to carve, to whittle, to sculpt, to reduce, to curtail, to disbranch, to eliminate; to slash, to geld, to dismember, to castrate; to delete, to assemble, to improve, to edit, as with a book or a film; to ignore, to avoid, to pass by,

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13 Ibid, p. 341
to pretend not to know at all – all these were just some of the many interesting and various meanings of the elusive word ‘cut’.14

The narrator here is the author Bradbury. He employs the metaphor of cutting when describing how social and economic factors barbarically sculpted the choices people made. I recall the decade as one in which these cuts directly affected me as an eighteen year old leaving home to go to art college and managing my own money for the first time, attending protest marches, Gay Pride events and witnessing the riots in Brixton. Education cuts affected how I was taught and my higher education was funded, as both McSmith and Bradbury have suggested in their writing, some individuals, including me, resituated themselves during this decade, with long-lasting effects. This was one aspect of my own lived experiences that pepper this research.

**Research Methods**

In this research it is the participant embroiderers’ voices that provide the data that is explored. This is done through email interviews that are viewed as individual ‘truths’. This study uses a qualitative research approach that focuses on the lived world of men. These are their ‘truths’: their perceptions and experiences as they remember them. These embroiderers are the loci in this research and the aim of this study is to explore their reasons for choosing to make art textiles. Two methods are used to do this; they are interviews and art practice, the latter of which involves the processes of active documentation and transcognition. The art practice takes the form of visual diaries in the quest for a dynamic multidimensional model in which artistic thinking is defined as transcognition.15 Art cognition in this study is viewed as a socially mediated process that examines how language constructs narratives and meanings. The languages in this case are stitching, textile printing, photography and collage.

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Sullivan says the approach to cognition using art practice in this way is a dynamic one:

This approach sees cognition more as a dynamic, systems-like model that is continually changing as a consequence of the interaction between the thinker and the surrounding environment.\textsuperscript{16}

This highly contextual view of thinking in learning was selected because it enabled active exchange between the researcher and the socially mediated material that the participants’ interviews provided.

**The Interviews**

The interviews were conducted using an evolving systems approach to investigating creative work and motivation as defined by researchers Wallace and Gruber.\textsuperscript{17} Philosophically and practically this treats creativity as purposeful work and recognises that it integrates cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and motivational aspects of a creative process. Wallace and Gruber define the evolving systems approach as a set of attitudes that enable complex, pluralistic, idiographic research. The methods selected for this research adopted these attitudes, from how information was found to how it was processed and then presented. As an evolving systems approach, the methods both recognise and reflect that creative people employ insight, chance, play and purpose.

When deciding how to use the interview data I was drawn to an artist statement by embroiderer Nigel Graham Cheney. This is a very conversational statement written by him for the catalogue of *CultureCraft, Culture In The Making: An Exhibition Of Contemporary Craft*. Cheney is both a colleague and a friend who began his textile

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 4
career after 1990 and in this statement I could hear him coincidentally answering the research question:

As a child I grew up in a house with a sewing machine in the living room. Not a dainty little machine for home dressmaking but a great big brute of an industrial machine. My father was the manager in a garment factory and brought boxes of outwork home every evening for my mother who then sewed them together the following morning. There was an amazing cycle of work in and work out.\textsuperscript{18}

Here Cheney puts sewing at the heart of his home and remembers it almost as another family member, a formative presence in the home. In the interviews I was also hoping to find other examples of direct links to cloth and stitching like my own formative familiar ones. Cheney exemplifies this identification that I felt and in his statement he explains how his archive of memories recall exposure to ‘the magnificence of plenty, of multiples and the patterns that piles of anything can create’. His mother’s piecework gave him a tactile appreciation of cloth and materials. His reasons to embroider now and then are idiosyncratic, specific and worldly constructed from his life experiences. This confirmed to me that the approach to take when analysing the participant interviews should be an evolving systems one; one that explores lived experiences.

The researcher in an evolving systems approach has an active role as a constructionist who chooses the framework within which the research takes place. A researcher is a creative person according to Gruber and Wallace, and his approach is an experientially sensitive one in which artists of all kinds are the subject of the research:

\textsuperscript{18} Cheney, N. (2013) Made in Market Harborough from CultureCraft, Culture in the making: an exhibition of Contemporary Craft, CultureCraft and the Crafts Council of Ireland, pp. 20-21
The creator is not considered as the doer of the work, but also as a person in the world. Such a person has emotions and aesthetic feelings as well as social awareness of the relation of his or her work to the world's work, its needs, and feelings.\(^{19}\)

There are three notable restrictions placed on research aims that use the evolving systems approach. These apply to the methodological approach taken in this research, which clearly sets out not to do any of the following:

- To not explain how a person became creative.
- To not study an extraordinary creative process to draw general conclusions.
- To not generalize about creativity, but to develop a guide to the study of creative individuals.\(^{20}\)

But what the approach does aim to do is to study creative individuals and the participants in this research are such people.

The research methods sit within a social constructionist ontological approach. This is a psychological perspective in which an individual sees reality as being constructed inter-subjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially or experientially. It is the view adopted in this research that individual men are skilled or expert voices in the field of art embroidery and social constructionist inquiry is employed here because it is concerned with explaining the processes that people use to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live.\(^{21}\) This study gives the participants the space to be idiosyncratic when describing their

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\(^{19}\) Ibid., pp. 4-5  
\(^{20}\) Ibid.  
epistemological relationship to art/textiles/embroidery because it seeks to understand their reasons from a constructionist perspective. The breadth and complexity of their reasons are identified and contextualised to demonstrate how embroidery in practice is an orchestration of lived experiences.

The Art Practice

I have worked with textiles since the mid-1970s including spells in the textile and fashion industries; my primary output, however, has been art textiles and this is why the second method used in this research is practice-based. This is the first occasion in which I have used practice to decide how to proceed when writing is the outcome. I have never previously used photography to formally process ideas before either. Practice assisted in reflecting on and then making decisions: it is used to reflect on when to act and then how to act when confronted by data. It was vital to ensure that there is a suitable match between theory and method, which artist and researcher Carole Gray says is necessary when pairing what the research needs to do with how the methods achieve it.22 According to Gray the adopted arts practice in research needs to be appropriate. The specialised methods should be familiar to the practitioner because the research is using their practice. In his introduction to Twice Told Tales, first published in 1837 author Nathaniel Hawthorne described his writing as ‘an intercourse with the world’ and this is how I see my art practice - in this thesis it is an intercourse with the exegesis and is recorded as such.

The use of snapshot photography to complement the record of the textiles, visual diaries and collage works is a new vein of art practice for me and its function can best be explained in this quote from Australian Jewellery Artist Helen Britton:

Along side this, from amongst the blur of daily impressions certain pictures manifest clearly and stop me in my travels, I photograph them regularly, these strong images - the supermarket, the half assembled fair ground, the chunks of roller coaster, the building site, fragmented images from the general debris of high density living. I observe in these places potential to combine materials to form structures and concoctions- this is a real source of wonder, I see this all around me, and it is this transformative process that brings about an intense fascination. That I make jewellery, drawings and paper objects and not fun rides, buildings or gardens is a good thing, because I am building in a way a very private world, that accepts no compromises. The scale of my work allows my full range of fantasies without requiring communication and without leaving a legacy of public monstrosities - instead I leave these modest little machines and landscapes for wearing. My practice is accumulative, experimental and heterogeneous, faithful to my life experience. It is also a conscious dialogue with matter, form and ideas.23

Britton uses photography to record the potential that she sees in the everyday. I use it in this way too; it allows life experience to inform my practice and reflexive aspects of this study while aiding what Britton calls the hunting pattern when sifting through possibilities.

**Active Documentation**

Active documentation is the capturing of information on accidental discoveries, improvements or problematic blocks (phases of work that can become invisible with progress) that contribute to the running of a research project. It entails all investigations during the research period recorded as research material by the

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researcher. In this way, problems relating to the disconnection between making and writing in practice-based research projects in art and design can be alleviated and traffic between researcher and subject can be increased. According to de Freitas, the form in which the supporting and contextual information is presented aids the construction of knowledge within a reflective art practice. The art practice in this study is the active documentation that processes what de Freitas has described. In de Freitas’ words active documentation can be used, as it is used in this research, because:

The time of engagement with material processes is the locus for reporting, reflecting and discovering coherence and it is the reason for advocating active documentation as a research method in practice-based projects.24

Transcognition

Art theorist and educator Graeme Sullivan places emphasis on the inclusion of iterative processes when recommending transcognition.25 Best described as thinking when making, transcognition is an ongoing dialogue that Sullivan suggests operates ‘between, within and around the artist, artwork and viewer, and context where each has a role in constructing meaning’.26 It is the cognitive process that moves this research forward and is recorded using the method of active documentation. Sullivan says that the self and others are ‘parallel and necessary agents of mind that inform each other through analysis and critique’.27 The agents of mind in this research are the research participants and the researcher. The creative practice reflects on and interacts with information. This information is both existing knowledge in the form of literature, as discussed in the literature review, and new data provided by the

26 Ibid, p. 9
27 Ibid.
research participants. The art practice represents the negotiation that takes place between what Sullivan terms the agents. The art practice enables me to hold ideas and provides time to reflect upon them. This is arts practice as a dialogic tool, a process used to reflect on findings and research events and then to understand their place within the whole work. It is a method that enables critical thinking, but the artwork produced is a by-product and does not stand-alone from the writing: it is only a component of the exegesis.

The deployment of a practice-based model has applications for other makers seeking to combine qualitative research and arts practice. The artwork sections in this research provide an additional platform for expressing reflections where content can be experienced as it unfolds: sensorially, emotionally and intellectually. In this way, this research contributes to knowledge when it is understood to be audience-specific: both academic and art-based where these are different.

These methods were chosen to activate a social constructionist approach, when artistic thinking is seen as a transcognitive process, the role of context is acknowledged as highly influential. According to Sullivan, this is the case because:

This includes human involvement, as well as situational factors, physical features and other environmental and cultural cues.28

So when transcognition, according to the theories of Sullivan is applied, art practice does not mean reducing art to either process or product but rather that it is both process and product because they are interdependent. In this research the views of the artist duo of Christo (Jeanne-Claude Javacheff 1935-2009 and Christo Vladimirov Javacheff b.1935) are those that best sum up how practice can be utilised as a tool. In an interview with Chang in 1979, the artists were asked if it was the process or the

28 Ibid, p. 6
product that their artworks emphasised. The response given was that they considered their work only in terms of *process* and *progress*, saying that the work included the processes of planning and negotiating but also the progress made moving forward the understanding of the subject.29 This research is a study of creative individuals explored through their reasons, and art practice has been made to process the research journey and progress understanding.

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2. The Art Practice as a Research Process

My Motivations

Reasons to choose art textiles are given as memories by the research participants. In his work *The Five Senses* philosopher Michel Serres proposes that *when memory becomes objective* the thinking subject *becomes forgetful*. Following on from this, the research in this study examines the subjective by asking the interviewees about their lived experiences as textile arts practitioners. Also it is the subjective memories of my own extended embroidery practice that led me to ask why other men stitch and to explore their motivations. Memory and subjectivity act as potent drivers throughout this enquiry so in this section I will explain my reasons for investigating the subject in terms of the themes that arose when reflecting on my own choices. Some of the same themes are used later to analyse the participant data because they were identified in the interviews too. This can be seen as a chicken or egg situation – which one came first or should be valued more highly is irrelevant because the sources of the themes, and the themes themselves, need to be ranked equally because participants and the researcher operate in tandem.

At home there were no barriers to me using textiles but I was expected to be creative. Being dyslexic was not considered (I found to be dyslexic in my 30s) but I was not expected ‘to shine’ academically so art was the given alternative. Serres finds that that women were the ‘first geometers’ as makers of cloth because ‘fabrics, textile and material provide excellent models of knowledge, excellent almost abstract objects, primary varieties: the world is a heap of clothes’. I was raised by such geometers because both my grandmas put needlework into my biography. This was similar in a fashion to how Macedonian artist Lucas Samaras (1936) links using textiles in his art practice to his upbringing:

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31 Ibid p 83
‘The needles are another part of my biography. You see, my father was a furrier’.32

Both my grandmothers stitched although my mother could barely use an iron let alone wield a needle. Grandma Sylvia Mary Evans made all her clothes, knitted terrific blackberry-stitched clustered Aran jumpers in pastels and delicately worked tablecloths, even hand embroidering a 24 inch waist belt for her ballroom dancing gowns. It was considered ‘all very practical’ but it was also beautiful to my eye. In contrast Grandma Fry (Betty Gronow Fry) learned fine stitchery at her Swiss finishing school and it was in her house that I first learnt French knots and bullion stitches as an extension to collage, and she grounded me in painting and sculpture too. Textiles and embroidery plus art became something I was expected to do; it was Grandma Fry who first introduced me to textile art when she gave me a copy of The Art Fabric: Mainstream in 1973 when it was first published published by Van Nostrand Reinhold Company. I was 10 years old and massively struck by textiles as a new world.

Since beginning to make textiles I have been acutely aware that this was an unusual practice for boys and men, and that non-industrial/non-functional textiles were not ordinarily seen as masculine territory. This did not deter me and the first art textiles exhibition I visited was the 3rd International Exhibition of Miniature Textiles at the British Craft centre in 1978. This show sharpened my wits to the psychological and technical rationales peculiar to art textiles. Suttie writing in Ceramic Review (number117, 1989) of his ceramic practice said ‘I want to make pots that shock us, or console us, that are life affirming, or that haunt us. I want them to address the problems of life today. I want pots that make the ideal alive and believable’ and this is what I now know I took from this textiles show.

32 Samaras, L. (1978) Reconstructions at Pace Gallery, Interview with Barbara Rose
A seminal event that helped to define my choice to select art textiles happened in 1977. This was the year that *Saturday Night Fever* came out and then in 1978 I met John Travolta. I was 15 years old and this *John Travolta* was a three-dimensional assemblage comprised of a tied reed “easel” upon which was attached a small square of silk organza with his face on it made by an American artist called Ed Rossbach (1914-2002). I had been captivated by the publicity around the film about an immature young man whose weekends were spent in the disco where he is the king. Then I found, in a Sunday supplement colour magazine Rossbach’s newspaper and reeds tied with electrical tape crowned with a printed silk image of John Travolta’s face. Popular culture and art textiles collided happily for me in this work. Now anything was possible: it was textiles not dance that was to be my destiny. I had seen a photograph of this small object (16 x 9 x 7 in.) and a button had been pressed: craft was folksy but contemporary and this fed my dreams. John Travolta personified the subculture of the disco era; the symphony–orchestrated melodies, haute couture clothing, pre-AIDS sexual promiscuity and graceful choreography. I fancied him ‘something rotten’ and this artwork inspired my exit from Luton. The Travolta story is the one I would give first for me choosing art textiles as a medium and I suspect it remains the most potent of my reasons.

A maker of extraordinarily crafted works, Rossbach was an imaginative and adept weaver who mastered ancient techniques and innovated with new and unorthodox materials such as plastics and newspapers. Considered by many to be the pre-eminent influence in the rise of basketry as a sculptural form, Rossbach is known for incorporating unconventional imagery, including pop culture references in his work of which *Mickey Mouse* (1969) and *John Travolta* (1978) are his best known. Adamson expertly situates the influence of Rossbach as an artist educator in his article ‘The Fiber Game’ (2007) in which he explains that American ‘fiber art’ has ‘received little attention from art historians despite its evident affinities with the much studied field
of Postminimalist sculpture.\textsuperscript{33} Rossbach’s \textit{John Travolta} is handsomely photographed in the book \textit{Beyond Craft: Art Fabric} by Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larson (Van Nostrand Reinhold Company 1981) which has become a classic text on international textile art.

\textsuperscript{33} Adamson, G. (2007) The Fiber Game, Textile, volume 5 issue 2, pp. 154-177
I continued with embroidery and went to study art textiles embroidery at Goldsmiths College in London in 1981. I had been visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum by myself from the age of twelve and later regularly went to exhibitions there and at the Crafts Council gallery in central London. This fed, informed and inspired my love for historic textiles. Curator Jennifer Harris makes a helpful point regarding embroidery and history; it is one that I considered when formulating this project:

Textiles in the UK is still firmly rooted in the popular imagination as an artisanal activity associated particularity with the vernacular textile traditions of quilting, embroidery and knitting. Equally hard to shake is the notion that textiles are irrevocably linked with women and with the domestic economy, a romanticised and highly inaccurate view of an industry that has been mechanised since the end of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{34}

Here Harris is saying that the handmade in textiles is an invented tradition; post industrial societies were obliged to invent traditions or develop new conventions more frequently than earlier societies. However as Harris also says this enables artists to use embroidery for a ritual and symbolic use because of the time-lag in the mind of the general population. This is one of the reasons I believe that I came to use embroidery, because even as a shy child I felt an outsider and a ritualised form of making provided me with an excuse for time away from others. That textiles were particularly familiar compounded my feelings of safety. This investigation is motivated by such observations and the schoolboy activity that led into a thirty-plus years occupation for me.

\textsuperscript{34} Harris, J from Millar, L (ed). (2007) Cloth and Culture Now, University for the Creative Arts p.148
Adopting the perspective of a qualitative researcher, one that Denzin and Lincoln propose turns the world into a ‘series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos’, in this project I am motivated to use myself to interpret the participant’s reasons for choosing art textiles.35 The act of making using stitch is repetitive and iterative. It is also highly idiosyncratic because no two hands or brains work in exactly the same way and it has become a reflective process for me. I find that there exists a happy tension between my ability and my intentions, one that is fuelled by my autobiography but ultimately not anchored exclusively to narrative interpretations of it. Again Samaras puts this simply enough for me to identify with:

‘To put it simply, I make things to seduce myself’.36

In examining other men’s reasons for making art textiles I am also seeking more answers for myself about both then and now.

Shercliff in her examination of hand stitching as a social practice asks whether this function can extend the historic precedents established by sewing bees or knitting circles. I would propose that even when embroidering by myself I am having conversations with other embroiderers (male and female, dead or alive). As Shercliff explains you can belong when you stitch, this belonging is both a physical and emotional attachment for me:

Hand stitching is a slow rhythmic craft that describes both functional and symbolic dimensions of joining and being attached. It surpasses its functional attributes when considered as a material practice that offers

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particular metaphors for other processes of collaboration and integrity – or even separation and isolation.\textsuperscript{37}

Fortunately my art and craft teachers held a liberal attitude to boys doing embroidery at senior school. Indeed it could be said that they held the same perspective as schoolteacher Miss Jean Brodie. In Muriel Spark’s novel \textit{The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie} (1969) the protagonist rationalizes one of her student’s hobbies concisely:

‘For those who like that sort of thing, that is the sort of thing they like’.\textsuperscript{38}

And this is how I imagine my teachers explained my actions, with incredulity but understanding. However I was aware that to enjoy textiles and in particular embroidery was ‘wrong’. In the novel \textit{Against Nature} written in 1884 by Joris-Karl Huysmans the protagonist Des Esseintes fashions both perilous and pleasurable transgressions for himself. My recall is that embroidering was such an outsider activity; this transgression was at that time limited in my mind to being a boy, but as Tucker explains historically the dialogue between gender and textiles presents any artist with a complicated situation to navigate:

Embroidery is historically: ‘ipso facto inferior to fine art’ with the nineteenth century having set the standard of them as lesser.\textsuperscript{39}

This is a more nuanced understanding that later superseded my choice of textiles to be socially odd. But even so I could work uninhibitedly because for me textiles were a familiar commodity; as Karl Marx says in \textit{Das Kapital} (1867) ‘a commodity appears, at

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{38} From \textit{The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie} (1969), a British-American DeLuxe Color film directed by Ronald Neame based on the novel of the same name by Muriel Spark (1961)
\end{itemize}
first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties’. In this project I am analysing a phenomena to understand it as a very queer thing because it never was a trivial or lesser thing to me but the familiar was also queer.

In 1981 I chose to apply to Goldsmiths having read the University of London Goldsmiths College Information Sheet for B.A Hons Textiles Courses which said that students of the course were expected to ‘acquire critical abilities and an awareness of the broader aesthetic and social context’ of textiles. The weaver Ann Sutton summed up the way the course operated accurately when she outlined what counted:

‘The whole person counts: don’t select and tidy your folio, and grubby sketchbooks are healthy sketchbooks.’

This is when I first began using visual diaries and I still believe that all the work one does is a way of keeping a diary (as Picasso said in 1932). So I came to London in the early years of the Margaret Thatcher government, I was just 18 and independent financially (I had a means-assessed students grant) and the city was my oyster. The 1980s for me was the time when, as Vitkiene in her essay on Lithuanian art textiles suggests, one establishes an identity. For me this meant adulthood:

Rather than searching for an identity in their artwork, textile artists experience the creative process as the establishment of identity’

Expectations and encouragement, textile histories, the physicality of making, belonging, transgression and the 1980s all fed into my motivations to work with

41 Picasso, P. (1932) from En Causant avec Picasso in Teriade, June 15th, p.1
textiles and embroidery. These factors are also why I designed the research question as I did (Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?) with its focus on lived experiences.

The Process Artworks

This section explains three sets of artworks that were made to process information relating to specific research stages of the research. Here I will explain the communication between the practice and the research into men’s motivations, and how the artworks capture this dialogue. The artworks are a method that process knowledge, questions findings and models debates found whilst doing this project. They are allegories of process and physically model my thinking. This was a very necessary method because using a familiar elastic, dialectic and iterative way of thinking I was able to hold non-written information and then decide if/when/how to act upon it.

The three sections are firstly the introduction and literature review, then the methodology/methods and the raw interview data, and finally the findings and conclusion. It should be noted again here that my creative practice relied on the use of active documentation and transcognition to process the information found. The artworks under each section, which I match with the chapter headings, may picture elements from the findings but relate more specifically to the research methods used, this is because the art practice processes information and does not seek to make art as a product.
Introduction and Literature Review Artworks

The images in this first creative practice section were made whilst researching, reading about and then writing the introduction and literature review. These artworks include two embroidered/collaged diaries that run for up to five metres in length, photographs I took on the journey whilst mapping out my path and a series of visual diaries that take the form of books. The artworks specifically relate to the research process because they helped me to hunt and capture information. A piece of research and the resulting thesis is a constructed decision-making process: what to keep and what to chuck out. These artworks helped me to hold ideas concerning these matters in a non-concrete form allowing me to refashion the construction and content of the research and exegesis any number of times.

The artworks here sometimes picture or specifically relate to imagery found in existing written material (for example there are portraits of Margaret Thatcher and Debbie Harry, images of historic textiles and ones purloined from art history) because they process ideas using visual metaphors. This is metaphor as thought and action because the conceptual thought system used here is about thinking and acting in order to process material. These works demonstrate how a researcher investigates existing knowledge and decides what to use in the research process.

The line diaries were constructed from thread and elements found when walking to and from the University of Brighton and libraries, and from additional fieldwork travelling across the UK. Undertaken as a long-term project, the first diary was completed over twelve months and specifically processes finding information. This includes what others have written about why men make art textiles. The second line diary distils the literature and ideas about reviewing; it is worm-like and blinded by so much light (information). Both these diaries have been cut and re-spliced many times and also contain events as motifs representing how information moved in my head.

and often baffled as I searched. A researcher adds to and subtracts from the elements that help to build a research equation and often gets stumped. However it was important for me to record these hiccups and this is an example of exactly how my creative practice is a form of personal active documentation.

The methods here, like all the practice artwork in this research, were also chosen in order to break a previously long-established pattern of figurative framed artworks that were made with a finished product in mind. When I began this project I did not have a finished product in my head.

As an exercise I walked, thought and picked up objects most days from the street. The Japanese New York resident artist Yuji Agematsu (b.1956) is, in my view, the contemporary exemplar of a scavenger’s working method with his obsessive, magpie-like eye for detritus. Like the French composer Erik Satie (1866-1925) his compositions have a keen sense of rhythm. Research has ebbs and flows, it needs a rhythm too and much of the artwork made during the introduction and literature review stages stammer and lack this.

Incumbent on establishing a new art practice was the need for me to find a diaristic space in which to mull ideas and to digest theoretical concepts. As I have outlined previously its form needed to be unstable, allowing for randomness and rhythm to reflect what was a Ping-Pong process with ideas. The walking and embroidering rhythm stayed with me because they became ritualised helping me to decipher how the research/material should be approached. I stitched, darned and buttonholed what I found both metaphorically and literally. The result is both a heap of stuff and a pathway into this research. The figurative elements that remain acted as springboards, a place from which to dive. This artwork on reflection is unsteady but was incredible useful to make.
In 2012 art critic Hans Ulrich Obrist interviewed South African artist Nicholas Hlobo (b.1975) for Flash Art.⁴⁴ Obrist asked Hlobo about his artwork Visual Diary from 2008. This is a large (2380 x 15570 mm) landscape format wall-hung calico that includes semi-abstract stitched aspects and ran the full-length of the artist’s studio. In this interview Hlobo explains his working method to Obrist:

I write with objects and sketch with words. Eventually those words get translated into objects. It’s a very common, conventional way of approaching a drawing. It’s something that resembles an idea about an object, of what it should look like.⁴⁵

An important part of his artistic practice, Hlobo likens this work to a sketchbook that documents his progress; it is made of both stitched and drawn texts. Keeping a diary was a way for Hlobo to preserve his thoughts and notes he would need to remember. The line and visual diaries recorded here are full of scavenged ideas and images that are notations. These artworks netted ideas. Like all the process works made during the undertaking of this research they do not offer fixed solutions; like Hlobo’s my ideas need holding but not to be set in aspic.

The literature review artworks particularly demonstrate the additions and subtractions of a review process: nothing can be fixed until the final edit, with rearrangement and scissor-work a necessity. What could take hours or days of work can be undone. This is most evident in the second line diary and in the sketchbook visual diaries. In ancient Greek mythology, Penelope the beleaguered wife of Odysseus, undid at night the accomplishments she had woven to make a funeral canopy for her father-in-law during the day. This literature review also required much unpicking then rebuilding, it too has been an unstable task but fortunately, it did not

⁴⁵ ibid
have to be unravelled covertly like Penelope’s work.

The nature of the review process is one of discovery and revision that is reflected in the snapshot photographs that I had commercially printed into the diary books; these were then worked into/onto using collages and stitch. They became bouts of encounter and doubt whilst the review was being undertaken; sometimes this was literal and the photographic imagery was erased then resurrected. Some smaller textiles were abandoned for a while then reformed into tokens or baubles of debris while the whole sat dismembered for long periods of time until the next edit. With my scissors as my best friend, these works were butchered and hurled across the studio. The use of images of eyes are common in this stage of the research because it seemed that all I could do well was look, often I did not know how to progress when I found things.

The practice of making, unmaking and remaking made the introduction (the initial period of discovery) and the literature review possible. Fortunately, unlike the case of Penelope, it did not last twenty years even though at times it felt like it. The artworks made during these stages are nomadic in subject but their role to assist with the reflexive thinking needed to untangle existing knowledge worked however chimeric the results may appear.
ADVENTURES IN EMBROIDERY

BY ERNEST THESIGER

"STUDIO" BOOK
Methodology/Methods and Interview Data Artworks

In this section I will explain how I have used my creative practice to explore how research structures function and to examine how I might situate myself within the project. As a male embroiderer how much of my hand could I show without distracting or dominating existing new knowledge and the participant data? During this time the interview data was coming in and my participants were situating themselves for me to see in relation to art textiles and identity. This extended ideas of identity and subjectivity beyond myself into the discussions that I was having regarding where to place myself as a character in this project. The works under this heading specifically relate to the research because I used them to model ideas about identity and subjectivity.

In her autobiography from 2003, American artist Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012) writes how textiles transformed her art:

An artist is the sum of his risks, I thought, the life and death kind. So, in league with my sewing machine, I pulled and stitched and stuffed the banal materials of human clothing in a transformation process where the most astonished witness was myself. Almost before I knew it I had an "oeuvre", a family of sculptures that were the avatars, three-dimensional ones, of my two-dimensional painted universe.46

What Tanning describes here are her three-dimensional graphical representations or ‘avatars’ as she named them. These sculptures are an alliance between upholstery and needlework. I decided that it was important for me to use avatars at this stage of the research when I found Tanning’s idea. She says she chose textiles to make avatars with because a cloth (and stitch) has the same length of life as a person. So

Tannings avatars ‘will, in effect, last as long as the human life – the life of someone ‘delicate’. For this artist textiles could be subject to sudden change and unpredictable degradation just like the body itself. With the artworks shown here I was considering my human presence in this project and like Tanning I used textiles as an art materials that will degrade.

Tanning drew on and taunted Modernist associations positioning textiles as a lower art form. This notion came from stitching and cloth being historically associated with craft or women’s work, rather than fine art. Tanning, however, was proud of these works:

These sculptures represent for me two or three kinds of triumph: The triumph of cloth as a material for high purpose... the triumph of softness over hardness... and the triumph of the artist over his volatile material, in this case living cloth.48

As with Tanning’s cloth sculptures my own artworks are avatars built from multiple parts that upholster a frame. All conceal armatures essential to their structure but only their skin and not their bones are visible. Unlike Tanning I did not set out to triumph over the anticipated expectations of what thread and stitch should or could do, but I did use my artworks to decide how much of me went into the research: all of it but you can only see bits.

The artist Judith Scott (1943 – 2005 USA) made artwork that was not autobiographical and her sculptures it can be said do not describe her experiences. Scott never discussed her creative output or processes and the variety of materials she used cannot be accurately inventoried. However for the viewer her wrapped and bound objects can appear to be solely be about materials and handmade

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construction. My creative practice here can be viewed similarly to those made by Scott as exercises in colour and form that utilize found materials. What is important (and was my intention) was that the avatars invite examination. I have used some materials particular to an embroiderer's 'oeuvre' like silk, ribbons, flocking, antique glass and amber in addition to what Scott had around her too (mass-produced, man-made yarns and thread) to cover my armatures. These avatars reflect the pragmatism of using what was on offer to me as an artist (and a qualitative researcher) working from my own lived experiences whilst looking for stable structures on which to build ideas. The way in which they were built, from components, was influenced by the works of Angus Suttie. In the photographs in this and the next artwork section the images of ceramics included are pieces of Suttie’s work that were all made between the short period between 1981 and 1993, his use of 3D collage, richness and invention are very evident, in my opinion are also avatars and both Suttie’s ceramics and his writings have influenced this investigation equally.
Analysis and Conclusion Artworks

Kay Lawrence proposes that kantha stitching enables a subjective space in which an embroiderer can create their world. Kantha is a form of Bangladeshi embroidered quilting that involves making thousands of tiny stitches. Lawrence says that this stitching constructs a territory that assists in creating those who stitch it.49 For Laurence, embroiderers build their world and themselves by embroidering. In Lawrence’s research stitching is framed architecturally because buildings are constructed territories made for people. Embroiderers build a narrative ‘in and of the cloth’ says Lawrence. This is an idea that I have been considering closely while analysing the participant data and drawing my conclusions because the interviews detail the social encounters and self-explorations that have built the participant’s art practices. Researching is like making kantha stitches, it is repetitive and can be tiresome but the familiarity of the physical stitching can also be soothing (until you get cramp). The imagery in the artworks in this section get spliced and striped, they reference the history of the portrayal of textiles in fine art and they get mixed with heroes and heroines. Backstitch and kantha stitching describe the cul-de-sacs I took and the intensity of involvement I found essential when immersing myself in the research. This is how the artworks specifically relate to the research process – this was a very physical transcognitive work time during these chapters and the eye motifs reminded me that I needed to watch myself as I worked.

Embroidery, it could be said, has given the interviewees a territory in which to partially or greatly invent themselves and it has given me thinking territory. Both are interstices: elusive in-between spaces where possibility can flourish. The artworks in this section are points of frisson between one idea and its counterpoint and this was the space I needed to process the interviews. So the artworks in this section helped me to mull over and explore connections, then make conclusions. The artworks record the wandering that a researcher needs to do, inhabiting an interstice in order

to hold conversations. Printed imagery on the final line diary is literally cut from earlier cloths and rebound with new ideas, these conversations used up a lot of material discovered earlier in the research process.

The participant interviews provided a rich stew of reasons; they are recollections of the participants’ spaces and opportunities that brim with real things they say have acted as powerful triggers. Using the same stitch and motifs repetitively, I processed the participants’ data. It was a ritualised process and this quote from ceramist Angus Suttie explains how ritual relates to the artwork and testimonies of the participants when he outlines the paucity of life in 1980s Britain:

> I hate the way that things are at the moment. My work is saying, I don’t agree, I don’t believe in what is happening. It is a reaction against. The government is stripping everything down to function, but life is richer than that. So I am looking at ritual things and in my own work putting on things that have no relation to function.\(^5^0\)

Whilst writing the analysis I reflected on similarities between 1980s Britain and now, and this permeated these artworks. In the third line diary made during the research lengths of cloth printed from my earlier photographs were worked into with stitch or collage; most had been left to simmer and added to intermittently. Now like the collaged and patched works they became a diary fashioned from smaller parts made separately, and identified separately in my mind, and then joined together to make a whole. This collage process resulted in more than the sum of the parts and imagery used (hybrid animals, prints of my avatars, texture prints, antique cloth, found objects and tie dye). The result was a symphonized mess but a useful one. This is how I write too, and, like the interviews, the artworks are hopefully both awkward and beautiful.

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To me the writing process is akin to collage. Both the conclusion and the artworks are composed of patches cut from big tents. Segments of cloth/stitch and writing were eventually, after much wrangling found homes for - they were settled into their compositions. In her novel *Autumn* (2017), Ali Smith plays mischievously with the word collage by presenting us with an original premise, and it is one I stewed over as my research student status came to a close:

Collage is an institute of education where all the rules can be thrown in the air, and size and space and time and foreground and background all become relative, and because of these skills everything you think you know gets made into something new and strange.\(^{51}\)

I have not sought to make strange things but I did want to form new things; and after all these artworks were made in an art school. Within them I have explored dilemmas and frictions composed by the participants’ in their reasons. They are spliced, scrappy and instinctive, and do plunder the histories given by the participants. Artist Robert Rauschenberg’s radical blending of diverse source imagery provided me with a morphological precedent for working as I have in the analysis and conclusion sections. With his examples of sprawling visual vocabularies that both embody and radically subvert the idea of an archive by moving beyond a modernist logic Rauschenberg does not place ideas/images into dead archives or seek tame them. For as Jeanette Winterson says:

Art is odd, and the common method of trying to fit it into the scheme of things, either by taming it or baiting it, cannot succeed. Who at the zoo has any sense of the lion?\(^{52}\)

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This fluency is a refusal to view art as an exhibit in the zoo. It is what Rauschenberg delivers best in his work *Hiccups* from 1978 (held in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). It consists of ninety-seven small handmade printed and painted sheets of paper that literally zip together to form a sweeping vibrant line of discordant images (close-up, blow-up, texture) on the wall. Following Rauschenberg’s instruction all of the panels must be presented when the work is shown, but the order in which they lie is up to the installer and even then the viewer can imagine different readings because the zips are on display. This patchwork by Rauschenberg and the artworks made for these two sections (analysis and findings) are similarly composed; they are collaged ingredients and are a moveable feast. Patchwork traditionally is about using up parts of other things, it was originally a way to make something from the remaining cut-offs of cloth. The writer Umberto Eco says in the conclusion to his book *How to write a Thesis* that when cooking a pig nothing is wasted and that is the case here.\(^5^3\) Hopefully I have not wasted anything when writing this thesis and when using my art practice to process all the information that had to be cooked. The categories used in the analysis are present in aspects of the art practice made to process the data and develop the findings but is mainly oblique because the artworks are not the end product but exist to hold and progress ideas.

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3. Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

This literature review was compiled to find the gaps in the relevant writing in order to determine the validity and originality of this inquiry. Whilst this was being compiled, invitations were sent to potential research participants. The original question (Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art; why were you working with textiles and what were they about?) sought to cast the net wider; it was not restricted to those working with embroidery but covered all textile arts. The sources were selected by surveying (over a period of two years) all that could be found regarding men and embroidery; historically within art and craft movements that included American and Polish art textiles, British educational records, art catalogues, museum holdings and crafts council publications. The criteria followed this pattern: first searching for men and art textiles in Britain, then this was extended to international records and writing – at this stage it became clear that far more was available on male artists and textile art from abroad. The last stage was a comprehensive search for connections that others had made between my own motivations and the available literature/archive material. It was not essential that there be a connection between either my own reasons or in the interview material that the participants provided but as this data came in they were correlated.

This review was completed by the time participants had sent back their agreement to participate or not, and all of those who replied identified as embroiderers within the field of art textiles. This fact steered the path that the research then took. So, although the breadth of the literature is wider than the final participant demographic, it was decided to keep the review material in line with the research question sent with the participant invitation.
A literature review needs to be both agile and cumulative if it is to be efficacious. This review identified the themes used to determine the scope of the research and enabled an investigative shift from the general (art textiles) to the specific (embroidery). Barrett and Bolt when reviewing scholarly texts advise this breadth and adaptability. The usefulness of the catalogue essays, articles, reviews and other written materials were prioritised according to their provision of men’s reasons. Because this material is scarce, texts that raised additional relevant questions and identified potential motivations from a wider span were included in the review even if they did not directly answer the research question. These were particularly noticeable in research that examined women and identity in relation to textiles post-1989. Texts before 1980 that focus specifically on male textile artists are rare but are discussed in this literature review because some of the interviewees began using embroidery prior to that decade.

Possible sources were initially identified initially from online records of male textile artists’ activity. This could have been a historical reference in the form of an exhibition catalogue or an archive entry or a listed artwork and included visits to the National Life stories audio archives held at the British Library in London that has a section devoted to Craft Lives. Unfortunately although very interesting this oral recordings/interview resource, in which craftsmen and women are interviewed about their practice did not provide helpful data specific to the project. Three artists discussed in the literature are amongst those interviewed for Craft Lives though and some are discussed/interviewed in this research. Another, the weaver and printmaker Tadek Beutlich provided an exceptionally in depth account of his life but without specifically saying what influenced him to choose textiles. Most useful material prior to and including the 1980s was largely found in physical library holdings or second hand books because the majority of records detailing that period are not available.

online. The Craft Lives interviews are a superb resource though that detail cultural roots and influences of many other makers.

Records of men that could be established as working in 1980s Britain warranted close inspection first. Records of their artworks most often did not indicate that they had been recorded as discussing their choices to use textiles. These searches took considerable time and most often led to the purchasing of out of print catalogues and ex-library books – most often from University libraries. With craft an increasingly legitimate part of the artistic canon from the 1980s onwards (as identified by craft historian and curator Katz-Frieman) men positioned themselves as craftsmen and it is by using this categorisation rather than limiting searches to finding male artists that most relevant material UK was found. 55

Wider discussions of art education in the 1980s are to be found in three sources and were helpful in providing context. The first by Buckley examines recent developments in the teaching of textiles and embroidery in British schools at the end of the decade.56 The second examines the position of textiles in the new National Curriculum introduced into schools in England and Wales in 1990 and is by Greenlees (1995).57 The final source comes from a male textile artist with an international reputation Michael Brennand-Wood (1952). This is particularly useful for two reasons, on a personal level Brennand-Wood taught me and his observations are as I remember art textiles being taught in higher education in 1980s Britain. Writing in his introduction to the ground breaking Crafts Council Exhibition Fabric and Form in 1982 discusses how he placed content over technique whilst teaching at Goldsmiths:

The type of work the average student is exposed to now is vastly different from that of a few years ago. I would cite recent exhibitions of work by Eva Hesse, Robert Ryman, Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Cornell, Antoni Tapies, and the Décor show at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, as being of particular importance. Consequently, the terms of reference within which contemporary textiles are produced have altered. The effect of this change is not fully realised, but there is evidence in certain current work of changes in awareness and the past constraints of use, durability and application have begun to break down. This will lead to a different form of textiles, which is no longer dependant on the study of a technique, but is free to involve and embrace any media or discipline necessary to further the concept. Textiles will never again be a definable area: in the same way, distinctions between painting and sculpture have become pointless.\(^5^8\)

At Goldsmiths College there were also other staff re-invigorating textiles and textile theories with a vitality that ceramicist and writer Alison Britton refers to as experimental materiality in her catalogue essay for the exhibition *The Maker’s Eye* held at the Crafts Council which included a number of textile artworks made by men.\(^5^9\) I think it is this approach that led so many other men to study embroidery at Goldsmiths in the 1980s. Acknowledgement of the teaching legacy from this period when Audrey Walker led the department is also discussed under the theme of encouragement in the analysis of the interviews in this research.\(^6^0\) Importantly during the 1980s there were seven leading UK embroidery courses - Loughborough College of Art and Design, Ulster University, Glasgow School of Art, Manchester, Trent and


\(^{60}\) One review is available of an exhibition of textiles, drawings, paintings, constructions by staff of the Embroidery Department, Goldsmiths’ College held at Goldsmiths’ College Gallery, London, 2-15 March 1983 and is by Tanya Harrod in *Crafts* (62), p. 46
Birmingham Polytechnics and Goldsmiths College, University of London was not the only one with innovative approaches to art and design using textiles.\textsuperscript{61} In addition art colleges had their own collections and Clark comprehensively discussed the origin and management of textile archives and research collections in UK colleges and polytechnics, including West Surrey College of Art & Design, Manchester Polytechnic, Trent Polytechnic, Goldsmith College, the Scottish College of Textiles, Huddersfield Polytechnic, and Middlesex Polytechnic in 1988.\textsuperscript{62} So students had historic examples of textiles readily available in a lot of cases to influence their making.

An artist mentioned by Brennand-Wood is Robert Rauschenberg (1925 – 2008) who appeared to recreate himself through making art. He did this by using diaristic memorabilia that represented family and home in his artistic framework. This understanding of his output influenced my use of visual diaries enormously. In using familiar domestic items (they could be crotcheted, patch-worked or embroidered) as both familiar items and as unfamiliar elements of his vocabulary, placed in or attached to different contexts, by simply being in an artwork and in relation to other disparate objects such as taxidermy animals or advertising debris, Rauschenberg’s work becomes anchored by it’s associations to the stitched textiles of his childhood in a similar way to my own.\textsuperscript{63} It has be said that Rauschenberg posed an alternate aesthetic by including domestic textiles in his ‘combines’, which some commentators determined to be proto-feminist or gay.\textsuperscript{64} According to Wainwright, he did refer to his childhood, she says, in works made when he was in his late 20s, recalling his childhood by ‘reaching back to crawling beneath his mother’s quilting table at

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid p. 197
quilting bees when he pieces fabric to reconstruct domestic space to discover who he is becoming’.  

So this literature review found information discussing art textiles made by men from the 1950 onwards. Using embroidery in art in the 1950s was a radical choice and a gendered medium presumably because embroidery relates to the household and the everyday. Examples of male contributions to embroidery in history can be found up to and including the present day unfortunately why men chose to work with textiles is rarely discussed.

Literature on the status of textiles as art was also reviewed, primarily this was for what men said about their motivation for using the medium but this did not produce much of use. However Adamson writing in 2014 when looking back to discuss American art textiles raises a salient point applicable to British artists in the 1980s. Adamson is correct when he says that it needs to be remembered that historically embroidery was still regarded as the *outsider* then even though it was no longer the 1960s when:

A renewed demand, spurred by the feminist art movement, for the dissolution of medium-specific limitations that cornered discussions of fiber within craft. The consequent expansion of art that involved handicraft recharged discussions of gender, value, and status. Yet it is often the case that when male artists knit and sew, it is considered transgressive, a defiance of traditional gender roles; it is not considered craft.  

65 Ibid
In the USA during the 1970s Harmony Hammond, Faith Wilding, Miriam Schapiro and many other feminists were the first artists to recoup a skill set that had been previously denigrated as female by mainstream art worlds according to Tucker.67 The use of needlework in art is perceived by many authors as a gendered activity, writing in 2010 Auther says a widespread adoption of embroidery by artists does not indicate any great effacement of the hierarchy of art and craft, instead it would appear that subordinate categorizations continue to thrive. Masculinity remains seen as in opposition with femininity in art just as the sciences are deemed hard subjects and the humanities are soft.68 Auther’s work provides many insights into the relationship between sexual politics and textiles in the 1980s but as with much of the literature reviewed on history it concentrates on the USA.

How time affects how embroidery and men are viewed is the subject for a different piece of research but this literature review did unearth examples of this. For example artist Michael Raedecker talking in 2013 is well aware of how his embroidering was received in the late twentieth century:

But what was interesting was that twenty years ago, when I started to use embroidery – some women had a problem with this, they felt that I was working in a territory that was not supposed to be mine. I guess I acknowledged their concerns, but I am from a later and more progressive generation, so I didn’t feel constrained by those gender-related connotations.69

Because historian Rozsika Parker asserts that embroidery is not a universal and timeless practice but is instead actually a socially and culturally embedded art form

with meanings that change over times this review categorises the literature as such.  

This view of embroidery being time bound also underpins why the research has its specific focus on men using textiles during one distinct period and why time periods are used to clump together men’s reasons in this review. The time categories used are:

1. Pre-1980  
2. 1980-89  
3. Post-1989

**Pre-1980**

Prior to 1980 there are three significant occasions when men’s reasons to use textiles are discussed, but, both sides of the 1980s, texts containing reasons are rare. The first pre-1980 text hails from Britain and was published in 1945. The author was an embroiderer but is best remembered as an actor. Ernest Thesiger CBE (1879 –1961) was also a pioneer of needlework for men. In his book *Adventures in Embroidery* Thesiger discusses creative instinct and the *purpose* of embroidery but not his motivation to embroider. For this we must watch a British Pathé newsreel: *Ernest Thesiger - Expert Embroiderer* (1944). In this short film designed for cinema projection he states that needlework has ‘always been his hobby’ and he uses it ‘as a relaxation from acting’. A voice over highlights Thesiger’s lesser-known artistic talents but these words are read by a commentator, the assumption is that these are Thesiger’s words. We do not know this for certain but it is definitely not his distinct speaking voice. As far as I can tell this is the first evidenced time a British man’s reasons to make embroidery are given and publicly available. Thesiger was a character actor and the most celebrated embroiderer of the interwar years. In addition to his career, he founded the Disabled Soldiers’ Embroidery Industry in 1918.

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71 Thesiger, E. (1944) *Expert Embroiderer*, British Pathé, Retrieved 29.05.2017 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sbWO8AWp5g
For additional information on this organisation there is a very comprehensive article by Joseph McBrinn.72 This was one of a number of therapeutically focused charity schemes founded in the wake of the First World War that aimed to rescue severely disabled veterans from impoverishment and destitution. The Disabled Soldiers’ Embroidery Industry was, however, exceptional in its focus on embroidery. There are items made by soldiers from various conflicts that are embroidered or made from textiles in museum collections, but these do not have accompanying data that reveals why they were made. Thesiger used his fame to promote his charity and the case of the disabled but except, in the single film discussed, did not talk about his reasons to embroider. It is to be noted that sailors have stitched sails and made and mended their clothes, so sewing was certainly part of their lives. Following the advent of steam, sailors had more leisure time aboard ship and it is in the 19th century that they took up the time-consuming art of embroidery. This was known as woolwork and, unlike land-made embroidery relied on the ingenuity of their hand-drawn designs. Although there are examples of sailors’ work, records of their motivations have not been found to include in this review.

Another book written by an actor/embroiderer is the 1973 publication Rosey Grier’s Needlepoint for Men.73 Professional American football player Rosey (Roosevelt) Grier (b.1932 USA) took up needlepoint following his retirement from sport. Speaking in the first person, Grier tells us why men might embroider at this time:

I’m no anthropologist, but maybe it all has to do with the whole trailblazer, he-man thing of a growing country. And now that the land is all

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under control, men can turn more easily to less rugged occupations, and also, they have more time for hobbies than ever before.\textsuperscript{74}

The author discusses the camaraderie of stitching and he has the voice of a confident, self-assured all-American hero. Grier takes the final chapter titled \textit{Other Men in Needlepoint} to recount the opposition other sportsmen voiced to him discussing embroidering (according to them he was casting footballers ‘in a bad light’ and encouraging others to see them as ‘sissies’).\textsuperscript{75} In this chapter Grier introduces the reasons why other men made needlepoint:

1. The blackout in WWII and ‘itching for something to do with their hands’.\textsuperscript{76}
2. ‘Not being able to draw’ and the paintings of Roy Lichtenstein, which employ dots akin to needlepoint stitches.\textsuperscript{77}
3. Having a ‘needlepoint marriage’ where both husband and wife stitch.\textsuperscript{78}
4. Relaxation whilst watching sport or films on television.\textsuperscript{79}
5. Inspired by a press article on Rosey Grier read when recovering in hospital.\textsuperscript{80}
6. Inspired by a houseguest.\textsuperscript{81}

For additional information on American post-war textiles made by men historian McBrinn’s expert work on craft and masculinity is well worth reading.\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{Post-1989}

Post-1989, data directly answering or even relating to the research question is rare.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, pp. 17-18
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, p. 127
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, p. 128
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, p. 133
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, p. 134
However in what is available the cultural space into which textile artists were fitted societally or have fitted themselves continues to be a theme of investigation. This is summarised by potter and craft theorist Alison Britton retrospectively when reviewing her writings about craft in general from the 1980s:

> Reading over the 1980s it seems to have been a time full of ideas when people working across the visual arts, in good rapport with each other, were seeking a different cultural space.\(^83\)

Britton warmly remembers camaraderie amongst professionals as a reason to make crafts and this is a significant factor that did prove useful in relation to men’s reasons for embroidering.

In this next paper, the first of two written from a social sciences perspective, a sense of belonging is explored. Researchers Johnson and Wilson ask why contemporary handcrafters make art textiles similar in form and function to those produced by previous generations.\(^84\) The research method comprises of thirty-nine questionnaires completed by women. Eighteen makers also participated further in secondary stage in-depth interviews to establish why they made textiles. The conclusions are based on the meanings that textiles as an activity brought to the participants in the context of group participation. In its findings, this paper usefully identifies three themes why textiles were chosen:

1. An opportunity for the handicraft workers to identify their place in the world
2. The production process of the items giving meaning to the women
3. Tangible and intangible benefits gained from the products of their labour.\(^85\)

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\(^85\) Ibid.
The Irish participants were given the opportunity to express themselves freely within a tightly structured two-tier process. Useful methodologically, the approach taken by the researchers and the three motivational reasons identified by them could be used to help in the analysis of the original data acquired for this research. The second paper is by researchers Nelson, LaBat and Williams from 2005. Although again concentrating on women’s reasons to choose textiles, the results are organized thematically into three conceptual areas that are used to structure the findings: identity, marginality and agency. The use of themes enables a clear reading of the results. Also because they were generated directly from the interview content they have proved helpful as a model for this research.

Interestingly, in Nelson, LaBat and Williams’ study only five female participants were interviewed to provide an understanding of what textiles mean in Irish culture and society from the perspective of the women who made them. This research found that historical identifications can be attributed to the participants’ reasons but do not automatically function as a reason to choose textiles. One aspect from this paper that may be applied to research on men and textiles is the small number of participants. This research is informed by concerns raised within, and central to, contemporary feminist writing about women’s experiences in society and culture. In short this paper is more useful for its methods than its findings but its premise regarding gender is taken note of here.

As an artist researcher, American Peter Hobbs in The Sewing Desire Machine (2001) binds together sewing and gay desire. For him sewing machines are ‘vehicles of queer potential’ when used by men. And this is why he uses a sewing machine to make art embroidery:

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Art objects, with their heightened sense of connotation, perform a special role within this play of juxtaposition. They have the potential to push us in directions removed from the everyday. Art making means actively pursuing connotative chains (this made me think of this, which made me think of this, which...). The connotations surrounding objects and ideas branch out and interconnect to form various discursive fields.\(^\text{87}\)

Without interviews or full discussions, Hobbs projects his reasons onto other artists. Similarly, curator Robin Metcalfe does the same in his catalogue essay for the Canadian exhibition *Boys with Needles* (2002) by giving examples of gay men drawn to embroidery in order to ‘deliberately apply their sexuality’.\(^\text{88}\) Saying that an artist’s sexuality is an identity device ready for deployment, Metcalfe’s views extend beyond his own productions. As with Hobbs, he does not illustrate this theory with other artist’s quotes or views. In both catalogue essays, the interpretations appear assumptive serving as a reminder not to extend an idea beyond what can be proven, in particular the linking of sexuality and textile production as automatically given for men.

Dutch artist Michael Raedecker eruditely cites his art practice in this next quotation, given in conversation with curator Reinhard Spieler in 2014. It is a retrospective view that mirrors some of the reasons given by the research participants in my project. We all rely on our memory to recall motivations and in this interview Raedecker does this to explain how his artwork draws upon the historical importance traditionally invested within painting. His painted and stitched canvases embody a graceful painterly aesthetic combined with use of the physical processes of stitching, cutting


and embroidery. Raedecker cites history, cultural and gendered expectations and how he feels about embroidery as an activity when providing us with his reasons for doing it:

What I liked about the technique was that it was considered a domestic activity, and that this homelike craft was not just reserved for women, but connected to the overall idea of home and leisure activity. The idea of craft is, as I said, non-art and goes back not to the female but to the human urge to make things. Craft comes from the heart; art is considered a rational higher activity. Combining the two was food for fantastic fiction’.  

Raedecker introduces themes that are later used in this research to analyse original interview material: expectations and the influence of textile histories.

Before we examine the 1980s texts, there is another quotation of note from the American artist Alan Shields (1944-2005). His contribution to this introduction is significant because in it the artist provides precise and erudite reasons for using textiles. Shields explanations exemplify the type of data that this study sought and, in quotes from him that discuss the merging of his child and adult worlds Shields outlines how he applied a Kansas childhood to a New York art world. Shields describes how his upbringing in rural Kansas, where quilt making dominated as a communal family activity, was a reason he machine embroidered his cloth paintings and handmade paper prints. His is a rare first person voice:

Part of my purpose, all the time, as far as being an artist is concerned, is to surprise people, to wave the flag and say this is me; this is something different than anybody else’s. It was only after I got away that I realized

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what those differences were and what the benefits were for me doing something different by taking advantage of the commonplace in Kansas that was not so commonplace in New York.90

In this extensive interview from 1999, Shields’ voice has the clout of authenticity. He says exactly why he stitches, and provides us with model data:

In a sense it was my grandmother and the quilting. And I did think Well, you know, maybe I could just paint canvas squares and sew them all together and make one big canvas out of a bunch of small ones, which I’d rarely done, but in fact that was what I’d thought I was going to do when I first started this process, because it was quilts I thought I was kind of replicating when I was putting together the designs for the canvas surface.91

Shields worked with textiles as an artist throughout the 1980s and he discussed them often. These examples make the most direct connection though. All the texts discussed in this review are relevant, though unfortunately few are as erudite and direct as the words of Alan Shields.

The 1980s

This is Embroidery (1980) by Moira Kelly.

In this article artist Michael Brennand-Wood was interviewed by Moira Kelly for Crafts Magazine. The perspective taken in this interview from 1980 is that Brennand-Wood’s artworks are embroidery because they employ stitch and thread, even though their appearance is unconventional when compared to domestic embroidery. The author

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91 Ibid.
informs us that Brennand-Wood chose to study embroidery because it gave him more options than a painting course might have:

He was wary of the trends prevalent in painting departments and equally determined not to become drawn into production-line textiles or weaving. He thought embroidery might afford him the opportunity to experiment, and it would appear that he made the right decision.\(^\text{92}\)

There are no direct quotes in this interview but we must assume that these are Brennand-Wood’s reasons because the context is given that the author visited him in his studio specifically to ask questions about them. The information is clear and useful because it identifies a reason: freedom to experiment.


In these two publications three authors introduce us to aspects of the socio-political making of embroidery in the twentieth century: embroiderer and educator Audrey Walker (b.1928), weaver Ann Sutton and feminist historian Rozsika Parker (1945-2010). Their commentaries elucidate how art textiles were perceived in the 1980s. Walker makes a significant point about higher education and art embroidery. Her contribution comes from Ann Sutton’s survey on British Craft Textiles.\(^\text{93}\) Walker links education and opportunity in this next quote:

Furthermore, a curiously persistent misconception which equates embroidery with compliant female domesticity has done nothing to help those who have recognised its considerable potential (and history) as an art form and have wished to practice it professionally. In one respect,

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\(^\text{92}\) Kelly, M. (1980). This is Embroidery. *Crafts Magazine* November/December, 28-29

however, such serious students are in a fortunate position – Britain is one of the few countries where embroidery may be studied as a specialist subject at Honours Degree and postgraduate levels.94

This is important information deftly contextualised. Walker does not sex her students and she labels embroidery as a profession any artist could choose, a useful recognition here within the context of the time that she does not exclude men. Walker raises a third important issue when she situates feminism and embroidery historically:

In the USA the strength of the Women's Movement in the 1970s was undoubtedly a catalyst in the re-presentation of sewn work.95

Here Walker refers to a ‘creep from America to Britain’ and that craft was adopted as part of feminist art practice. This, she says, was not only due to its rejection by the art world establishment, but also for its gendered associations. In relation to this, historian Rozsika Parker reaches rather further back to argue that a separation between fine art and craft began in the Renaissance. In her seminal text on embroidery *The Subversive Stitch*, Parker investigates the construction of femininity through textiles.96 Parker, like Walker links, education with opportunity, but hers is a contrasting picture in which the gendering of arts and crafts was a division that ‘inhibited’ production. A division, she says, between art and craft continued into the eighteenth century academies, the models for European art schools, when craft and art was consigned to the ‘appropriate’ gender: female. Again there is no mention of men and textiles, but Parker admits that she limits her remit to women, while Walker implies that textile arts education is for all. Men have been recorded as embroiderers

94 Ibid, p. 5
95 Ibid, p. 53
from medieval times through the Renaissance and onwards, but we do not have evidence of their reasons for embroidering. In Britain, according to Walker, opportunities had increased to choose the medium as a profession in 1980s and she makes no distinction between gender and opportunity. In 1984 Parker proposed that social constructs in embroidery define us (us is not reductive here because it is it applied to both men and women in her text). Embroidery has, she says, provided through its making a way to challenge long held stereotypes for men. This is a reason to bear in mind when new interview data is examined.

Ann Sutton, in her introduction to British Craft Textiles, establishes that funds did exist for men to use following their art school training during the 1980s. Interestingly, the Crafts Council revealed that textile departments were comprised of almost entirely women students and staff in 1983. This independently commissioned report also states that 87% of full-time crafts people working in textiles were women. What is of note here is that it was mostly women who produced, taught and administered textile arts at this time. The other 13% are the men, some of whom research participants in this study.

A male artist discussed in British Craft Textiles is Tadek Beutlich OBE (1922–2011). Polish by birth, Beutlich worked as a weaver and printmaker. In British Craft Textiles Beutlich is certain why he uses textiles and discusses his weaving techniques, specifically regarding one series of artworks:

For the last ten years I have been interested in light falling on some textile materials, mainly in the form of dots and lines on different levels and at different angles. For this reason I am creating and searching for textile structures which enable me to obtain the best results in this three-

97 Ibid.
This direct link between material and content comes from an artist who worked for four decades exploring textile methods experimentally. This plain speaking about reasons is rare and particularly so from him. In this quote Beutlich seeks a desired effect best found by making in textiles and this is his reason he chose to use them. Beutlich is a textile artist who has been exhibited widely in Britain including at Hove Museum, East Sussex and the accompanying catalogue *Tadek Beutlich: Off the Loom* by Linda Theophilus published in 1997 explores the work life of this shy and modest artist. I first really encountered Beutlich’s off-loom textiles that use a combination of wrapped and stitched techniques in Michael Brennand-Wood’s show curated for the Crafts Council *Fabric and Form* in 1984. His work has been an inspiration for me to use textiles for over forty years and he was included in the international exhibitions of miniature textiles held in Britain in 1974, 1976, 1978 and 1980 at The British Craft Centre in London that was the forerunner of the Crafts Council Gallery.


Artist Rushton Aust (b.1958 UK) believed what enables him to escape from the restrictions of painting is his ability to respond to materials freely and utilize the physical flexibility of cloth. The draped and hanging aspects of his wall-hung textiles is what craft theorist Peter Dormer (1949-96) admires in his artworks. In the catalogue for *The New Spirit in Craft and Design* exhibition for the Crafts Council, Dormer uses the example of William Morris as a contrast to the clean lines and simplicity when reviewing the work of textile artist Rushton Aust. This he does to praise Aust:

> Given the reactionary pressures of middle-aged whimsy made respectable by the term ‘post-modern’ it says much for people like Aust that they

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resist the clamour to re-cycle William Morris or his saccharine clone, Laura Ashley.\textsuperscript{100}

In an interview with craft theorist Johnson from 1989 ‘Surface Tensions’ Aust is quoted as saying that the surface tensions are why he choose to work with cloth:

I have an interest in the fabric itself, the resilience of the surface and the way it absorbs and takes up colour. A painter would stretch and prime a canvas so that nothing would sink in. I am interested in building up a surface right from the very fibre. I couldn’t work on any surface.\textsuperscript{101}

Aust chose textiles because of the resilience of its surface and links this to its structure, and this was as a beginner on his pre-degree level training (Foundation course) in Derby:

There was a certain degree of dogmatism about painting – that’s how it seemed to me – and, everyone wanted to do it, the space was cramped. I realised I was much happier working in textiles and other media, not just oils on canvas.\textsuperscript{102}

His choices seem practical but also refer to attributed expectations of fine art painting akin to those held by Brennand-Wood, they both chose textiles because it represented freedom.

To explore the history of art textiles this review involved studying the work of Pamela Johnson has written extensively about British art textiles, in particular two texts written in the 1990s explore how history has influenced textile making and artist

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
vocabularies. In *Under Construction* from 1996 the Crafts Council touring exhibition and *The Jerwood Prize for Applied Arts: Textiles* catalogue from 1997 Johnson frames textile making eloquently in terms of philosophy and exploring processes historically. Jonson’s is as significant a contribution to that made by Ann Sutton regarding the field of art textiles in that decade.

**Summary**

This section reviewing literature written in the 1980s is revealing. The voices in this section have been helpful in identifying potential circumstances and reasons for men choosing art textiles, but men talking in the first person are rare. A friction between painting and textiles is discussed as a reason to use the latter, and it has been said that art textiles provided an individual’s best avenue to achieving their artistic goal in the cases of both Aust and Beutlich. This chimes with Shield’s view post-1980. Both Aust and Beutlich were highly successful exhibiting artists with gallery presences during this decade, which could explain why their testimonies were asked for and recorded. It does prompt the question why other equally high profile artists from the decade, although recorded in catalogue literature, were seemingly never recorded as giving their reasons.

There is evidence of a gap in knowledge. The 1980s were an incredibly productive decade for men working in textiles: men’s textiles are represented in national and international museum collections but the reasons they made work with textiles are mainly unknown. How did circumstance, listed in particular by both Sutton and Walker, impact on men’s decisions to use textiles? There are significant limitations to the texts reviewed but all are useful, in particular the two research papers respectively (researchers Johnson and Wilson, and Nelson, LaBat and Williams) clearly demonstrate the value of a simple interview process and well-structured analysis in achieving a great deal of useful raw data.
This literature is an incomplete jigsaw: where is material from the novices, educators, organizations and guilds that all possibly exerted an influence on men's choices? Where are the other long established artists and collectors who, logic suggests, must have been around to influence the decisions made by younger male artists? There are leads but few answers. This literature review demonstrates not only that there are gaps in knowledge and suggests some directions that this study could follow in order to find answers.

4. Methodology and Methods

Introduction

This research records a dialogue between participant interviews and an arts practice. It constructs and analyses interactions between existing knowledge and new data supplied by men who recall why they chose to embroider in the 1980s. This chapter explains why and how methods were selected and how they functioned as a methodological whole.
Ontology and Epistemology

Creative arts methodologies are often built from multiple elements, so a framework was developed that gathered and analysed reasons men gave for specifically selecting textiles as their art form. Emergent in its construction methodologically and ethically, the methods used needed to be responsive to and transparent for the participants involved. In short this research took place in the real world and sought to value the real lived experiences of those involved. Essentially, it needed to be responsive to the requirements of the research (its aims) and have a strong but flexible dynamic at its heart. Researchers Gray and Malins say that research is essentially qualitative when it acknowledges that the experiences of participants are real and valid as a subject.103 This is a view of reality also held in this research, in which an individual or group build new knowledge because of whom they are.

Ontologically, this research seeks to find out why men chose to realise their ideas using art textiles. This study took the conceptual position that the participant’s reasons are recalled elements from a complex collage of motivations and circumstances. The reasons given by the men have not stagnated since the 1980s: the participant’s memories of their reasons have travelled regularly between two or more places both then and now. These reasons, like all memories, have been added to and modified. This re-specification of the reasons happened many times over as they have moved like the bobbin used for carrying the weft thread between the warp threads when weaving. Shuttled for over twenty years, what the participants recall in their interviews are just one version. Artist Polly Binns explains how collecting and recollecting deposits information into the present and that the shuttling of them is key to their value:

The very act of recollection may be a way of incorporating into the critical awareness of the present...all critical practices are characterised by this shuttling process.\textsuperscript{104}

This research seeks to bring a critical awareness of the participants’ reasons into the present.

Social constructions are those that do not rest solely in the mind, but are shared in and formed by activities in the outside world. The exchanges between people, objects and activities help to compile an individual’s view of his world. The embroiderers in this research have made choices that result from their social interactions with, and exposure to, external elements combined with their emotions and inner worlds. According to researchers Savin-Baden and Wimpenny:

Thus reality is not entirely external and independent of the individual conceptions of the world, and therefore signs and systems play an important part in the construction of reality as individuals make and experience meaning together.\textsuperscript{105}

This research recognises that social constructions are also formulated by circumstance and that social constructionist research, under which category this investigation falls, entails deconstruction, dialogue, negotiation and reconstruction of phenomena. The research methods in this study were selected to do this, and that they are dialectic in nature was essential to the research gaining an understanding of the embroiderers’ shared and co-constructed realities. In considering this perspective I was reminded of the artist Nicolas Moufarrege (1947 - 1985). Egyptian-born Lebanese raised in Beirut, he stopped off for a while in Paris before landing in New

\textsuperscript{105} Savin-Baden, M., and Wimpenny, K. (2014) \textit{A Practical Guide to Arts-related Research}. Springer. p. 3
York in the late 1970’s. In his idiosyncratic embroidered paintings Moufarrege molded a complex mixture of his ethnic and cultural roots into a distinct sensibility, and he described art as ‘a gathering of free-floating ideas; these exist available to the artist who transforms them either subverting them, or documenting them, but always inevitably personalising them’. Here Moufarrege is talking about co-constructing his realities and he had a particular flair for recycling images from van Gogh, Picasso, Japanese woodblocks and comics, interspersing them with Islamic patterning and Arabic script. These he arranged in a succession of delicate, seductive surfaces that narrated his life.

The social settings and views of the research participants hold the key to understanding their choices and why art embroidery was a way for them to make and experience meaning. In addition a constructionist view of reality allows for the investigator to build up or to build on prior knowledge rather than setting it aside, this is important because it allows for the preservation of the participant's voice and the introduction of alternative readings.

The social constructionist view means that reality is perceived as constructed intersubjectively, that is to say through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially by individuals. Multiple realities could therefore be embraced as personal and social constructions. Reality is produced through social subjective apprehension and the world is not divorced from the individual; it is an individual’s world. This view was key when gathering and preserving men’s reasons and emphasis was placed on not homogenizing them. A locus of socially constructed meanings is the research focus. The loci in this work are the men who chose to use embroidery to make art between 1980-89. Theirs are individual truths and not to be read as cover-all suppositions. Within qualitative research, a constructionist paradigm

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allows for the researcher’s role as co-creator of meanings. This recognises that the researcher is active within the research; he is not a character without history or influence himself, and the arts practice in this study is where his deliberations sit.

Reflexivity in the Research

Hammersley proposes an applicable definition of reflexivity that is adopted in the methods and approach used in this project:

What is meant by ‘reflexivity’ here is the attempt to make explicit all the assumptions, value commitments, feelings, etc. which went into, or underpin one’s research, how it originated and progressed, etc., so that readers can understand the path by which the conclusions were reached.  

In this research reflexivity does not operate abstractly. As Hammersley suggests it is a tool of autobiographical excavation and is used throughout the research process to see phenomena in new ways. In addition, Sullivan says that reflexive practice is ‘emancipatory’ for the researcher because it allows for direct involvement in ‘a common cause to enact artistic, social, political, educational, or cultural change.’ I am in agreement with Sullivan in that this requires a researcher to ‘see through’ existing data, texts, and contexts in order to be open to alternative conceptions and imaginative options because of this situation and knowledge advantage.  

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109 Ibid, pp. 100-101
artworks were being made, the practical, ethical and logistical problems that cropped up were examined reflexively. This was the time when I was able to gauge their importance and apply the distance required to solve the problems found. These decisions were not made in isolation but within the ethical and methodological framework of the project. Ethics are discussed next under a separate heading. Respect for, and ethical consideration of, the role and participation of the interviewees was paramount; this required an awareness and sensitivity that was enabled by a reflexive approach. I believe that my art practice that centres on stitching enabled the sharing of embodied knowledge. This is what Shercliff describes ‘the rhythms and patterns of social interaction and self-reflexivity’.110

Ethics with in the Research

Ethics, in its most applicable form, can be described as general principles and rules of proper conduct. This is how Gray and Malins define ethics in research and how it is embedded throughout the design and execution of this research.111 The conduct towards the participants was carefully considered and the key skill employed to ensure this has been simply listening to them.

The embroiderers were asked to ‘democratically participate’ in the research. This is a term coined by Hall and encompasses a cooperative relationship between researcher and participant group. 112 The transparency of the research intentions and the researcher role is key to this working relationship. This can be demonstrated from the first email contact regarding the research and throughout all stages of the research.

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The aim was to represent all participants equally as advised and recommended by researchers Gray and Malins.\textsuperscript{113} This was designed and operated in accordance with the University of Brighton ethics policies. Listed below are the relevant ethical interventions made to enable a transparent participatory approach:

1. Staged formal requests to participate in the research including the option to ignore the invitation if it was unwelcome. These were made in the first email invitation. Initial non-responders were re-sent the request to participate once more (but no following email messages/requests) after a four-week gap from the first email.

2. An explanation of my dual role as researcher and embroiderer, the option to give information that could be presented anonymously if requested and that consent was required for participation were all included in first contact.

3. This research is necessarily reliant upon gaining participant consent and ensuring participant confidentiality. The consent form used was adapted from the University of Brighton protocol (2011) and approved by the University of Brighton supervisory team.

4. As one participant requested anonymity, the most effective way to ensure this was to treat all participant data as anonymous throughout the research process as the world of the practicing male embroider in Britain is currently a small one. I was keen to ensure that others could not identify a participant through the process of elimination.

5. The option to withdraw was given upfront and it was stated that participants could withdraw at any time.

6. The research contact was only conducted via my University of Brighton student email account. This situated me within this institution and the rules and regulations that governed me there as research student.

7. Only the individual addressee’s email address was included on the messages sent. At no time was a joint or group email sent and the names of the participants were not revealed outside of the supervision team.

8. Participants were kept informed of any changes in the focus of the research. An example of this is that they were informed once participant data had been gathered and that because every individual described their arts practice as embroidery the emphasis changed to this from the wider initial topic of art textiles. No participants objected to this redirection.

9. The research question sent was deliberately open-ended. It included the option to say why the participant worked with art textiles and what the content of the work being made was. The research question sent was as follows: *between 1980-89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?* Should the participants have chosen to answer one part of the question or both the research would have tailored its remit and methods to include the participants’ choices. All participants chose to provide information about why they were working with art textiles but did not respond to other elements of the research question. As a consequence, the research focused on their reasons to embroider.
10. The participants were asked to give reasons for their choices from the 1980s, and the email interview format allows for time between the question being asked and the response being delivered. This relatively everyday mode of communication does not actively wait for or cue a reply, and answers may be easily corrected when constructing a written dialogue. The participants were given time to think and then reply.

11. Specific subject memories were requested using landmark events as contextual cues, the decade and the place: 1980-89 in Britain. These factors all enable recall in quantitative research responses according to Thomson and Brinkmann.\textsuperscript{114}

12. Ongoing data gathering continued until categories reached theoretical saturation, in other words when no new or significant insights are forthcoming from the data.\textsuperscript{115}

13. Participants were informed that the project would take between five to eight years to complete and that it would be used for examination purposes with copies held at the University of Brighton and the British Library following successful completion. In addition, a copy of the completed thesis will be sent to the participants online.

**Methodology Summary**

Regardless of the origin of research material, whether it pre-exists or is new, according to Sullivan it is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to respect the

\textsuperscript{114} Thomsen, D. K., and Brinkmann, S. (2009). An Interviewer’s guide to autobiographical Memory: Ways to Elicit Concrete Experiences and to Avoid Pitfalls in Interpreting Them. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 6*(4), pp.294-312

material, the object, its origin and the processes it undergoes throughout the whole research process.\textsuperscript{116} In this work the discussions regarding constructionism and reflexivity, and the elastic approach to defining the phenomena were all necessary in order to achieve an ethical research approach and methods that allowed enough space for the needs of the research participants. This next section is an explanation of how the methods were chosen.

Methods Introduction

The two methods used in this research are discussed in this section:

- Interviews
- Art Practice

The art practice is used as a reflexive device throughout the research: it processes the written content and stores the dilemmas the investigation produces. The interviews have a single concrete goal, based on a specific question; answers were sought as to why the participants were using art textiles at this particular time. The arts practice was not designed to provide answers in the form of finished artworks, its function was to process information and hold ideas. The participant interviews provided all the original data for this study.

The Interviews: Identification and Selection of Candidates

The uniqueness of each creative person can be found in an interview; using this method, the social nature of a person’s creative work can be researched without losing the sense of the individual. It was not anticipated that the research participants would view themselves as a group or movement, but that they would identify as individuals whose practice and backgrounds, ages and intentions would vary.

However, should they identify as a group with existing social and professional relationships, these could be included and discussed.

The literature review identified possible sources through which research participants could be recruited, and records were found that indicated particular art schools and courses that they might have attended. The Crafts Council was a major source of funding during the 1980s and was a useful source because it holds an index of artists that includes those using textiles.117 Similarly, the free online Visual Arts Data Service VADS contributed names towards the final list of twenty-six men that were approached to participate in the research.118 VADS has served as a record for the academic community for twelve years and records images of artworks, as well as biographical details of makers who use textiles amongst other disciplines. It contains a considerable portfolio of visual art collections, comprising over 100,000 images and dates/descriptions that are freely available and copyright cleared for use in learning, teaching and research in the UK. Additional candidates for the research were identified from the Constance Howard Study Centre Archive (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Design Council Slide Collection, both of which are open accessible online and are study collections/organisations that have records of applied arts and design members or graduates.

The main advantage for using these sources was that they are actively maintained by archivists and contain extensive archival records. All potential participants that met the criteria were invited, but it is recognised that there are limitations to the participant group selected. These limitations are as follows:

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1. That they were readily identifiable: this may be an indication of their willingness to be associated with art textiles, but not all historical records indicate that consent was given at the time of the record being compiled.

2. The catchment group was identified from records of graduates and members of professional organizations. No non-graduates were identified outside of these sources and could not be asked to participate because their names were not recorded. However it should be assumed that there were male artists that were not found, perhaps because they had not attended higher education and/or were not registered as members of craft/art organisations.

Prior to the decision to use the email interview method, a pilot in person interview was undertaken with one participant. This raised issues regarding the validity of a face-to-face interview method and the usefulness of the data it delivered. The field of art textiles in Britain is a small one and, due to a pre-existing relationship between interviewer and interviewee (social familiarity), the focus of the interaction was interrupted by diversions that elicited irrelevant information. The interview became a conversation because a shared professional history was too easily strayed from. Additionally, all the other participants in this study were known to the researcher and the problem risked duplication. As a result, written questions were designed and sent to participants. This sustained more distance between interviewer and interviewee and it elicited interviewees' responses without extraneous material.

Like the participants, all the non-responders had active profiles as artists/designers at the time the invitations. Those who did not respond were currently working in arts administration, photography, fine art painting and academia but no longer appeared to have active textile profiles. No reasons were given by these eighteen for declining to take part and the correlation between non-participation and current occupation would be speculative if examined here.
The Interview Process

Twenty-six men were invited to participate in the email interview process for the research. The invitations were sent to all the addresses found for the possible participants, which meant that more than one invitation was sent where one or more addresses which were found for an individual. Personal, professional, blog site and website email were all used. Those who responded did so from a variety of these sources, with no evident pattern.

Eight of the twenty-six men approached agreed to participate, and they corresponded over fifteen months: this was the data collection period. Unfortunately, during the gathering of data one participant had to withdraw due to ill health leaving seven. The participants are demographically all part of my embroidery community: they were people that I have worked and/or studied with but most I had lost touch with since the 1980s. They range in age at the time of this research from mid-40s to 80s. One is Black, two are openly gay and they all reside in the UK except one and five of the seven were born British nationals. They only function or might be read as a ‘group’ when they exhibit their artwork together which has happened in varying combinations, they all continue to make using textiles but not always with art the end product. All but two of them have an educational link to Goldsmiths College.

All participant contact was mediated by technology because data was sent via email. Geographically distant participants according to Elmholdt, utilise email successfully when data is self-transcribed by them into a text format. In addition, Elmholdt proposes a practical rationale for using email in this case because the potential participants were scattered across the UK, with some currently working abroad. Although an email interchange eliminates gesture and body language which can add to the meanings of a conversation, this was not considered as valuable as the more

essential aspects that promote a participant centred inquiry: accessibility and inclusivity. Of primary importance was that the men wrote and could readily edit their stories in their own way prior to them being sent. Using email, the participants sent their statements as complete data in which their idiosyncrasies and original formats were preserved. The email is a format that enables an epistolary relationship to grow between researcher and participants that mirrors how textile practice builds cloth structures and shares ideas. It can be said that the email interviews in this study are threads that exist as conversations within the email threads between the researcher and the participants.

The Interview Protocol

During the interview process, no deadlines were given and no email prompts or reminders were sent to participants. Replies were acknowledged quickly (between 1-3 days) and second and third questions were sent out seven days after acknowledgement of a reply. The email interviews went as follows:

- Invitation to participate sent.
- Acknowledgement and thanks sent to all responders. Sixteen initially agreed and some specified preferred time frames that were agreed with. This second email also contained an attached consent form which the individual as asked to sign and send back via email
- Eight participants gave consent and became participants having replied to the second email, although one participant later dropped out due to an accident and resulting serious injury

At this juncture, the research focus switched to embroiderers as makers of art textiles solely because this is how all participants contextualised themselves in their

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interviews. This demonstrates how an evolving systems approach in research was used, because this study employed a key element of this research framework: a participant responsive approach, as defined by Wallace and Gruber. This also treats creativity as purposeful work and researches the cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and motivational aspects of a creative process.\textsuperscript{121} In this study on men’s reasons to use art textiles, the key point is that the research methods were able to be adapted as required according to the needs of the participants. The research procedure continued:

- All seven embroiderers were asked two follow-up questions and three replied:
  - What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?
  - Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice-based during the 1980s, if so what do you attribute this to?
  - The three that responded were then asked a third question. One responded to the question below but the artwork cited is no longer in existence (no photographs exist) and had been a private commission: When you discuss work from 1980’s do you have any particular examples in mind?
- At the end of a six-month period, thanks were sent to all participants by email.
- The single request for the research to include that person’s data as anonymous arrived one year after the data had been collected.

\textbf{Art Practice as a Method: Active Documentation}

Art practice in this research functions as an investigative tool and as a record of process; it provides a parallel detailed history of the research process. In this thesis,

this is the recording of practice to track the development of the researcher’s understanding and provides a visual reference point for what happened when and the problems it presented.

Active documentation is what educational theorist and researcher Nancy de Freitas has termed the up-to-date record kept by a researcher whilst in the midst of a project. This, according to de Freitas, allows the researcher to feel the excitement of invention and allows for momentum to build. This keeps the research process alive because the records are active for the full duration of the project; they are not retrospective and allow for writing and making to work as a conversation. In active documentation, all process material is viewed and recorded as research material. This is how the arts practice was made and why it is presented in its format within the thesis. As a record of process, this visual diary practice can be likened to artist Gabriel Orozco’s (Mexico 1962) notebooks. These contain ideas, sketches, plans and found objects as described by curator Briony Fer. Orozco exhibits his notebooks as companion works. The arts practice in this thesis is companion work used to drive the written aspect forward. In his Notebook 14 on page eighty-eight, Orozco says that the act of making art delivers new ideas:

If the artist does not make, it means there is no process, there is just production. And the artist’s brain dries out, because it is in the mistakes and accidents of process that we get the ideas for the next work to follow.  

I am firmly in agreement with this view, and accidental discoveries, improvements or problematic blocks (all phases of work that can become invisible with progress) are


\[\text{124 ibid.}\]
recorded in the artworks in this thesis for this reason. The method of recording process to understand and drive forward research/ideas is an essential aspect of this study’s research mechanism because, as de Frietas says, up-to-date documentation enables an increase in the traffic or dialogue between researcher and his subject.

Artist Katy Macleod identified a type of practice-text relationship that relates to art practice revealing information and dialogue as it happens. On the relationship between writing and art practice (one that is presented in this thesis and not as a stand-alone body of work) the following definition by Macleod can be applied:

Revealing a practice – where the relationship between written text and practice-based is one of seesawing between the two and thus the text becomes instrumental to the practice at the same time as the practice-based becomes instrumental to the text.

Macleod does not use the term active documentation, but the similarities of intention are akin to de Freitas’ definition of the recording of art practice and writing as a partnership.

Researchers that use mediums and materials that are familiar to them enable a better fusing of practice into the methodology according to Gray and Malins, and the methods selected here have been aligned to tally with that view. Here Gray and Malins outline the productive links between practice and familiarity when applied to research using art practice:

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126 Ibid.
Firstly research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice-based and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners.\footnote{Gray, C., & Malins, J. (2004). \textit{Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design}. Ashgate. p. 21}

This useful familiarity can happen in this study because the practice methods used are aspects of my existing creative practice that have become integral to the intellectual and reflective processes of this study. Active documentation records these interactions throughout the thesis as witnesses to the triggers and dilemma that spur the research process forward.

\textbf{Art Practice as a Territory}

A space was needed in this research that could hold ideas and data whilst the reflexive process took place. This holding bay is an interstice as best described by art historian Gert Staal, who discusses how a liminal arts practice requires a less defined territory in which to flourish. This quote, from Staal’s catalogue essay for an exhibition of British and Dutch ‘art objects’, talks of how artists need a space in which to cogitate their ideas:

\begin{quote}
But the artists we are dealing with here prefer to behave like nomads. They carry with them the traces of their travels that require no regulating because regulation in itself has no meaning. Leftovers, unrecognizable equipment, images explained out of context. They choose the temporary above the permanent, doubtful recognition rather than definite
\end{quote}
knowledge, instinct above intellect. They realize that the appearance is sufficient, and intimates the reality.\textsuperscript{128}

The territory in this thesis where Staal’s ideas about the unrecognisable and leftovers can sit without too much regulation is the arts practice, and much of it takes the form of what has been defined as ‘fine art textiles’ back in 1980 by Sutton.\textsuperscript{129} This is the main form of art practice in this study. The absence of a linear narrative in the art practice was chosen to promote an instinctive, truer depiction of the research process that is both encyclopaedic and quixotic in nature. The practice fences off a space additional to the writing in which the reader can witness the dialogue between researcher and research material.

**Stitch in the Art Practice**

Stitching is a readily familiar form of construction for me. Artist researcher Emma Shercliff, expanding on hand stitching and belonging, says that:

Hand stitching is a slow rhythmic craft that describes both functional and symbolic dimensions of joining and being attached. It surpasses its functional attributes when considered as a material practice that offers particular metaphors for other processes of collaboration and integrity – or even separation and isolation.\textsuperscript{130}


This accurately describes my relationship with hand stitch and mirrors how I see the research process: in constant dialogue with my everyday and extraordinary life. This symbiosis entails digesting what has happened and what could be. Artist Joseph Beuys, when describing his drawing practice, chimes a chord because I believe that embroidery possesses the same agile inquisitive qualities that he attributes to the activity of drawing:

Drawing is... the first visible thing of the form of the thought, the changing point from the invisible powers to the visible thin ... It’s really a special kind of thought, brought down onto a surface, be it flat or be it rounded, be it a solid support like a blackboard or be it a flexible thing like paper or leather or parchment, or whatever kind of surface... It is not only a description of the thought... You have also incorporated the senses ... the sense of balance, the sense of vision, the sense of audition, the sense of touch.\(^{131}\)

I seek the same balances from my art practice, particularly in my stitched works where my reflections are visualized and processed, which is why they dominate the art practice used throughout this research.

**The Process of Transcognitivity**

Representations of the researcher’s experience may include the researcher’s own reflections according to Temkin and Rose.\(^{132}\) This inclusion is suggested by Sullivan to be particularly useful when a qualitative researcher attempts ‘to capture features


inherent in socially produced phenomena'; this can be put into practice using transcognitivity. Sullivan recommends transcognitivity as a process-orientated method that can be used to model discussions in research. The art practice in this study models pathways that the thesis narrative could take. By making and unmaking the possibilities, the appropriate path to follow is identified because art practice that is accumulative, experimental and heterogeneous is also faith to a social constructionist outlook.

Making artwork is a cycle of conceptualisation, it is thinking and re-thinking. The final form relies on a synthesis of memory, history, meaning and the revelations that occur. The artworks depicted in the thesis describe the reflexive collisions that happen when data and ideas meet during these revelations. The process of transcognitivity is the mechanism for this to happen because it is the creative thinking about one phenomenon whilst building with another. According to Sullivan, making provides time to ‘unpick the relationships amongst the features present in the data’, which here means the participant interviews. A good example of the transcognitive process in action can be given by Australian Historian Lissant Bolton when she quotes Tasmanian basket maker Verna Nichols on how baskets embody culture. It is this dialogical embodiment that takes place in the art practice in this research:

In the old days, the old fellows were sitting around, all the women laughing, joking – so all that conversation has gone into the basket.

The research conversations about the direction and content of this project are in the

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134 Ibid, p. 196
art practice as well as the writing; all are purposeful forms of inquiry according to Sullivan:

Whereby the artist-researcher explores the uniquely human process of making meaning through experiences that are felt, lived, reconstructed and reinterpreted. These may be personal or public and may result from experiences of art-making processes or outcomes of encounters with artworks. Consequently meanings are ‘made’ from the transactions and narratives that emerge and these have the power and agency to change on an individual or community level. 136

This research is investigating the participant’s experiences and these are lived encounters they remember as their reasons for choosing art textiles.

Summary

In this research art practice is one cog that turns the research engine. It does not result in finished artworks instead it enables the research to progress. The practice recorded in the relevant chapters is complementary to the writing and was worked on during the time engaged on each particular chapter. This was a repetitive process that could not be completed in one sitting. Like research it required revision and reflexivity, and involved much revisiting of the material. Arts practice was used to explore and record as visual conversations the individual constructions of knowledge made by others; embroiderers, artists and writers. This use of art making is one that stems from encounters with materials of all kinds and with other textile or art objects.

Walker in her essay *Insights* from 1999 explains how the encounters that drive her work begin with observing others and then develop into a highly nuanced connection with the process of making:

A dictionary definition of ‘encounter’ includes ‘to come upon (especially casually)’ and this is relevant to the way I work. At the outset the idea which prompts the work is only partially sensed and the incompleteness is the essential starting point. It is necessary to ‘not quite know’, to allow the fabrics, threads and stitches under my hands to reveal unexpected things and to make room for small and large adjustments. The piece may only need subtle refinements in tone or colour but it is just as likely that it will need to be cut up, spread out, reassembled, reworked or even abandoned. This process of discovery and development is the crucial encounter which will allow an abstract idea to become an effective material object.¹³⁷

This is how I use my art practice too; from the reactivation of memories, ideas and observations right through to a conversation with material. In this exegesis this has principally been a transaction between the reasons of others for embroidering/making textiles and my own.

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5. The Analysis

Introduction

The interviews recall the participants’ reasons to work with art textiles in the 1980s. They represent seven individual pathways to embroidery as an art practice. Some participants’ give reasons that overlap and indicate meaningful similarities whilst others offer stark dissimilarities. Although outside the time frame of this research there are three participants who began using embroidery earlier than the 1980s. The research questions asked all the participants why they were using textiles between 1980-89. However, these three participants (P1, P3 and P5) each chose to discuss the origins of their choices further back historically. This data was important enough for the participants to give, so it has been treated with the same degree of importance existing knowledge about this phenomena between 1980-89. This follows the adaptive philosophy taken throughout the study in which the participants were able to adapt their interview content: they decided what to include and in doing so indicated that this was relevant and therefore important data.

At this stage it is worth remembering that each participant was asked three questions and these were:

1. Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?
2. What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?
3. Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice during the 1980s, if so what do you attribute this to?

My answers to these questions (my reasons) have been discussed earlier throughout this exegesis because they have informed my approach to this enquiry. This is why they were included in the literature review, the methodology, the methods, process
artworks and in the conclusion sections but not in this analysis. They are not discussed directly in a dialogue with the participants’ answers because I did not interview myself and wanted the comparative study to be of other male embroiderers/textile artists. I do think it would useful to recap here what my motivations were because they do closely link to the themes identified in the participant data interviews. In answer to the first question (why I was working with textiles and what were they about) there is a relatively straightforward set of reasons. My motivations were familial, educational and inspirational, and all resulted from encounters with historic objects, exhibitions and people. As to what the art textiles were about at that time I would say in a nutshell - identity and belonging. I have discussed my answer to question 2 in relation to my grandmas and teenage years when discussing my motivation for doing this research. In answer to the last question (3) because I began my higher education at art foundation level aged 18 and then went on to Goldsmiths College during the 1980s the expectations and encouragement of others (whose influences have been detailed earlier) spurred changes in my practice both technically and philosophically over this decade. So the themes used in this analysis, which are Expectations, Textile History, Making embroidery, Belonging, Transgression, Encouragement and the 1980s, all informed my motivations/reasons for embroidering in 1980s Britain.

The participants all answered the first question with P1, P6 and P7 providing a single answer that included all three questions whereas P2, P3 and P4 gave separate answers to each one. P5 did not answer question 3. I decided to analyse the three answers as a whole because they offered intertwined ideas and the themes that dominated their answers came from answers to all three questions.

As a housekeeping device each participant is numbered from 1 to 7 (i.e. Participant 1 = P1) in the analysis. This is done to ensure anonymity, as requested by one participant, and in order that singularities, patterns or dissimilarities can be readily
identified to an individual. In addition, to respect the participants’ idiosyncratic voices their texts are printed exactly as they were delivered in the email form. To this end the grammar, spelling, use of capital letters and any idiosyncratic formats have been copied when they occurred. The interview quotes are reproduced authentically from the original email responses sent by the participants. Full transcriptions are available in the appendices with the only adaptation being the omission of all the participants’ names. In this quote, Brinkmann and Kvale situate the researcher’s voice as an active ingredient:

The question of why the subjects experience and act as they do is primarily a task for the researcher to evaluate, and the interviewer may here go beyond the subjects’ self-understanding.\(^\text{138}\)

What this means is not that the researcher speaks on behalf of the participant but may propose or suggest ideas that go beyond the participants’ understanding. The researcher is not foisting his views but instead raising possibilities and interpretations already embedded within the data. The participant’s own understanding of their reasons will be open to the ‘free play’ as Bourdieu names it of the reader. The ethical responsibility of the researcher is to allow space for the reader to factor in their interpretations as Bourdieu explains:

Free play in the game of reading, that is, in the spontaneous (even wild) constructions each reader necessarily puts on things.\(^\text{139}\)

Because the analysis will be read more than once and by different people this cannot be a finite reading and anticipates that free play for others will take place. This study sought to ensure space for other reader’s constructions to happen. In addition to the

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use of an inductive approach this has been done by not editing the participant interviews in the slightest. The use of punctuation, capital letters and flow are reproduced directly from the participant’s email scripts which allows any reader to see the level of enthusiasm and passion, and to view the participants’ voices with their human foibles evident.

The inductive approach taken in this analysis allows for the addition of hermeneutic layers that readers may bring to the interview data. According to theorist Hennie Boeije, an inductive approach is useful when examining a social phenomenon with the aim of establishing patterns that can work as or lead to a theory.\textsuperscript{140} Induction involves drawing inferences of observations according to Bryman (2001) cited in Bampton & Cowton - particularly in relation to online interviewing which is how this data was collected.\textsuperscript{141} Each response or quote from the participant statements is treated as a discrete utterance. The discrete utterances in this study are quotes from the participants analysed to develop their meanings by bringing the subject’s own understandings into the light and this is identified by Bampton and Cowton as a key objective when using email interviews.\textsuperscript{142}

The Analysis Process

Each participant’s interview was initially treated as a stand-alone text so that, according to MacLure, individual voices remain readily identified.\textsuperscript{143} This was achieved using a process called close reading, which here means:

\textsuperscript{140} Boeije, H. (2009). Analysis in Qualitative Research, Sage Publications, Sage., 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition pp. 5-6
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, pp. 221-222
When you close read, you observe facts and details about the text. You may focus on a particular passage, or on the text as a whole. Your aim may be to notice all striking features of the text, including rhetorical features, structural elements, cultural references; or, your aim may be to notice only selected features of the text—for instance, oppositions and correspondences, or particular historical references. Either way, making these observations constitutes the first step in the process of close reading.144

The next analysis process was as follows:

- All interview data from one participant was close read in one sitting and treated as a single data set from which specific impressions were gathered. The interviews were read as narratives from which to capture key understandings. This is a process that Boeije describes as making manageable units ready for analytical induction.145 So each interview was treated as a separate unit initially because they were manageable units.

The next stages relate to the process of coding, beginning with notes being made on copies of the text that identified participants’ reasons:

- It was noted whether these responded directly or indirectly to the research question.
- Each interview set now had an accompanying list of notes on reasons; these were words and phrases that seemed significant to their motivation.

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144 Retrieved 29.11.17 from https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading
At this point the participants' texts were compared as a set of seven interviews and the following stages followed:

- Stand-alone reasons, similarities and differences were noted.
- Key content was used to categorise the reasons into themes. This was not done before to reduce the risk of hunting for commonalities or variables.
- The themes were clustered and sub-divided. The final names for the themes remained fluid until the analysis was complete.
- Interpretations were then drawn from the interview data about the field under discussion, and it was held in mind that the participants were answering the research question as memories.
- It was noted when the participants challenged existing knowledge or beliefs and when some of their individual reasons were at odds with each other.
- The order and flow of the participant’s reasons as given in this text was established during the drafting process following the analysis.

The themes used in this analysis are Expectations, Textile History, Making embroidery, Belonging, Transgression, Encouragement and the 1980s, all grew from reasons explained by the participants.

**Expectations**

An expectation is a belief that something will happen or be the case in relation to oneself or others. This section examines reasons the participants have given in their interviews that relate to their own or others’ expectations. The expectations theme comes directly from this quote made by P2:
P2: I feel with hindsight that the main reasons for working with textiles was the lack of 'expectations' or preconceived outcomes, as a man in textiles it felt like the territory was open to occupy, the existing arguments about gender and textiles were much more firmly biased towards feminine women's art /craft (the subversive stitch et al). I guess the fact of London, the 80's, the beginning of a gay political environment, an 'outsider' existence also encouraged working in a media not bound by rules and masculine precedents- despite the fact that historically men were the professional embroiderers.

P2 was not expected to go into textiles or embroidery, but his reason to do so was prompted by a lack of expectations. Embroidery was open to P2 because discussions at the time centred on how women were situated and perceived in relation to the craft. When coupled with his identification of the media as unbound by gender precedents, P2 embroidered because the lack of attention on men and embroidery at that time appealed to him. This is a lack of expectations by others and a reason for P2's choice and is a theme found throughout the interview data from him.

Expectations and family can be connected in the next two instances. A lack of familial expectations can be found in two quotations from P1 and P2. First is the quote from P1:

P1: Why was I working with textiles? Historically textiles were in my blood; I'd interacted with textiles since I was very young and my maternal Grandmother was an industrial weaver, as were all her family. As a small child I'd ask my Grandmother to teach me how to sew and knit, I literally played with fabric, as her house was always full of cloth. The importance of this in retrospect is that I never thought of textiles as being a solely female area of expression.
Here, having an instructive Grandmother played a part in P1’s route into embroidery. Textiles for P1 are remembered as an everyday experience, and he aligns them with his grandmother’s productivity. For P1, his grandmother’s textiles meant work: she was a professional in the weaving industry, not a hobbyist or an artist. For P1 textile production put food on the table and he remembers it as something integral to family life and income. P1 could be implying that his situation was unusual, but it is unclear whether this relates to his heritage or textiles being readily available to a young boy. It can be said that there were no expectations which is why he chose it; it was ordinary, and therefore says he could choose it and use it without expectation.

The next quote from P2 offers another example of being free from expectations but for him this is because of an absence of expectation rather than a familiarity with textiles:

   P2: I do not have a family background within art, no learning at granny’s knee, or with my mother. I think the attraction was the transgression of norms, nothing to live up to if there is no family precedence....

Here P2 says that he did not feel bound by or drawn to the medium because of an example. This embroiderer recalls a lack of expectation, that there was nothing inherent or expected from him in relation to textiles. This comment is also discussed under the theme of transgression. So for P2 the route into embroidery was without expectations, and this was viewed positively because he uses the word ‘attraction’. The use of the word ‘attractive’, in this case meaning being attracted to an aspect of embroidery or an association held about the medium is a reason for P2’s choice. The question of whether men are not expected to be attracted to textiles/embroidery arises here, and it could be said that instinct overrides expectation here because P2 chose to use textiles regardless. Both P1 and P2 see the family associations or the
lack of them as liberating from highly contrasting sets of circumstances, and these factors assisted them in making their choice.

P1 next discusses how his formative exposure to textiles led him to train in the field in the late 1970s in Britain. In this quote discussing other people’s expectations again, P1 identifies a prejudice directed towards him, but this did not deter his choice:

P1: At Foundation, as I prepared my folio, I instinctively interpreted ideas in machine embroidery, tapestry and fabric collage. My intention was to study Fine Art but the prejudice I experienced because of my use of textiles necessitated a re-think. I decided to study embroidery in 1972, retrospectively a brave choice as I was the only man throughout my degree.

This ‘prejudice’ to which P1 refers is that textiles were not considered by his peers in the late 1970s to be a fine art material. It would appear that P1’s reaction to encountering prejudice was to choose textiles; he stuck to his instincts. How much others’ expectations influenced that choice, or whether textiles were chosen because his instincts were a stronger force is not clear. It seems that both influenced him, but it is unclear if either are a reason. It is interesting that P1 recalls his choice as brave possibly because he was the only man on his degree course.

P1 does not identify gender as a reason or contributing factor in this quote in relation to him using textiles when compiling his portfolio. P1 being the only man on his course he sees as retrospectively brave. One reading is that he once again did not see textiles as being a choice for women at the time, so this expectation was not a factor. Another is that P1’s instinct was again stronger than other’s expectations again. Either way P1 defied other expectations because men rarely did train in this field at that time.
In this next quotation, P1 reads embroidery as having unlimited qualities and possessing uncertain outcomes. This is reflected in contemporary writing from the 1980s, particularly in texts by both Sutton and Walker as discussed in the literature review and it is for this reason that it is of note here.\textsuperscript{146} P1 sees the uncertainty of outcome that embroidery is seen as possessing in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century as a reason to choose it and this could be named as a lack of expectations for him:

\begin{quote}
P1: Embroidery seemed to me to be like painting in 1910 ready for innovation, I viewed stitch essentially as a form of 3 dimensional drawing. Embroidery, unlike weave or print, didn’t really have a functional outcome, there was an air of uncertainty as to what exactly embroidery was in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century
\end{quote}

Here, it is P1 who has a lack of expectations, which he sees as a positive reason to use embroidery for making art. This relates to other comments made by him and other participants on freedom as a contributing factor in deciding to make art textiles.

P3 recalls his first use of textiles in college from 1964, when he remembers that there was an expectation to have a wide array of facilities to hand (of which embroidery was one) when teaching art in the classroom:

\begin{quote}
P3: We were expected to ‘ have a go ‘ at all disciplines, because, as art teachers in secondary schools, we would be probably be expected to be able to teach EVERYTHING to do with art and craft.
\end{quote}

This participant began his career as an embroiderer years earlier than the other six participants. He conformed to what was expected of him after being told that it was

a skill he needed to learn for his teaching portfolio. P3 captures how the initial suggestion to stitch may not have been his own idea and, although he had not necessarily expected to teach textiles or embroidery he was happy to comply, with his use of the term ‘have a go’ P3 is implying that he was open to the idea. P3 signals in this quote that the word ‘EVERYTHING’ is important by placing it in capitals, though the emphasis could well have other meanings: that it was too much to expect from him, or that this was a massive goal to achieve.

An expectation or a lack of expectation by oneself or from another is certainly an influential factor for some of the participants, but attractiveness, uncertainty, instinct and being ‘brave’ seem to have driven whether some participants ignored or complied with expectations. Each quotation in this section appears to stage the participant’s experiences, giving the reader context. Expectations are clearly important, but it can be surmised that the reasons under this theme are dependent on very particular circumstances, and in each case expectation if it is a reason is highly nuanced.

Textile History

We turn now to whether a historical precedent was a reason in itself or if it affected the participant’s reasons. Under this theme the participants cite an influence, or specific form of textile from history, to identify a reason they use embroidery/textiles for making art. This section explores historic textiles as something that the participants say motivated them. The first quotation from P1 refers to textiles history directly, and this could be described as a reason. Historic textiles are a driving or motivational factor as to why he used embroidery, we have to ask whether the novelty of being a pioneer the real reason:

P1: My work is interdisciplinary in approach; it’s a fusion of ideas and material processes. It’s rare to this day that I conceive of a work that
doesn’t have a subliminal connection to textiles. This could just as easily be use or adaption of a technique or a reference to textiles history. It’s also important to say that I felt like a pioneer in the mid 70’s, everything I did felt new and exciting. During this period people like myself who had a desire to make expressive one-off statements with historically functional materials infiltrated traditional applied arts areas. You can see not dissimilar enquiries in jewellery, glass and ceramics.

P1 refers here to ‘historically functional materials’: in the context of the quote, this means that materials have specific associations with types of objects and their anticipated functions for him. P1 is saying that how a particular material is associated with an established function or item is an expectation. However, for him this is liberating because he does not have to conform to established norms that stem from historic associations with embroidery/textiles. P1 has referred to textile materiality before as being appealing outside of its traditional associations. P1 says that he made art in the 1980s that is not limited to the embellishment of cloth that would be both a domestic and ceremonial historic reference. P1 says that his artwork referenced textile history but that it functioned only as art. This comment also relates to how P1 does not wish to conform to expectations about textiles and that in doing so he transgressed by producing the work he did. For P1 embroidery offered a welcome historically recognised uncertainty:

P1: Embroidery, unlike weave or print, didn’t really have a functional outcome, there was an air of uncertainty as to what exactly embroidery was in the 20th century

For P1 this is a reason, connected to expectations too, that specifically relates to textile history, and it appears that breaking with tradition was important to him.
Historic precedents are cited by P1, P2, and P6, but these are not all given as reasons. Instead, although inspired by textile history, this informs their reasons; textile history is an influence. A clear example of this can be found in this quote from Participant 2:

P2: My practice was as a profession and was led by examples drawn from the Victoria and Albert Museum, fashion exhibits, Indian / Middle Eastern Galleries and textile sample rooms. Schiaparelli, 17th century French court embroidery, early work of Lesage.

The influences on his art practice that P2 cites are specifically European and from the twentieth century: Elsa Schiaparelli (1890–1973) was an Italian fashion designer who used embroidery and applique inventively and is regarded as one of the most prominent figures in fashion between the two World Wars. Maison Lesage has designed and made visually rich embroidery for Haute Couture, Ready-to-Wear and accessories in its Paris workshops since 1924. Both of these are singular examples of visionaries who influenced the history of embroidery in the West. P2’s art practice and reason to stitch was inspired by them specifically. This could be partly circumstantial because during the 1980s the historic permanent display held at the main site of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London was extensive and readily accessed via pull out glass drawers. In addition to this, contemporary art textiles were on display in a programme of exhibitions, and site-specific textile work was commissioned by the museum. P2 would have had access to this when he visited the museum.

In this next quotation from P3 a particular type of embroidered textiles is mentioned:
As you and I know, historically, only blokes did the embroidery for those fabulous OPUS ANGLOCANUM masterpieces, because it was physically difficult....So, gender issues, are not possibly part of the reason.  

Although P3 is not directly stating that this is a reason to embroider, what emerges from this comment is that he is citing a historic precedent to align himself with. This is P3 linking himself historically to embroidery. Others may not have expected him to embroider, and P3 says that it was physically difficult, so it is logical that he be suited to it (this could be a justification to himself or for others). The physical difficulty referred to could be that P3 believed that this type of embroidery was physically demanding and that this is why men, not women made this work in medieval times. P3 is misinformed though because women did make Opus Anglicanum too. It is of note here that there exists a specifically masculine mythological status given to men in the production of Opus Anglicanum. This may not have been known by P3 during the 1980s because there has been considerably more research on this embroidery since then, and P3 may not be aware of this now either.  

P2 identifies with a time period to explain his choice of embroidery. He uses history as a reason and asserts his belonging in terms of a historic precedent. Here P2 does the opposite of P3 by saying that freedom came, for him, from a lack of precedent:

P2: I guess the fact of London, the 80's, the beginning of a gay political environment, an ‘outsider’ existence also encouraged working in a media not bound by rules and masculine precedents- despite the fact that historically men were the professional embroiderers.

147 Opus Anglicanum is the generic name for ecclesiastical embroidery produced in England between approximately 900-1500. It is most often worked on velvet and linen in silk and metal threads. It includes the use of jewels, pearls and beaten gold additions, usually worked in split stitch and couching.
In this section, it has been demonstrated that history was for some participants a reason. It is hard to say whether textiles directly inspired them, they had a belief about textiles that informed their choice, or maybe circumstance exposed them to a particular view of textiles that proved key in their choice to embroider. To conclude this section, it is interesting that circumstances figure highly in the answers give by the participants, and it seems clear that reason and circumstance are intertwined in their minds.

Making Embroidery

So far, two themes of reasons have been identified as being important: expectations and textile history. Both are person specific and complicated to unravel. The process of embroidering can be seen as complicated because it involves an ongoing generative movement: it is itinerant, improvisatory and rhythmic; it is a physical activity, one in which tension and accuracy match patience and dexterity. It is, I believe, a sensorial physical activity that involves the senses of touch, smell, hearing, taste and sight. This section explores reasons in which the participant practitioners, all of whom are embroiderers, talk about the physicality of making as a reason to choose stitch, including textile properties as diverse as colour and thread, sumptuousness of fabric and visual pleasure.

In the following two quotes from P3 he appears as unsure today as he was when he began in the 1960s about why he embroiders. His enthusiasm, once again demonstrated here by the use of capital letters and cavalier punctuation, can be read as a sense of euphoria, of him feeling unbound. He recalls being caught up in the vitality and enjoyment of the act of making embroidery. His zest for making is untempered by his inability to pin down the precise reasons for his taking up embroidery:
P3: I don’t know EXACTLY what made me stay...Even now, I'm not sure whether it was the FEEL of the texture of fabric and threads or was it the vast range of their VISUAL effects or the physical technique of STITCHING by machine and hand that I enjoyed? Probably all of it...

P3: The ' WHAT ' was an intense feeling that I had FOUND myself. The medium, in itself, had allowed me to be ME. I could say that it was the sumptuousness of the velvets and the silks, the sparkle of sequins and beads and the act of touching and feeling these substances. True indeed, but such sensory feelings touched ME beyond my eyes and fingertips. Nowadays, it is cool to say,’ a eureka ' or even ' cathartic ' moment!!!!!!!

For P3 being able to embroider appears to be a finding of oneself as an artist. This is important to him as a reason, and his directness indicates this. In these quotes P3 is questioning himself and the role of sensorial processes. His enthusiasm and the pleasure he derives from making are evident in his interview, and I would describe this as him identifying with stitch and finding the medium that, as he says, suits one’s character. But for him this goes beyond pure momentary sensorial pleasure, as it is a key event that he recalls. In some ways he believes the choice was made instinctively, and it remains difficult for him to express verbally. Unbridled joy is evident in P3’s comments and is evidenced by his text formatting, in the original email interview which emphasises how P3 found the medium revelatory. This highly personalised use of writing can be found in all the raw data given by P3 and that it has not been altered indicates the great gusto with which he participated in the interview process.

P6 found that he was able to work more freely in a textile workshop than any other when starting out in textiles. He recognises that circumstance was a factor that informed his decision to make textiles:
P6: I was very interested in working with colour but on my Foundation course there was no opportunity to specialize in painting. Looking back it was essentially a Craft and Design based course with no real provision for Fine Art, unless you wanted to make sculpture. I was always interested in working with my own ideas as opposed to working to a design brief and the only place where I could work freely with colour was in the Textile workshop.

P6 had limited options, so textiles offered him the opportunity to work without a design brief on his own ideas. P6 places equal emphasis on circumstance, freedom and the exposure to textile making facilities as reasons here. Colour is important too because he felt able to work more freely with it using textiles than had he chosen another medium. Another participant, P2, also arrived at textiles via a process of elimination combined with an attraction:

P2: I had come to textiles more as a process of elimination, rather than a positive decision, during my foundation year 82-83 I felt I had little attraction or ‘understanding’ of traditional fine art studies, nor fashion or graphics.

P2 talks of being attracted to textiles whilst he was not drawn towards other media. This idea was expressed earlier by P1, although he felt an attraction towards embroidery because it offered a creative freedom of expression. In this next quote from his interview, P2 recalls his first experiences with using textile as a medium, describing how he honed his choice by weeding out those methods that least attracted him. Through making with other techniques, P2 identified what was important to him and this directed his choice of specific techniques:
P2: First experiences in textiles were really on starting the degree course, and the introductory workshops- having defined the media of textiles appealed to me I was able to further identify which media- NOT knit/ weaving or felt.... texture and fabric was already important, Stitch and print seemed to be media I could use.

P2 offers a considered answer here and used the word ‘defined’. It can be said that experience enabled him to choose which textile methods to use, as he learned what best suited him.

Although P6 says that his tutor’s encouragement was a reason to choose embroidery, in the next quote he is just as definite about his sensory engagement with textiles as a medium:

P6: Over the years I have thought about what it was that drew me to work in that area and I think the two principle things were colour and the tutor.

P6: My first experiences of dyeing cloth, printing and transfer printing were exciting and the potential for these processes to act as vehicles for my ideas made me want to work in that area.

P6: Whilst I am very interested in painting, more so than Textiles, I think the need to physically make something and to engage with materials, whether paper or cloth would mean that the Textile workshop would still have won.

This is the second occasion on which P6 has made comparisons between textiles and fine art (previously he discussed a shifting hierarchy between them in terms of their influence on his art). Here he is definite and clear too: P6 wanted to work with textile
processes and aligns this with, in particular, how colour operates on cloth (textile pigment and dye differ from paint and canvas). It is an engagement with materials, the physicality of working with cloth that provided P6 with excitement and a reason for his choice. The physicality of making embroidery, working with its particular inherent physicality, is an important reason for this participant.

Under this theme, those cited recall textile making as a physical, sensorial experience that informed or directly provided them with a reason to choose art textiles.

**Therapeutic Motivation**

A therapeutic motivation is a reason that only one participant identifies. In the context of this sentence, ‘therapeutic’ here reads as personally absorbing in P5’s description. This can be aligned with P5’s lifestyle that is explored more fully in the next analysis theme of belonging. It would appear that P5 does not refer to needlework/embroidery as a healing activity as might be interpreted by the word ‘therapeutic’ but instead for him it is a freeing experience. P5’s reason to choose textiles is about a sense of freedom that textiles gave him:

> P5: I discovered that the craft itself was not only therapeutic but highly motivating and allowed my imagination to run riot.

Although P5 does not use the word ‘freedom’ it is a word that other participants use when they describe a reason with a similar emphasis on reasons that have enabled choice and allowed them the space in which to be fully absorbed by making.

**Belonging**

Turning now to the reasons given by the participants on the theme of belonging, they discuss belonging to a group, being an outsider or inside a community and indicate that this influenced their reasons. Within this theme inclusion and exclusion
dominate the discussion, but other aspects of belonging are discussed. Belonging and embroidery are linked in the next quote from P1. This quote chimes with how positive textile associations established in childhood continued into P1’s professional adult life with the idea of unity and belonging. Here P1 sets out the idea that art textiles as a practice united the genders in the timeframe he outlines, and this was a reason for him to choose it:

P1: The period you are focusing on is interesting for me as it almost bookends my time teaching at Goldsmith’s College, I began in 1977 and finished in 1989. The first part of that time span 1977-86 I found to be the most interesting, there was a tremendous energy within the Textiles Dept. at Goldsmiths and most importantly a pluralistic attitude towards work. We had students engaged with all forms of subject matter and there was no accepted creative route to follow. It’s worth remembering that when I began to work in textiles the fight for acceptance was both a male and female concern.

This fight that P1 names is one for recognition of textiles as a valid medium to make art from and about. Is this a reason or a factor that enabled him to choose to make art textiles? The topic of acceptance and textiles has been widely discussed by other researchers and theorists in relation to the feminization of craft and resurgence of stitched textiles as a means of expression for women artists. Here P1 raises the issue as a teacher and as an artist. Remembering this time positively, P1 talks of a variety of textile practices being produced and there was an energy at this time that fuelled his belonging. For P1 embroidery was a place where personal narratives could be explored whilst the case for textiles to be taken seriously as an art medium/source was being made. P1 recognises here that the attitude was a shared one, and that he felt that he belonged at Goldsmiths College in a textiles department that placed great emphasis on the medium as a fine art one.
P1 in his interview discusses why men are less evident post-1989 and presents us with a less positive outlook at the end of the decade in question. The reasons why he chose embroidery are not evident in those passages, so they are not discussed here but suggest an idea for additional research.

A point P4 raises is that he chose an embroidery course because he sought change precisely to be amongst women. He says that he was making a move away from a male dominated area of work (engineering) to join a different community. He believed higher education would provide him with an avenue to do this. Embroidery, for him, was a catalyst for change, a motivator, and he used embroidery to change his life. Being eligible for a free university maintenance grant enabled P4 to fulfil a new goal, and he used embroidery to do it:

P4: My background was working class, where education did not really matter, and I had set out on a career in engineering when Margaret Thatcher decimated industries throughout Scotland and the North. Education was one of the only ways to get money, so I chose art as I was quite good at drawing. A BTEC two-year foundation in Middlesbrough and then Goldsmiths where I chose the textile course as it was very free and allowed you to use mixed media more than fine art degrees around the country. Also the course was full of women, and I liked the change from the male dominated world of engineering.

P4 says he was good at art so this would be his tool for change, and also there would be a different group of co-workers. The notion of difference here is important; this is what P4 wanted and to be amongst different company was a way of achieving it. P4’s reason directly reflects here his circumstances and social changes much evidenced by social historians taking place in Britain during the 1980s. P4 refers to Margaret
Thatcher, Britain’s Prime Minister, and lays out the social circumstances of his previous life here for us as reasons for wanting change. P4 wanted to reconstruct his life but the simple reason to choose textiles is that he was, he says, ‘good at art’. The other factors although contributory can be classified here as circumstantial.

What we do not know is whether P4 knew that the ratio of female to male students and staff was higher at the course he chose at Goldsmiths’ College or in textiles education in general. However, as has been identified in the literature review, this information was readily available, so it is possible that he did. P4 is talking about finding a new place in which to belong. Money, gender and class all shaped this desire for change.

It was experiences found in an alternative community in 1960s California that brought P5 to Great Britain. He appears to be saying that he was seeking himself and remembers how practical aspects were his reasons to begin making with textiles:

P5: Interesting question you ask and I will give you an off the top of my head answer. I got involved with textiles in the late 60’s early 70’s probably before you where born. It was a time of great improvising of life styles. We were experimenting with living as cheaply and freely as possible and finding inspiration and comfort in gatherings listening to music and working on projects as a group. Portable textile projects like embroidery, beading, leather patching, knitting where very good projects for such a gathering.

For P5 textile craft is recalled as a social activity, one that provided him with the opportunity to express a lifestyle, with a place or space in which he felt he belonged as it also had for P1, P3 and P4. The benefits gained from making textiles, P5 is saying, tangibly enriched his sense of belonging in a group. He found it suited his
alternative lifestyle. Was this an actual reason for choosing it or a bonus once the choice was made is unclear, but although it is uncertain it is included. Similarly, in this next quote the interviewee says that the 80’s gay community enabled him to find and use his voice as an embroiderer, but we are unclear if this is a reason:

P2: I guess the fact of London, the 80’s, the beginning of a gay political environment, an ‘outsider’ existence also encouraged working in a media not bound by rules and masculine precedents- despite the fact that historically men were the professional embroiderers. I think I used textiles as a way of affirming this ‘difference’ I still do to an extent, although it is a media which I feel I am now effective in expressing myself, this was not yet the fact in 80-89.

P2 saw himself as on the margins but belonging to a community of outsiders. For him belonging is an asset and he identifies art textiles as an ‘outsider’ occupation. P2 links this to his politics and identity. It seems P2 perceives himself as an outsider because he is an embroiderer and that this occupation enables his status as an ‘outsider’. In his words it ‘affirms’ a difference that he welcomed. It could be that P2 also believed, like P1, that, because the medium was tagged as feminine and domestic, it presented him with an opportunity to explore gender and perceived expectations about masculinity. P2 could belong as an outsider because it offered him a freedom of expression and, whilst not conforming he could still fit in. He elaborates this reasoning further in the following quotation by suggesting that although not bound to break rules by choosing embroidery he was doing just that:

P2: Work that I made at college 83-86, saw the beginning of work that looked at ‘minority’ values, at the time opulence and excess, not from a socio-political critical view but more of a celebration of ‘guilty pleasures’ I
felt that working within textiles already an 'unexpected' media for a man, could be effective.

This is another reference to belonging. Being within a group or community and feeling able to express one's self could have made P2 more ‘effective’ as an artist although only he could say this is a reason and he does not do so in his interview.

In the 1980s in Britain, embroidery was still an alternative choice where the majority of makers were women. According to P1 in the 1980s embroidery was situated on the margins of art. P1 appears to have relished the outsider status he had as a male embroiderer when textiles and domestic crafts were being associated with feminist concerns and/or domesticity during this decade:

P1: If people had an issue with expressive textile work it was their problem not mine. I enjoy this outsider role, as I believe it gives an artist a creative freedom to work outside the mainstream.

P1 says that he is communicating as an outsider with a language particular to that status and himself: the language of textiles and his relationship to it as a man. P1 believes that art textiles in 1980s Britain was not regarded as male territory and of note here, is that he says this after telling us how welcome he felt within a community of textile artists most of whom statistically would be women. Like P2 he was, he says, enjoying employing his marginality as a male embroiderer to directly address his concerns but being different from the group into which he was welcomed is essential for this dynamic to operate. This is his belief and could have contributed to his using textiles. This is in stark contrast to P2, who identifies his belonging to a group composed of other ‘outsiders’, all of whom had the opportunity to express themselves freely by embroidering.
P3 recalls how his tutor in the 1960s not only gave reassurance to him that he was not an outsider, she actively invited him to feel that he was welcome:

P3: Along came Constance Howard or Mrs Parker, as we addressed her then, with amazing malachite green hair, and delivered an inspiring lecture with images accompanied with encouraging remarks for us fellows like, 'This was done by a coal miner'.\textsuperscript{149}

Important here is that during the 1960s there may have been less men training in embroidery and that P3 was a novelty for his tutor. However P3 appreciated this intervention that may have been given designed to reduce his isolation. It is a reason for him to feel welcome but it cannot be said how much it informed his choice.

P3 uses the term ‘female element’ when remembering how he did or did not belong in the field of embroidery. In his interview he wonders whether to be an exception as a man is what attracted him to the medium, and if it was a reason:

P3: But was there a 'female' element, associated with embroidery 'that drew me to the 'female' side of me? A question that has questioned me every now and then. (Not that it has been bothered me much in spite of silly remarks from men, who say, 'Fancy seeing.' And women, who say, 'It's good to see...a man behind a sewing machine').

This is included under the theme of belonging because P3 is questioning whether gender was influential in his decision. P3’s focus here is on whether he recalls a

\textsuperscript{149} Arguably the most influential British pioneer in textile design of her generation, artist, writer and teacher Constance Howard MBE (1910–2000) had a colossal impact on contemporary embroidery. She was dedicated to establishing an art world confidence in textile work during the second half of the last century. Her influence is significant on a micro level too because she would have interviewed many men for places on her textile courses. In refusing to let embroidery and textile design be seen as comparatively minor crafts, she ensured that they have become important artistic genres.
female aesthetic drawing him towards embroidery. He says that it was not. Others may not have expected P3 to embroider, and he recognises this, but it is not a reason for choosing to do so or not. The comment can also be discussed in terms of expectation but, because P3 identifies gender in terms of men being perceived as not belonging in this field, it is discussed here. P3 felt that he belonged and that these remarks could be dismissed. Masculinity is being raised by P3, and he refers to the behaviours, social roles, and relations of men within a given occupation as well as the meanings attributed to them. P3 raises the issue and dismisses it, embroidery as a gendered occupation was not a reason for him to make or not make using textiles.

An unanticipated finding was that one participant remembered his reason to engage with textiles as purely perfunctory. P7 says that he did not identify with art textiles or embroidery and that it definitely was not an active choice. He views the textile element as present but of less importance: textiles were something nominal, and the categorisation was unwelcome. This quote from P7 is his only answer to the research question/process:

P7: I've worked on a couple of responses but in all honesty I'm finding that the only 'textile' work I made in the 80's was that at Goldsmiths. As you remember the concept was my main concern and now that I see it from a (distant) viewpoint the use of textiles was a minor if not an annoying inclusion to my aim at the time. I think I was one of those who 'should have done a fine art course. I could go on about the use of material or the materiality which was certainly relevant but it feels untrue to raise that above the concepts I was working on. For my degree show the only textile I used was white poly-cotton sheeting which I projected photographs onto.
In the 1980s P7 did not identify with textiles even though the degree course he took was listed as Embroidered Textiles (subtitled as Fine Art Textiles) at Goldsmiths’ College. P7 says he did not align himself with embroidery or textiles and did not seek to belong. His reasons for using stitch and cloth were because they best suited the aims and content of this work so to this end, so he only belonged incidentally. P7 chose the materiality of textiles to execute his ideas with but says that he did not choose to be a textile artist or an embroiderer.

Belonging has been given as a reason to choose embroidery by three participants. Whether these participants cite a communal or familial connection, when as part of seeking a wider change (as in the instance of P4), it is used to assist in the forging of a new identity; belonging appears to be a potent reason. There are once again circumstantial or opportunistic elements to the participant choices but what sits at the core of the reasons under this theme are the participant’s perceptions of how they did or did not fit in. Not all of the participants chose embroidery in order to belong or found that they belonged in embroidery. For one participant it seems that other people thought that he did not belong in the field as a man and for another not belonging gave his work an unexpected edge. Actually, not belonging is the majority of content in this section and provides more reasons why the participants chose art textiles.

**Transgression**

This theme considers how transgression could be interpreted as a reason. Transgression is defined here as crossing a boundary of acceptable conduct, or exceeding a social limit.150 The participants reasons for using embroidery may be perceived as transgressive in relation to a social or occupational norm, possibly even as an attempt at patriarchal gain from a feminist perspective. The concept of textiles as a transgressive medium was found in the literature review but discussions were

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confined to women and artistic content, and what was termed the reappropriation or reclamation of textiles as craft. The theme in this analysis comes directly from this quote by P2 in which this participant uses the word transgression:

P2: The underlying attraction was as earlier said, the idea of transgression and confounding expectations of artistic practice, I used textile practices without the ‘normalisation’ of a fashion background, membership of the 80’s gay subculture and ‘stand up and be counted’ was re-enforced by my identity as an embroiderer.

The idea of transgression and confounding expectations is a reason for P2 to choose embroidery. P2 says that he believed he could harness the medium to express himself and, in addition, confounded others expectations. So for P2 his transgression is both in the choice of embroidery and that he wanted to use it to confront. Ones identity as an embroiderer here is tied to the idea of transgression, and it can thus be suggested that, by embroidering, P2 crossed a boundary of acceptable conduct and that his selection of embroidery enabled this.

Encouragement

The theme of encouragement is taken directly from quotes given as reasons by two participants: P3 and P6. Traditionally, encouragement is defined as words or behaviour that give someone confidence to do something, and this definition is affirmed by some participants directly and by others less overtly. Having defined what is meant by encouragement, I will now move on to discuss how it influenced the participants’ reasons.
In this section there is a very strong leaning towards the influence of Goldsmiths College throughout the interviews, and most of the participants taking part in this research did attend the art textiles course there either prior to or during the 1980s. It is for this reason that Goldsmiths’ is not reflected as one particular theme heading. In this 1983 article for *Crafts Magazine*, Sutton identifies Goldsmiths College and its embroidery course as a significant source of potential textile artists:

I see the only salvation of what remains of Britain’s fine-art textile reputation to come via Goldsmiths’ College Embroidery degree course. It is the only one where the fine-art approach is not tucked into a design course- Goldsmiths’ is uncompromising, and is producing artists. It remains to be seen whether these graduates will have the strength and support (currently both craft shops and galleries are wary) to be able to continue in the real world.\footnote{Sutton, A. (1980). Which Textile Course: A Personal Guide by Ann Sutton to Textile Design Courses in Britain. *Crafts Magazine*, Jan/Feb}

The nature of a candidate’s character and the ability for artists to thrive in the college environment is identified in this quote. Specific teachers are cited as encouraging several participants to work in the field of art textiles, and all the participants but P5 have a teaching or student connection to Goldsmiths’ College.

In the context of this study, the college plays a circumstantial role in the participants’ reasons mainly though. Both P3 and P6 name sources of encouragement as their tutors. P6 identifies one particularly encouraging tutor who, he says, fuelled his inquisitiveness, compared to others who did not, those he viewed as irritants:

P6: I think the two principle things were colour and the tutor.
P6: Also the tutor who ran that workshop was very inspiring. In the general studio I had to fend off two textile tutors who endlessly tried to get me to put beads and glittery threads over everything but down in the textile workshop I had a tutor who endlessly questioned what it was I wanted to do and always pushed me to consider what else I might do in order to develop ideas further. She endlessly encouraged experimentation with the phrase "great but what if" this has stood me in endless good stead over the years. At this stage I had no sense of a wider textile world and to some extent I wasn’t interested.

For P3 there were inspiring teachers who activated his interest:

P3: Along came Constance Howard or Mrs Parker, as we addressed her then, with amazing malachite green hair, and delivered an inspiring lecture with images accompanied with encouraging remarks for us fellows like, 'This was done by a coal miner' and 'It doesn't matter if you don't know any stitches, just make them up as you go along.' This was followed by an invitation to come into her domain and have a go whenever we wanted. Quite a lot of us did. But I stayed.¹⁵²

More regarding Howard as an encouraging influence comes from the same interviewee and this tutor was I surmise a reason for P3 to choose embroidery:

P3: Possibly it was the first time that tutors (after five years) were obviously impressed with what I was doing with this medium and were SAYING so... It was Mrs Parker, by whom we knew as CONSTANCE HOWARD then, who gave a stunning, inspiring, encouraging slide lecture
and, consequentially, many of us had ‘a go’. As you know, I stayed and have done so for 50 years. The ‘WHAT’ was an intense feeling that I had FOUND myself. The medium, in itself, had allowed me to be ME.

One reason to embroider was staff encouragement for the two men cited; they were being encouraged to be themselves artistically. The palpable joy P3 describes is contagious and the ‘having a go’ attitude he says remains with him. From P3 the use of capital letters to emphasis the word ‘ENCOURAGED’ and the tutor’s name denotes the value he places on this reason. P3 continues:

P3: At the same time Constance Howard and Eirian Short (then a 'stand -in' at this college for one term and still a part time lecturer at Goldsmiths and had taught me a few stitches in 1964), both suggested various 'avenues' to follow. I was still being ENCOURAGED. 153

P3 began using stitch in 1964, and here he recalls Goldsmiths College staff from that time as one of his reasons to keep embroidering into and beyond the 1980s:

P3: I mention these ENCOURAGEMENT factors because without them.........would I have entered [still embroidering] into the 1980's?

Goldsmiths College, where both Howard and Short taught, also receives acknowledgement from P6. P6 is referring to how the textile degree course ethos and positive reputations of the teaching staff drew him to apply to Goldsmiths when Audrey Walker, who helped to define art embroidery in Britain in the 1980s and is discussed in the literature review, led the course:

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153 Eirian Short (b.1924 Wales) is a renowned figure in the world of British embroidery as a lecturer – both at Goldsmiths College of Art and Hornsey College of Art and as an Author. She is a prolific maker of embroidered panels and specialises in dense hand stitchery.
P6: Knowledge of the Goldsmiths approach to textiles led me to studying there; it was there that I began to establish a visual and creative language using textile processes and media.

It can be said that the Goldsmiths’ approach to textiles was a reason to take up embroidery for both P3 and P6. Both participants who give encouragement as a reason to initially choose and remain with embroidery cite individual tutors and the colleges they attended. P3 had encouraging encounters with two high profile educationalist embroiderers and this unexpectedly led to his immersion in embroidery for the decades that follow. P6 was drawn to embroidery and textiles because of an encouraging tutor and then sought to join a particular course with an emphasis on similarly speculative inquiry first fostered at pre-degree level. Both men also recognise that this encouragement stayed with them and these encounters at formative stages in their careers have had long-term effects. P2 takes the theme of encouragement as a reason outside the college environment though:

P2: I guess the fact of London, the 80’s, the beginning of a gay political environment, an ‘outsider’ existence also encouraged working in a media not bound by rules and masculine precedents- despite the fact that historically men were the professional embroiderers.

For P2 being an outsider encouraged his choice, this was explored earlier too in terms of the sociopolitical groups that he aligned himself with. For P2 the wider

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154 The embroidery course at Goldsmiths College introduced students to current feminist theory and raised awareness of textiles as products of complex social relations according to publicity information. This was also seen as an essential aspect of the course because the textile school was within a University and critical essay writing was a compulsory element at that time. Inspired by newer waves of feminist theory by the 1980s, as has been discovered by the literature review, there was a renewed demand for the dissolution of medium-specific limitations that previously hemmed embroidery outside art. The University of London Goldsmiths College Information Sheet for B.A. Hons Textiles Course from 1987 said that students of the course were expected to acquire critical abilities and an awareness of the broader aesthetic and social context of textiles.
world outside college encouraged him to embroider, not because he was expected to embroider, quite the contrary in fact. However, he used events/issues that came to the fore for him during the 1980s to inspire him. On the question of encouragement, this study found that, whether inspired or driven by the encouragement of tutors or by political identity/events, this was a reason for P2, P3 and P6.

The 1980s

To conclude this analysis section, one participant provided data that identifies the 1980s itself as a reason for him choosing embroidery. That the research question particularly situated this inquiry on this decade means that the participants’ responses unsurprising frame their reasons around this decade. However, most participants refer to the period contextually and do not directly cite it as a concrete reason. Remembering that three other participants discussed formative influences first encountered in different decades (the 60s and 70s) it is important to register that, for P2, the 1980s did inform his decision to embroider/make art using textiles:

P2: I guess the fact of London, the 80’s, the beginning of a gay political environment, an ‘outsider’ existence also encouraged working in a media not bound by rules and masculine precedents- despite the fact that historically men were the professional embroiderers.

For P2 events outside the college experience during the 1980s are unravelled. P2 was inspired by wider events in the shape of a political movement; ‘outsider’ status gave him a reason to express himself through embroidery in 1980s Britain.

Summary
The fundamental goal of this research was to examine the participants’ testimonies in order to identify why some men chose to make art from textiles between 1980-89 in Britain. To re-cap: a group of men who were active as textile artists between 1980-89 in Britain were identified and seven of them were interviewed. The interviews consisted of up to three questions; the answers delivered seven key themes and consequent sub-themes that were then analysed. From the start of the project, the philosophical approach and practical methods centred on the belief that the researcher had an active role as an art practitioner to play in the research process. The research methods including the analysis were fashioned, as Harper Lee reminds us in her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), in order to understand a person by considering things from his point of view, by climbing into his skin and walking around in it.

Two key strengths of the present study were to ask open-ended questions and use email to do this. The participants were therefore able to answer in and write their own words, and their responses could, and did, include them listing influential circumstances. This is interesting because each participant used circumstance to situate their reasons and these were at the core of participant’s answers. This raises and answers some intriguing question regarding the nature of how, and to what extent, reasons to select an art medium are influenced by circumstance.

This study has found then explored seven men’s reasons and these are remembered experiences. The methodology successfully allowed space for the research participants to reflect on their memories, to digress and introduce related content. They have provided complex nuanced data, indeed this research has demonstrated better than anticipated how art practice can function as a cipher used to process reasons. Future work could focus on the role of time and memory in relation to this; similarly it could be interesting to compare experiences of male and female embroidererers within the same time frame and locale. Another area of study could be
how an artist’s initial reasons direct their long-term output. More research is also required to better understand the dialogic relationship between other particular art practices and the reasons for choosing them.

What can be summarised is that expectations held by others regarding men embroidering and the encouragement the participants received both proved to be powerful reasons for the participants. Another implication of this study is the possibility that the participants were generally pleased to accept outsider status and creatively utilised their odd choice of this particular medium. This observation may support the hypothesis that outsider status was seen as a bonus, something welcome that spurred them on, because it proved advantageous, rather than inhibiting the participants it prompted and directed them in several ways. In addition, it was found that, for some, a licence to transgress by embroidering in the first place enabled a freedom of expression, and this element has not previously been described in relation to art textiles. The present study therefore makes a noteworthy contribution to how outsider status and transgression was embraced by men working in this medium, and it supports the idea of the textile artist as outsider.

In this section, it has been explained that art textiles for the participants was chosen to, and did, deliver the opportunity to build personal narratives. According to the interview data, we can infer that, even when the participants perceived their reasons to be mediated by others, they still choose to use embroidery because it benefited them. It could conceivably be hypothesised that for this area to be moved forward, a wider understanding of the associations between an art medium and time/place/events needs to be developed. However these findings do help us to understand how an artist’s relationship to their chosen medium can be fuelled by a key educational figure or establishment and it can therefore be assumed that this would be a fruitful area for further work. Goldsmiths’ College and its Fine Art Textiles course could be a focus for such a study, as the analysis has demonstrated.
What can be drawn from this study are two things: first is that the participants remembered art textiles as an encounter, an opportunity or even a tinderbox, and secondly that the medium offered the participants a space in which they could determine their place in the world.

The analysis section has shown that embroidery as art textiles when recalled by the participants, was a device with which to map their encounters. Also by virtue of their choice to use this medium they were operating at the margins of textile culture in 1980s Britain and their reasons are determinants that readily bear the traces of the negotiations and circumstances that they experienced back in 1980s Britain.
6. Conclusion

This is the first time that art practice has been used to explore reasons to choose textiles, and it extends the knowledge of how artists select an art medium. It also demonstrates how another artist can contribute to unravelling a phenomena by using their own art practice to process data. Confined to examining Britain in the 1980s, this study concentrated on a short period of time but other studies could apply the methods more widely and/or differently. Another time and/or a different art practice could be investigated and another demographic selected then researched using parallel combinations of methods because the ones used here have demonstrated that such a marriage is robust enough.

I initially feared that a limitation of this study could be the small number of participants taking part; in terms of the scope of the findings, this has not proven to be the case as the seven cases in this study still managed to indicate an unexpected breadth of reasons. The data suggests that broader influential issues or events can underlie a participant’s reasons and that the small number of participants did not restrict the findings. This, I believe, was the case because the research framed the participants as the research subjects, rather than the objects of a study and this was central to them providing candid complex reasons when answering the research question.

The research methods have implications for art practice as a field of knowledge in terms of process and not only as an outcome, that is to say art practice does not have to be the final or finished product in research but as demonstrated here can function instead as a tool to process data. Indeed, the art practice operates in this study as a catalyst only; it enabled the researcher to understand the phenomena. The research model put into practice thinking through making (the process of transcognitivity) and used active documentation methods to record the art process.
This research as a study of creative individuals explored the participants’ reasons through art practice and has progressed understanding.

This study took the conceptual position that the participants’ reasons to take up art textiles were complex collages of motivation and circumstance and the findings demonstrate this. The interviewees elected to do what women in earlier times were expected to, or they have resumed what men professionally did before in history but each participant was led by an idiosyncratic combination of narrative elements. What I thought I knew about their reasons has been made new and less familiar by their testimonies. Had I been expecting to hear an angry polyphony of voices laying claim to art textiles as men’s turf I would be disappointed. Instead the participants talked more of finding art textiles to be a shared, welcoming and bountiful territory.

Prior to beginning this study I believed that art practice and particularly art textiles was a place of suspended agency, one that often kidnapped me away from teaching and writing. I now recognise that by allowing my art practice to capture the complexities of cognitive processes I have established a productive revised working art practice integral to my research interests and methods. Making has become more enlivened and reflexive, and it now offers me a more useful space in which I can determine my world with greater awareness.

Pleasingly, my position as an embroiderer researching other embroiderers has not resulted in the lurid colouring-in of the participants’ reasons. Although I did feel kidnapped by them sometimes I have not ventriloquized the participants and using artwork helped enormously in preventing this because it enabled three useful and practical things:

- I always had a bookmark to use throughout the research journey and its rolling findings
• It stopped me over-thinking the research process
• It gave me a space in which I could be reflexive and responsive to the research material without using words

In her reflections on making *Making Things, Practicing Emptiness*, theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick sets out why making art means asking questions. Using art practice in this study was a personal risk because, as I have said, I was asking my art practice to do an unfamiliar task: I wanted it to ask questions of data that did not belong to me. The process taught me how to think and not to concentrate on making the finished article. It can thus be suggested that within this research the making became a conversation between researcher and material. Sedgwick beautifully explains this idea in practical terms when she suggests that making can ground an artist in reality:

I feel this wonderfully in my material practice, with the ways that paper, fabric, thread, and other supplies press back so reliably, so palpably, against my efforts to shape them according to models I’ve conceived. In these circumstances perfectionism, for me, would make no sense at all, and the disturbing fantasy of omnipotence has no opportunity to arise. Instead, there are second-by-second negotiations with the material properties of whatever I’m working on, and the questions “What will it let me do?” and “What does it want to do?” are in constant three-way conversation with “What is it that I want to do?” So in my art there is no shortage of instances where mastery of the material world is pretty inconceivable and traces of negotiations with the middle ranges of agency are visible to a marked extent. It feels wonderful to exist and to be active in a space of suspended agency. But it’s also true that the techniques that I’m attracted to are the ones where, even when they are done competently, or even most beautifully, the will of the artist is only one
determinant of the art that emerges – and often not the most important determinant.\textsuperscript{155}

The research methods gave me a way to concentrate on the participants’ reality, with the interviews and the negotiations in the art practice fuelling the research mechanisms. The will of the researcher is simply one ‘determinant’ and not the dominant one either, thanks to the art practice. Like the participants who never make claims beyond their experiences it was important that I always prioritised the participants’ reasons as they were given: highly individual and fully contextualised.

The reasons established in this research capture the zeitgeist of Britain in the 1980s and the participants’ circumstances press back against any efforts to shape the results according to any preconceived models. The participants’ reasons belong to them, and I hope that this study remains exact enough for them to still claim their words. I am aware that it is a tailored heap of elements but I hope that it is honest and realistic in its outcomes.

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8. Appendix 1

Participant Interview P1

Research Question 1:
Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?

Participant Response:
Why was I working with textiles? Historically textiles were in my blood, I’d interacted with textiles since I was very young and my maternal Grandmother was an industrial weaver, as were all her family. As a small child I’d ask my Grandmother to teach me how to sew and knit, I literally played with fabric as her house was always full of cloth. The importance of this in retrospect is that I never thought of textiles as being a solely female area of expression.

At Foundation, as I prepared my folio, I instinctively interpreted ideas in machine embroidery, tapestry and fabric collage. My intention was to study Fine Art but the prejudice I experienced because of my use of textiles necessitated a re-think. I decided to study embroidery in 1972, retrospectively a brave choice as I was the only man throughout my degree. Embroidery seemed to me to be like painting in 1910 ready for innovation, I viewed stitch essentially as a form of 3 dimensional drawing. Embroidery, unlike weave or print, didn’t really have a functional outcome, there was an air of uncertainty as to what exactly embroidery was in the 20th century.

Professionally I began to exhibit in 1977 after I finished my MA, by 1982 I’d been showing work internationally for 3 years. Early work focused on a deconstruction and
re-invention of stitch, I developed a way of working that allowed me to work in 3-dimensions. Unhappy with traditional cloth supports I started to work with wooden grids as a ground instead of fabric. The primary compositional influence would have been minimalist music, particularly the work of Steve Reich, Terry Riley and Philip Glass. I saw a parallel between their metronomic pulses of sound and the overlaid thread rhythms that I’d work into the grids. Comparative structure was another interest; the connection between micro and macro structures all of which centered on a desire to build almost ambient reflective surfaces within which the viewer could drift.

Around 1984 I became increasingly aware of historical textiles as a source of inspiration for a contemporary artist. To an extent this interest was prompted by the pejorative use of the words *decorative* or *patterned* during Goldsmith’s College Fine Art and Textile shared critiques of student’s work. I began to ask myself why basic foundation stones of my practice were being used in such a critical context. From that point onwards I increasingly reference historical textiles, prior to that moment I’d been interested in textile materials and process but had largely drawn my ideas from the Fine Art world. Pattern was the first area I seriously looked at during the mid 80’s and by 1989 I was also studying lace. The influence of both of these areas is clearly evident, particularly in works like *Slow Turning*.

This interest in researching historical material continues to this day. Working with pattern, carpets and lace in the 80’s was deeply unfashionable; it therefore made me extremely independent and answerable to no one. If people had an issue with expressive textile work it was their problem not mine. I enjoy this outsider role as I believe it gives an artist a creative freedom to work outside the mainstream.

My work is interdisciplinary in approach; it’s a fusion of ideas and material processes. It’s rare to this day that I conceive of a work that doesn’t have a subliminal connection to textiles. This could just as easily be use or adaption of a technique or a
reference to textiles history. It’s also important to say that I felt like a pioneer in the mid 70’s, everything I did felt new and exciting. During this period people like myself who had a desire to make expressive one-off statements with historically functional materials infiltrated traditional applied arts areas. You can see not dissimilar enquiries in jewellery, glass and ceramics.

The period you are focusing on is interesting for me as it almost bookends my time teaching at Goldsmith’s College, I began in 1977 and finished in 1989. The first part of that time span 1977-86 I found to be the most interesting, there was a tremendous energy within the Textiles Dept at Goldsmiths and most importantly a pluralistic attitude towards work. We had students engaged with all forms of subject matter and there was no accepted creative route to follow. It’s worth remembering that when I began to work in textiles the fight for acceptance was both a male and female concern. The women in textiles seem happy and pleased to have another differing point of view. An obvious example would be that I personally never viewed textiles as domestic, my concerns and interests were different and I think people responded to that very positively.

During the 1980’s you see the increasing influence of *The Subversive Stitch* exhibition and the book *Old Mistresses* on textile courses, from that point onwards men in textiles almost become part of the problem. There was an increasing sense that we didn’t belong or that any success we had was simply down to the fact that we were men, all of which I find revisionist and frankly sexist. The importance of this ideology is that it essentially became self-fulfilling in curtailing the amount of male students applying for textile courses, which were now viewed as intrinsically female. I mention this because it’s another good reason, why men are less evident post 1989.

**Research Questions 2 and 3:**

1. What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?
2. Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice during the 1980's, if so what do you attribute this to?

Participants Response:
A single response was sent following research questions 2 and 3 which was delivered in an email above.

Participant Interview P2
Research Question 1:
Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?

Participants Response:
I had come to textiles more as a process of elimination, rather than a positive decision, during my foundation year 82-83 I felt I had little attraction or 'understanding' of traditional fine art studies, nor fashion or graphics. Knowledge of the Goldsmiths approach to textiles led me to studying there. It was there that I
began to establish a visual and creative language using textile processes and media. Really the years you are studying are the formative years of my practice, both in my final degree show, print based looking at ideas of luxury, opulence and sensuality, and the beginning of my practice in more commercial embroidery within fashion/theatre and advertising.

I feel with hindsight that the main reasons for working with textiles was the lack of ‘expectations’ or preconceived outcomes, as a man in textiles it felt like the territory was open to occupy, the existing arguments about gender and textiles were much more firmly biased towards feminine women’s art/craft (the subversive stitch et al). I guess the fact of London, the 80’s, the beginning of a gay political environment, an ‘outsider’ existence also encouraged working in a media not bound by rules and masculine precedents- despite the fact that historically men were the professional embroiderers. I think I used textiles as a way of affirming this ‘difference’ I still do to an extent, although it is a media which I feel I am now effective in expressing myself, this was not yet the fact in 80-89.

Work that I made at college 83-86, saw the beginning of work that looked at ‘minority’ values, at the time opulence and excess, not from a socio-political critical view but more of a celebration of ‘guilty pleasures’ I felt that working within textiles already an ‘unexpected’ media for a man, could be effective, also a majority of the research and inspirations were from male proponents and consumers of luxury.

Research Questions 2 and 3:
2. What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?
3. Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice during the 1980’s, if so what do you attribute this to?

Participant Response:
2. First experiences in textiles were really on starting the degree course, and the introductory workshops- having defined the media of textiles appealed to me I was able to further identify which media- NOT knit/ weaving or felt…. texture and fabric
was already important, Stitch and print seemed to be media I could use.
The period of 83/86 was really an exploratory period of the media, actually working
with textiles started in 1986/7 when I started as a professional embroiderer, learning
on the job........
I do not have a family background within art, no learning at granny’s knee, or with
my mother....... I think the attraction was the transgression of norms, nothing to live
up to if there is no family precedence....

3. Professionally I changed from screen print practice, long lengths and panels to
small hand embroidery, also working practice changed from personal inspiration and
motivation- notions of desire, luxury and craft...... to client based requirements,
budgetary, fashion led and using others initial ideas (fashion required new ideas each
season) with no real continuum except that of increasing technical knowledge and
deepening awareness of historical precedence.

My practice was as a profession and was led by examples drawn from the Victoria
and Albert Museum, fashion exhibits, Indian / Middle Eastern Galleries and textile
sample rooms. Schiaparelli, 17th century French court embroidery, early work of
Lesage.....

I would look at the period of the 80’s as my discovery and understanding period of
the textile media, which has enabled me to continue to explore and develop my uses
of stitch.

The underlying attraction was as earlier said, the idea of transgression and
confounding expectations of artistic practice, I used textile practices without the
‘normalisation’ of a fashion background, membership of the 80’s gay subculture and
‘stand up and be counted’ was re-enforced by my identity as an embroiderer.
Participant Interview P3

Research Question 1:

Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?

Participant Response

As you may know, I discovered textile art in October 1964, while studying to become an art teacher on the ATC (Art Teacher’s Certificate) course at Goldsmiths. We were expected to ‘have a go’ at all disciplines, because, as art teachers in secondary schools, we would be probably be expected to be able to teach EVERYTHING to do with art and craft. Along came Constance Howard or Mrs. Parker, as we addressed her then, with amazing malachite green hair, and delivered an inspiring lecture with images accompanied with encouraging remarks for us fellows like, ‘This was done by a cole miner.’ and ‘It doesn’t matter if you don’t know any stitches, just make them up as you go along.’ This was followed by an invitation to come into her domain and have a go whenever we wanted. Quite a lot of us did. But I stayed.

I don’t know EXACTLY what made me stay........Even now, I’m not sure whether it was the FEEL of the texture of fabric and threads or was it the vast range of their VISUAL effects or the physical technique of STITCHING by machine and hand that I enjoyed?

Probably all of it ....... But was there a ‘female’ element, associated with ‘embroidery’ ‘that drew me to the ‘female’ side of me? A question that has questioned me every now and then. (Not that it has been bothered me much in spite of silly remarks from men, who say, ‘Fancy seeing.......’ and women, who say, ‘It’s good to see.......a man behind a sewing machine.’ )..........................As you and I know, historically, only blokes
did the embroidery for those fabulous OPUS ANGLOCANUM masterpieces, because it was physically difficult....So, gender issues, are not possibly part of the reason........

Possibly it was the first time that tutors (after five years ) were obviously impressed with what I was doing with this medium and were SAYING so.

So, not only was I enjoying it for it’s own sake, but, for the first time I was being really encouraged.

Another encouragement, to keep me going, was an advertisement in the Times Educational Supplement for a ' General Art Teacher with an interest in ' Applique Work '. I applied, got the job in a Comprehensive School with 2,000 children. I, therefore, needed to continue ' learning ' / ' doing my work ' in order to be one year ahead of my pupils.

( I might say, this was a three years of a' baptism by fire ', but it made me ' grow up '.)

In 1968 I secured a lecturing position in a college of education mainly for my first discipline painting. However, because I consider both disciplines ( however different in technique ) are both forms of artistic expression, I gradually included textile art in my ' curriculum ', luckily with the blessing of my head of department.

At the same time Constance Howard and Eirian Short ( then a ' stand - in ' at this college for one term and still a part time lecturer at Goldsmiths and had taught me a few stitches in 1964), both suggested various ' avenues ' to follow. I was still being ENCOURAGED

I mention these ENCOuRAGEMENT factors because without them.........would I have entered into the 1980's ?
There I am..... in the 1980’s a member of the exhibiting ' 62 Group ' of embroiderers, being invited by branches of the Embroiderers' Guild to run courses, getting commissions, having several one-man ( or should I say ' one-person ' shows these days ? ) and even resigning my full-time lecturing post , ( that had risen to Head of Art at the same college, together with all the stress of bureaucracy that came with it, ). To become ' self-employed ' in 1985. In 1989 I held a small , but highly successful celebration of being 25 years in embroidery at the HQ of the Embroiderers' Guild at Hampton Court Palace.

Thence........I've written 7 books on Embroidery, Design and Drawing.........All out of print now........ but continue to paint, collage and stitch pictures of subjects that give me pleasure........and, I hope, give to others.

Call me limited within my field, you are correct!   My work does not hit the Head-Lines of Craft Magazines.
I continue with what I have started. I have begun to integrate paint with collage and stitch as well as keeping the various disciplines discreet and individual. All forms have their own character. I don't change anything in order to be ' different ', as so often asked. I just hope to get better with what I already do.

Research Questions 2 and 3:
2. What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?
3. Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice during the 1980’s, if so what do you attribute this to?

Participant Response
2. My first experiences of working in textiles were in October 1964, ' WHEN ' embarking on the ATC course at Goldsmiths School of Art. As budding art teachers
we were expected to be BRILLIANT at all forms of art, so it was arranged that the heads of all departments gave either lectures or demonstrations of their particular fields. It was Mrs. Parker, by whom we knew as CONSTANCE HOWARD then, who gave a stunning, inspiring, encouraging slide lecture and, consequentially, many of us had 'a go'. As you know, I stayed and have done so for 50 years. The 'WHAT' was an intense feeling that I had FOUND myself. The medium, in itself, had allowed me to be ME. I could say that it was the sumptuousness of the velvets and the silks, the sparkle of sequins and beads and the act of touching and feeling these substances. True indeed, but such sensory feelings touched ME beyond my eyes and finger-tips. Nowadays, it is cool to say, 'an eureka' or even 'cathartic' moment !!!!!!! (although a very glamorous girl who wears fish-net tights, flowery blouses, vastly short skirts in a textile shop in Monmouth, near us here, all of 15/16 going on 25 tells me 'cool' has been supplanted by 'SOUND' !!!!! )

So, in short, the 'WHAT' was a SOUND experience !!!!

3. No changes, only developments.......like getting better (!)...........The change from formalised figurative images of the early '70s to more 'Impressionistic' style by which I represent my images now was a result of returning to painting in 1976, having 'left' it for about 12 years. Embroidering took a 'back seat' for a year. I then 'missed it' and wondered if I could re-form oil paintings into my 'SOUND EXPERIENCE' of textiles............The rest you know.
Participant Interview P4

Research Question 1:
Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?

Participant Response:
Like you I went to Goldsmiths from 84-87 on the textiles/embroidery course.
My background was working class, where education did not really matter, and I had set out on a career in engineering when Margaret Thatcher decimated industries throughout Scotland and the North.

Education was one of the only ways to get money, so I chose art as I was quite good at drawing. A BTEC two year foundation in Middlesborough and then Goldsmiths where I chose the textile course as it was very free and allowed you to use mixed media more than fine art degrees around the country. Also the course was full of women, and I liked the change from the male dominated world of engineering.

While at Goldsmiths the work I produced was very introspective and personal with hidden meanings and symbols.

Using hand dyed cloth with machine embroidery.

After college I produced work for competitions for about two years, but nothing much came of it, and I went back to engineering to earn a living. Then I taught on a pre degree course and started making again and am now exhibiting and selling.

**Research Questions 2 and 3:**

2. What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?

3. Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice during the 1980’s, if so what do you attribute this to?

**Participant Response:**

2. My first experiences of working with textiles was in my foundation course and a workshop on screen printing.

3. My work did change in the 80’s, but I would like to think developed. The main change was from a personal approach to a more political one.

Coming from male dominated background in engineering to one with a lot more women, my eyes were opened to feminism and the working class struggle. I tried to bring this to my work subtlety.
Participant Interview P5

Research question:
Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?

Research Response
Interesting question you ask and I will give you an off the top of my head answer. I got involved with textiles in the late 60's early 70's probably before you where born. It was a time of great improvising of life styles. We were experimenting with living as cheaply and freely as possible and finding inspiration and comfort in gatherings listening to music and working on projects as a group. Portable textile projects like embroidery, beading, leather patching, knitting where very good projects for such a gathering. And while doing this starting with knitting going onto needlepoint, I discovered that the craft itself was not only therapeutic but highly motivating and allowed my imagination to run riot. My painting career seemed much more laborious by comparison and so I cultivated textiles as a way of exploring colour idea's.

Research Questions 2 and 3
1. What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?
2. Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice during the 1980's, if so what do you attribute this to?

No Response
Participant Interview P6

Research Question 1:
Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?

Participant Response:
I studied textiles at Goldsmiths from 1984-87 working in a number of different ways that included drawing, making sculpture with straw and also fabric collage. After leaving Goldsmiths I worked for a year or so making large sculptures using underlay felt but then stopped working with textiles and concentrated on making and exhibiting work on paper, which I did until 2000 when I started to work with textiles again.

I started to work with Textiles on my Foundation course. I did a two year diploma and it was in the second year that I began to work more in the textile workshop. Over the years I have thought about what it was that drew me to work in that area and I think the two principle things were colour and the tutor. I was very interested in working with colour but on my Foundation course there was no opportunity to specialize in painting. Looking back it was essentially a Craft and Design based course with no real provision for Fine Art, unless you wanted to make sculpture. I was always interested in working with my own ideas as opposed to working
to a design brief and the only place where I could work freely with colour was in the Textile workshop. My first experiences of dyeing cloth, printing and transfer printing were exciting and the potential for these processes to act as vehicles for my ideas made me want to work in that area. Also the tutor who ran that workshop was very inspiring. In the general studio I had to fend off two textile tutors who endlessly tried to get me to put beads and glittery threads over everything but down in the textile workshop I had a tutor who endlessly questioned what it was I wanted to do and always pushed me to consider what else I might do in order to develop ideas further. She endlessly encouraged experimentation with the phrase "great but what if" this has stood me in endless good stead over the years. At this stage I had no sense of a wider textile world and to some extent I wasn't interested.

The reason I chose Goldsmiths was because I knew that I would be allowed to just get on with the things I wanted to do. I looked at many courses throughout the country but they all seemed too focused on Design and be project lead. Over the years I have often wondered what would have happened if there had been a painting department on my foundation course. I don't know whether I would have gravitated towards it given the opportunity or whether Textiles would still have won out. Whilst I am very interested in painting, more so than Textiles, I think the need to physically make something and to engage with materials, whether paper or cloth would mean that the Textile workshop would still have won.

After graduating and working for a year or so with constructing felt pieces in conjunction with drawing I stopped working with Textiles
and chose instead to concentrate on making drawings and collage. I did this for eight years or so, apart from an attempt to work as a freelance commercial Textile designer which was a mistake and a financial disaster, but had the effect of reminding me why I went to Goldsmiths in the first place. It was only after moving out of London and starting to make new work after a break of two years that I began to feel the need to translate these drawings into cloth. Interestingly it was coming across a number of African Textiles and having the opportunity to buy them that got me started again. They were the kind of Textiles that I had never seen before and of which I was unaware. The Textiles that seemed to be held up at Goldsmiths as examples to admire always seemed to be Indian or involved a lot of careful embroidery work. The Textiles that I love are in a way the antithesis of that.

Research Questions 2 and 3:
2. What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?
3. Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice during the 1980’s, if so what do you attribute this to?

A single response was sent in the email above to all three questions
Participant Interview P7

Research Question 1:
Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?

Participant Response:
I've worked on a couple of responses but in all honesty I'm finding that the only 'textile' work I made in the 80's was that at Goldsmiths. As you remember the concept was my main concern and now that I see it from a (distant) viewpoint the use of textiles was a minor if not an annoying inclusion to my aim at the time. I think I
was one of those who 'should have done a fine art course. I could go on about the
use of material or the
materiality which was certainly relevant but it feels untrue to raise that
above the concepts I was working on. For my degree show the only textile I
used was white poly-cotton sheeting which I projected photographs onto. Hope
that's not a disappointment, I'm sure you'll have a fabulous response from
the other contributors and thank you for asking me.

Research Questions 2 and 3 were not sent

9. Appendix 2

Email Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear....
I hope this e-mail finds you well - and that you don't mind me contacting you out of the blue like this. My apologies should this request be unwelcome, please just ignore it should this be the case.

I am undertaking doctoral research at the University of Brighton and am writing to ask if you could answer, via email, a question on your art practice. I trained at Goldsmiths College in the 1980s and later did an MA at the Royal College of Art. I work as an embroiderer and lecturer. My working thesis title is *Men's Art Embroidery in 1980s Britain: a study of textile art practices*.

My practice-based research explores the reasons why men made art textiles in Britain between 1980-89 when there was a surge of interest in the medium and they became more visible as makers. All the participants in the research have been identified from online records of graduates or from published writings, exhibition reviews or press cuttings of the decade. The question, if you would participate, is simply: *Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?*

The research findings will be submitted as a thesis for examination and will be held by The University of Brighton, I have attached a consent form to fill in and return by email with your answer to the question should you wish to join in.

Yours sincerely
Gavin Fry
Second and Third Questions sent to Participants

1. What and when were your first experiences of working in textiles?
2. Did you find that there was a change in your textiles practice during the 1980’s and if so to what do you attribute this?
10. Appendix 3

Research Participant Consent Form

N.B this is the form sent to all participants who agreed to take part in the research but because anonymity was requested completed forms cannot be included here.

Between 1980–89 in Britain men became more visible as makers of textile art, why were you working with textiles and what were they about?

☐ I agree to take part in this research investigating what encouraged men to take up textile art in Britain 1980-89

☐ The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the study.

☐ I am aware that I will be required to answer questions in writing.

☐ I give consent for photographs of my work to be used in this project.

☐ I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else.

☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw from the investigation at any time.

Name (please print)
Signed........................................................................................................................................
Date..............................................................................................................................................

Researcher: Gavin Fry MPhil Historical & Critical Studies, School of Humanities
University of Brighton

University of Brighton Consent Form Prototype (2011 Version)

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON
Participant Consent Form

[Title of Protocol]

☐ I agree to take part in this research which is [insert subject of protocol]

☐ The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the study and the possible risks involved.

☐ I have had the principles and the procedure explained to me and I have also read the information sheet. I understand the principles and procedures fully.

☐ I am aware that I will be required to [answer questions, give a sample of blood etc].

☐ I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.

☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw from the investigation at any time.
Name (please print)

Signed............................................................................................................................

Date...............................................................................................................................