

tacti|c|le:
the everyday politics of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle

by
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Canada

for my grandmother, who likes ladybugs
and has a wit to beat all heck

Abstract

This thesis examines the practices of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle, a group that uses the public performance and personal practice of crafting to counter corporate-globalization while knitting self-determined communities of mutual support. Conspicuously combining two familiar and conventionally opposed roles, those of knitter and protester, the group performs an accessible and eloquent parody, forcing audiences to re-evaluate their own commonsensical understandings of each. By utilizing nostalgia as a tactic, the group signals already established notions of knitting and knitters as comforting, gentle and welcoming. In so doing, it compels audiences to remain thoughtful of its message while cloaking its actions in a perceived benign activity as a way to protect participants from unwanted retaliation. I examine the group's modes of gathering, in which participants hand-work textiles, as a means to foster what I term haptic spaces. In these spaces, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle refigures alternatives, differently organizing, teaching and learning resistance as a way to prefigure alternative models of citizenship. Further, I argue that experiences remain as a residue within the body of each participant, creating the potential for these spaces to be affective beyond the temporary site of the group meeting. I conclude by reading the actions of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle through knitted fabric, suggesting that these practices are able to unravel and loosen space, thereby empowering individuals by increasing available options. As a way to destabilize the everyday hierarchical ordering of information while uncovering often overlooked data, I access my personal experiences with, and participation in, various Revolutionary Knitting Circles, interviews with former and current participants, current weblogs, zines and online forum groups, and place these along side scholarly studies by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Laura Marks, James Scott and Hakim Bey.

Acknowledgements

I remember my grandmother sitting in the rocking chair, two of her digits holding a needle and thread and another wearing a thimble. I remember her hemming pant legs, stitching up torn seams and repairing broken zippers. Mending, instead of throwing away and buying new, has always been my family's unquestioned answer to damaged clothing.

These memories hold perhaps my first, and most ingrained lesson against corporate-globalization, and as such, these memories have created the base upon which this thesis is built. This thesis has been an exercise in learning through social interactions. Many since have had an equally important impact on me, and thus on the thesis. I would like to begin by acknowledging a number of the people who have inspired and supported this project.

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I can chart my level of stress by how well my jaw opens and shuts. There have been moments, when I thought I had dislocated it forever; however, these were only moments, their duration shortened by the support of my family and friends. I am deeply indebted to you all. You are not only the inspiration for this project, but the backbone of it. Thank you.

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List of Abbreviations

9/11.....	11 September 2001, World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorism attacks
APOC.....	Anarchist People of Color
CAD.....	Canadian Dollar
CASA.....	<i>le Comité d'Accueil du Sommet des Ameriques</i> (The Québec city-based Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee)
CLAC.....	<i>Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes</i> (Anti-Capitalist Convergence)
CPA.....	Confrontational Protest Activity
DIST.....	Deconstructionist Institute for Surreal Topology
DIY.....	Do It Yourself
FTAA.....	Free Trade Area of the Americas
G8.....	Group of Eight
IMF.....	International Monetary Fund
NCPA.....	Non-Confrontational Protest Activity
NGO.....	Non-Governmental Organization
OSP.....	Official Summit Portraits
PAZ.....	Permanent Autonomous Zone
PIRG.....	Public Interest Research Group
TAZ.....	Temporary Autonomous Zone
TNC.....	Trans-National Corporation

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Preface

tacti|c|le: in defense of a word

Tacti|c|le is yet another in a series of hyper-textual words to come out of academia, specifically, out of craft theory. Already within its short life it has been mispronounced, misinterpreted, stumbled over, discounted. As I write, it is forever underlined in red on my computer screen; it is not recognized or accepted by my word-processing program. It is not correct. In defence of it, let me begin by loosely situating it as a response to another word arising out of the intersections of language and craft theory. Text/ile, used with much success in feminist studies of quilts, largely informed by the work of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, examines textiles as texts, reworking blankets as remnants attesting to a recoverable history of women. Disembarking from this translation of the material into the immaterial, and the focus on completed objects, I choose to situate my study of textiles within an embodied and resistive process. Intersecting the tactile with the tactical, I seek to evoke the small, incremental, and intensely material gestures that the Revolutionary Knitting Circle enacts.

The dropping in of the letter 'c' contaminates easy reading, and signals various incarnations of the word tactic or tactical, ranging from the revisionist to the revolutionary. Tacti|c|le is itself a poetic word. I suppose that I have intentionally made it difficult to read because through it I seek to embody the immaterial.

Chapter One knitting an everyday revolution

loose threads

There's a story told about a peace group who spent a day knitting at the corners of a big city intersection. At the height of rush-hour, the knitters worked their magic – casting a giant knitted net over the intersection, halting the automotive traffic – to protect that space for the community.

Revolutionary Knitting Circle 2002

I learned to knit on a pair of ballpoint pens. I received instruction from a friend I ran into at the library; it was a quick operation. People say I took to it easily. I think I took to it desperately. I am a burnt-out activist, or rather I *was* a burnt-out activist. Protesting, organizing, occupying, marching – these are all strains on both the material and non-material body. I cannot remember exactly what or when it happened, but at some point, I decided to stop physically participating in protests. I was burnt-out. Perhaps it was more a mounting pile of excuses delivered to my activist friends in guilty self-reflection than it was a solid decision. I still believed in direct action, but could not bring myself to participate in it. What I had failed to realize was that other activist friends of mine were feeling the same way. We all separately retreated to our rooms and did whatever we did. We read magazines, we surfed the Internet, we watched movies. On one of her travels through (sub)pop-culture media, my friend Tanja Radakovic discovered the Revolutionary Knitting Circle's website. She made a zine and word spread quickly that there was to be an inaugural yet casual meeting at her house. It was not so much that I wanted to be involved in the group as much as I needed to be.¹

¹ A zine is an independent magazine, home made with materials accessible to almost anyone (see Duncombe 2004).

Attendants at the meeting discovered that the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s),² originally begun in Calgary by Grant Neufeld in 2000, is an activist group that regularly gathers to knit and chat as a way to strengthen the skills necessary to sustain and build locally sufficient communities (Neufeld 2002).³ Many groups have since formed, dissolved, or mutated. Their commonality resides within the combination of crafting and activism. This thesis examines the multiple incarnations of, and actions taken by, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s), a group that sees crafting collectively as a way to build community and local subsistence while opposing corporate globalization. By positioning skill sharing as a social *and* resistant activity, this group is able to activate activist energy both in and through the sustainable environment of the safer space. Theirs is a different kind of direct action, one that rejects “a politics which appeals to governments to modify their behaviour, in favour of physical intervention against state power in a form that itself prefigures an alternative” (Graeber 2002, 62; quoted in Day 2005, 19).

post-revolutionaries

The hollowed-out effigy of the Absolute State finally toppled in 1989.

Bey 1991

The year 1989 was a big one. Communist rule ended in East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Romania; the Berlin Wall came down and protesters were massacred in Tiananmen Square (Hopkins 2000, 264). In *Foucault's Discipline: The Politics of*

² Throughout this thesis I situate the Revolutionary Knitting Circle within a grammar that positions it as a single entity. I do this as a practical measure. However, in order to resist a hegemonic collapse of these divergent groups into a single identity that does not exist, I insert a bracketed pluralization wherever I refer to the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) in all its forms. To indicate the possessive form (whether singular or plural) I simply add an apostrophe before the bracketed “s.” The difficult readings created by this grammatical contamination are intended to signal the structures of language that deny the existence of pluralities within single identities as limited and insufficient.

³ This original group produced a manifesto entitled “A Proclamation of Constructive Revolution.” It is available on its website and acts, for many, as a guide to the group’s methods (see Appendix A).

Subjectivity John S. Ransom describes this year as the year that revolution's previous semantic link with liberation was severed. "From the point of view of the West, these revolutions did not embody an ideal so much as formally call a halt to all such attempts.... The revolutions in the East have resulted in a kind of ironic disappointment" (Ransom 1997, 103-4). The previously understood correlation between revolution and emancipation was thus officially fractured. For some, this was discouraging. For others, it was the long awaited recognition of what was already painfully obvious. A shift from seeking total revolution to working towards an open system that is able to constantly redefine itself arose out of these understandings, pointing towards new possibilities for activism.⁴

Recent revivals of mass demonstration energies in the West surrounding anti-corporate globalization movements are situated within this climate.⁵ Participants in these rallies do not regard the event of protest as linked directly with liberation, although they do use these events as sites within which to create temporary autonomous zones, release frustrations and have a direct or symbolic effect on corporate-globalization.⁶ In response to

⁴ In 1991, Katherine Addelson wrote, "The success can never be more than partial" (1991, 179).

⁵ The "Battle of Seattle" is often thought of as the initial manifestation of these mass-demonstration energies (Krebbbers and Schoenmaker 2004, 197). Considered a success within resistant communities, the protests at the World Trade Organization meetings in 1999 have themselves been credited with inspiring other activists to attend such demonstrations. Kristine Wong writes, "Riding on the golden waves of Seattle, activists have flocked from one protest to the next, hoping to pressure international institutions like the World Bank and IMF, and the US presidential election conventions to reconsider their financial ties to TNCs" (Wong 2004, 205).

⁶ Hakim Bey coined the term "temporary autonomous zone" (TAZ) in 1985. Bey describes this term as necessarily difficult to define, a condition that allows it to remain open and uncontainable. It is, however, possible to describe the TAZ as a temporary and resistive space in which people act outside of state control. He writes, "Getting the TAZ started may involve tactics of violence and defense, but its greatest strength lies in its invisibility – the State cannot recognize it because History has no definition of it. As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it *will* vanish, leaving behind an empty husk, only to spring up somewhere else, once again invisible because [it will be] indefinable in terms of the Spectacle.... And because the TAZ is a microcosm of that 'anarchist dream' of a free culture, I can think of no better tactic by which to work toward that goal while at the same time experiencing some of its benefits here and now" (Bey 1991).

his experience at the anti-Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) demonstration in Québec City, Phillipe de Grosbois wrote,

These summits make for strange situations. There is the “spectacle” of revolution, not revolution itself. The spectacle makes a whirlwind tour from city to city, from Seattle to Washington, to Prague and Québec. Everybody tastes their own “piece of the spectacle,” but the real uprising remains to be seen.... We must evolve beyond the three-day revolution... to produce a real social movement. (de Grosbois 2001, 43)

Not only considered ineffective in the long run, the staging of these events is also becoming increasingly difficult within a post-Seattle, post-9/11 climate.

The protests in Seattle at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference of 1999 were successful in disrupting the meetings because the strength of the movement had been underestimated.⁷ Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper was criticized when he did not respond immediately to direct actions against business properties.⁸ When the police did react, their actions were also criticized as overly violent. Stanley Aronowitz writes, “Seattle’s mayor had egg on his face. Politically shy of clamping down on protesters in the relatively liberal city, he was forced at the eleventh hour by the Feds to come out swinging. Conservatives condemned him for too little and too late and the labor and liberal groups yelled police brutality” (Aronowitz 2004, 79).⁹ In the wake of these criticisms, Stamper resigned from his position (Democracy Now 1999).

⁷ “Seattle officials claimed they were caught off-guard,” Jeffery St. Clair writes, “the deputy chief told John Sellers that they simply didn’t have the manpower to handle it” (St. Clair 2004, 64-5).

⁸ Robert Pigott of BBC News reports, “It has been a disastrous week for the World Trade Organization.... After such a public relations disaster on the streets, failure in the talks as well, seemed unthinkable” (Pigott 1999).

⁹ As Jeffery St. Clair recalls, “Seattle was under civic emergency, a step away from martial law. National Guard helicopters hovered over downtown, sweeping the city with searchlights. A 7 P.M. curfew had been imposed and was being flouted by thousands – those same thousands who captured the streets, sustained clouds of tear gas, volleys of rubber bullets, concussion grenades, high-powered bean cannons and straightforward beatings with riot batons. The bravery of the street warriors had its tremendous triumph: they held the streets long enough to force the WTO to cancel their opening day.... The resistance had proved its resilience” (St. Clair 2004, 52-3).

Security preparations for subsequent summits have been far more extensive and strategic. For the third Summit of the Americas in Québec City in 2001, the Canadian government “organized the largest police deployment in Canadian history... the cost of security operations alone exceeded [CAD] \$100 million” (Chang et al. 2001, 20). Across the border, the passing of the United States Patriot Act on 24 October 2001 ushered in a new definition of domestic terrorism which, coupled with new and sensitive anti-terrorist sentiment, implicitly linked any activist activity to threats of mass murder.¹⁰ In Canada, just months prior to the anti-FTAA demonstrations of 2001, efforts to criminalize activists resulted in bylaws passed in Québec City and Ste. Foy that outlawed the wearing of scarves.¹¹ When worn on the face and soaked with vinegar, such fabrics are one of the only affordable and accessible defenses against pepper spray and tear gas.¹² After the death of a Group of

¹⁰ It reads,

Sect. 802: Definition of Domestic Terrorism

The term ‘domestic terrorism’

(5) means activities that – ...

(B) appear to be intended –

(i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population;

(ii) to influence the policy of a government by
intimidation or coercion

(U.S. Senate 2001). In his most recent documentary entitled, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, United States filmmaker Michael Moore features an anecdote in which a peace group (Peace Fresno) is infiltrated by the anti-terrorism unit of the local police (Moore 2004, 58 min).

¹¹ Ste. Foy is a large suburb west of downtown Québec City.

¹² Ithaca-based Activist Knitting Troupe knitted scarves to protest the ban on scarf wearing. (Stop the FTAA 2001). Of further interest is the notion that the passing of this ban moved many to attend the protests, because it negated expected rights and freedoms. David Fennario writes, “We put thirty people on the bus from Verdun although the government tried their best to scare everybody off. First they told us they were building a fence around Québec City, a four-kilometer perimeter. Then they announced they were emptying out local jails to make room for mass arrests and stocking up on a whole shit-load of pepper spray, teargas and rubber bullets. So people did take in a breath. People with kids and regular jobs, they took in a breath and I began to worry that maybe the scare tactics were going to work. But then the government also announced they would be arresting anyone in Québec City wearing a scarf! And people all over Québec went ‘no, it’s too much,’ and began signing up to get on the buses even more than before” (Fennario in Palladino and Widginton 2002, 46). Interestingly, the seeds of this reaction were planted when gas masks were banned during the WTO protests in Seattle. Elaine Porterfield reports, “In other developments yesterday [2 December 1999], one aspect of the city’s state of emergency – a police order banning gas masks or their sale in the downtown core – brought an immediate promise of a lawsuit. ‘I’m very angry,’ said Mark

Eight (G8) protester in Genoa, Italy, in July 2001,¹³ the Canadian government utilized a new strategy in security preparations by holding its April 2002 G8 meeting in Kananaskis, “an isolated wilderness area... near Calgary, in Alberta, one of the most prosperous and conservative provinces of Canada” (Starhawk 2002). The location, an environmentally-sensitive area with only one heavily-guarded access road, provided naturally occurring topographic barricades which distanced demonstrators from the proceedings.

In this context, engaging in resistive events is not only increasingly difficult but also harmful to the material body of the activist. Heather Majaury writes,

[Activists] are keenly aware that anti-globalization activism burns people out.... Burnout is not sexy or revolutionary. They recognize that constant, large-scale, action-intensive; risk-laden mobilization sometimes wreaks havoc on their hearts, bodies and relationships.¹⁴ (Majaury 2001, 58)

As protesters return home from these events, they are often tired, bruised and dismayed; community-based modes of acting are thereby becoming an emotional necessity. During an informal talk, entitled “Roots, Culture and Resistance: Connecting Black Communities

Miclette, president of GasMask.com, in Dexter, Maine. ‘I could understand if it was a violent weapon, but this is something people need to protect themselves from air they breathe. I just think this is a basic civil right. I view it as simple as getting a weather report saying it's going to snow, and someone saying you can't wear a coat’” (Porterfield 1999). On 7 March 2001, Macdonald Stainsby of the *Toronto Star* reported that the ban had been lifted in Ste. Foy. He writes, “A bylaw passed by a Québec City suburb to ban people from concealing their faces with scarves or masks at the Summit of the Americas has been scrapped. Ste. Foy Mayor Andree Boucher said she ‘listened to her conscience’ and decided to respect individual rights and the presumption of innocence. ‘Too often in other countries, laws have been abusively applied,’ she said yesterday” (Stainsby 2001).

¹³ On the afternoon of 20 July 2001, a policeman in a van shot Carlo Giuliani in the head. Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis write, “In an effort to get out of the hands of the furious crowd the driver of the van ran over Carlo’s body twice” (Federici and Caffentzis 2004, 145). They argue that the violent treatment of protesters in Genoa is “an essential part of the devaluation of European labor that is now required by globalization... they were being treated by the police as if they were poor people in the Third World or blacks in the US, i.e., people whose labor has been so systematically devalued the police have no inhibitions in killing and maiming them” (149).

¹⁴ Activist burnout is more widespread than is ever admitted on page. The Revolutionary Knitting Circles’ insertion of a meditative and comforting action within activism is one of many currents within the newest social movements which create direct action that is emotionally and physically sustainable by organizing socially outside of the intensity of the mass-protest (see Day 2005; Hudema 2004).

Across Borders,” held on 22 May 2005 in conjunction with the 6th annual Montreal Anarchist Bookfair, former Black Panther Ashanti Alston stated, “It is *not* a nice day when you know what’s going on in Iraq,” and urged activists to “organize through socializing” (Alston 2005). Increasingly, activists are seeking to engage in a politics of the everyday life.¹⁵ Often, this type of community activism is seen only to “re-inscribe marginalization of non-dominant socio-economic groups” (Lauzon 2003, 63). I would argue, however, that a focus on smaller-scale, locally-oriented movements is perhaps even more effective, offering a sustainable method for resistant action.

Theoretically, Michel Foucault’s re-conception of power as relational buttresses this everyday resistance. Foucault’s theories shifted understandings of power as a centralized force emanating from the state to a fragmented pervasive web of relationships. “Power,” he writes, “is employed and exercised through a net-like organization, and not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power” (Foucault 1980, 98). Often this is interpreted as a loss of the possibility for freedom. However, as Toby Miller points out, “Social relations are never to be transcended, but that does not mean that there is no means of transforming them” (Miller 1993, 175). Ransom argues that, within this framework, liberation may even be possible, as long as the methods used to achieve it are apt:

Because not everything is run from a central headquarters, because local circuits of power-knowledge have their own rationality, their own means and ends, local struggles do not have to wait for revolutions in the broader

¹⁵ This is not to say that mass protests are understood as unnecessary, or, as necessarily futile. Milstein writes, “While journalist Naomi Klein has been an insightful commentator on this movement, she is wrong in dubbing direct actions as ‘McProtests.’ Putting aside the fact that each direct action is not alike but borrows from, rejects and/or transforms elements of previous actions – that is, there is often a generative, creative process at work – as Québec City exemplified, mass actions also afford moments of real gain that would otherwise not be possible if resistance and reconstruction were merely parochial affairs. And they give people hope” (Milstein 2004, 132).

structure in order to be meaningful, actual agents of change. (Ransom 1997, 113)

Foucault argues that, at any given time, a certain number of options are open to a person. Each person has the power to choose between these options. He states, “Power is exercised only over free subjects and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized” (Foucault 1983, 221; quoted in Ransom 1997, 124). Options can never be fully removed, but they can be restricted. These restrictions are often subtle to the point of invisibility, as they script a narrative of commonsense.¹⁶ This narrative of commonsense privileges certain knowledges. Opposing knowledges are marginalized, suppressed and sometimes forgotten in order to create a sense of cohesion. Foucault terms these marginalized knowledges “subjugated.” He writes, “it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work” (Foucault 1980, 82).

gated communities

In Canada we don't ban demonstrations – we just reroute them.

Alan Borovoy 2001

Don't think of it as reasonable; think of it as terrifying.

Veda Hille 1996¹⁷

As a way to bring discussion of the physical affects of activism on activists together with discussion of marginalized knowledges, I turn, for a moment, to a fence, or rather to *the* fence (see fig. 1.1). The fence, which surrounded the 2001 Summit of the Americas in

¹⁶ Ransom states, “The best way to control the range and choice of options open to participants in a power relationship is to turn some of its key prerequisites into accepted and, finally, unquestioned ways of thinking” (Ransom 1997, 131-2).

¹⁷ Song lyrics from “Instructions,” released in the 1996 album, *Spine*.

Québec City, became a central site of resistant activity. Nearly four kilometers in length, it was erected in anticipation of the large and impassioned protests arising out of various global justice movements. I turn to this fence because the activities surrounding it ground the protests in the embodied, in the personal, and in the small and incremental. For many demonstrators, the main goal of the weekend was to symbolically tear a hole in it (Milstein 2004). I discuss three actions directed at the fence, the tearing down of parts of it, the teddy-bear catapult that lobbed stuffed animals across it, and the weaving of feminine objects into its warp and weft. These actions sought to render the fence conspicuous, absurd, and unreasonable. In this way, they worked to promote an understanding of the fence as undemocratic, rescuing this knowledge from a dominant narrative that situated it as commonsensical.

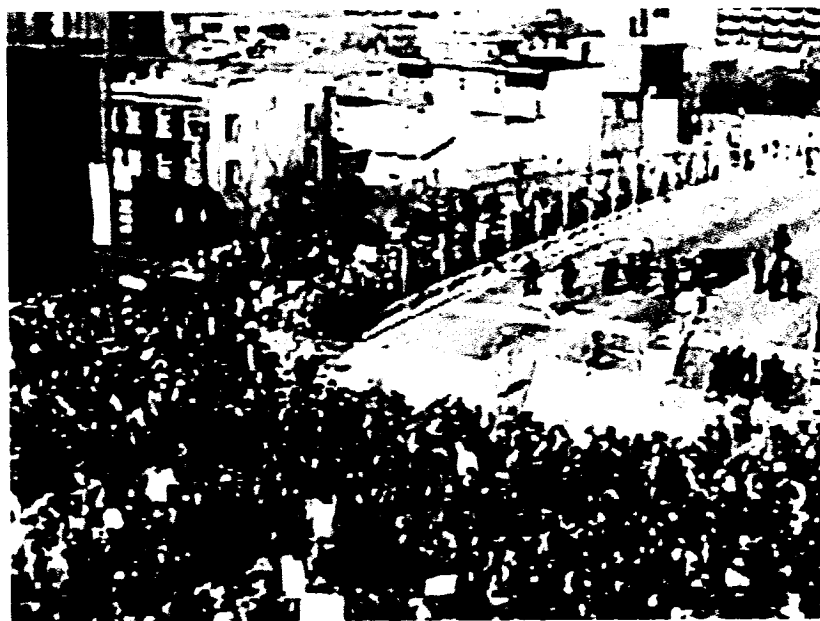


Figure 1.1 Photographer Unknown, The Fence, April 2001.

While the Canadian government legitimized the fence as a necessary safety measure, within activist communities, it seemed to act as a unifying symbol of the undemocratic nature of the Summit. As Sarah Anderson argues, “A silver lining to the military crackdown

was the unifying effect it had on anti-free traders of all stripes” (Anderson 2001). Further, Anthony DePalma, a journalist for the New York Times writes,

Thousands of police officers are coming to back up what is being called Quebec's “wall of shame,” and many Canadians are asking whether such separation is necessary, or is anti-democratic overkill, infringing not only on the rights of protesters but also on the character of a country known for tolerance and civility. (DePalma 2001)

The nickname, “wall of shame,” came out of a process of criticizing not only the security responses, but also capitalism itself. This name figures the fence as something that seeks to hide an embarrassing project, conspicuously privat(ized).¹⁸

The fence was defined by meanings inscribed onto it by both corporate and independent media even before it existed. Cindy Milstein writes, “if the fence had remained merely a physical barricade, it could have been counted as a security success....

Unfortunately for Jean Chrétien, George W., and their cohorts, the ten-foot fence became a larger-than-life symbolic divide, in essence demanding, “Which side are you on?” (Milstein 2004, 126-7). During the summit, the fence created a unique photographic opportunity, offering a visible barrier through which to capture the separation of, and interactions between, the police and the protesters. It was barrier through which protestors and riot police could look at each other, each taking on their own particular posture, one set in riot gear, the other in an assortment of gas masks, fairy wings, and bandanas (see fig. 1.2).

¹⁸ David Widginton writes, “Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and other heads of state kept promoting through the media that the FTAA will benefit everyone, especially the poor. They emphasized at every opportunity that the trade deal, which extends the North American Free Trade Agreement to Central and South America and the Caribbean, will be good for democracy, while in Québec City, they were building a militarized perimeter around themselves – creating a 13.6 km² totalitarian enclave in the center of town – to negotiate the deal whose details they withheld from the public. I couldn’t stop asking myself, why have they censored something they claim to be so beneficial?” (Widginton 2002, 24).



Figure 1.2 Ken Gould, *Crowd, Police, and Tear Gas in the Air*, April 2001.

Post-Québec, this fence has become a staple in academic writing on contemporary resistance. Naomi Klein's follow up to *No Logo* even recalls it within the title, *Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate*. In the book she writes,

When I first noticed that the image of the fence kept coming up in discussion, debates and in my own writing, it seemed significant to me. After all, the past decade of economic integration has been fuelled by promises of barriers coming down, of increased mobility and greater freedom. And yet twelve years after the celebrated collapse of the Berlin Wall, we are surrounded by fences yet again, cut off – from one another, from the earth and from our own ability to imagine that change is possible. (Klein 2002, xx)

Actions directed at the fence in Québec City were also actions directed against these non-material fences. They sought to recover the knowledge that such fences, erected by capitalism, are exclusionary and oppressive.

The tearing down of parts of the fence during the protests was, in a sense, inevitable (see fig. 1.3). The “flimsy fence that became a mighty symbol” (Milstein 2004, 132) was

understood as a physical representation of everything activists were demonstrating against. The ease with which the connections were made between this physical barricade and the non-material systemic barricades of the capitalist structure created an atmosphere in which the tearing down of the fence became an anticipated outcome. Milstein writes,

The widespread hatred of the wall and all it embodied meant that those who took a leadership role to bring it down – the libertarian anticapitalists – stepped not only into the limelight but also gained the respect and admiration of other demonstrators, much of the local populace, and a healthy cross-section of the broader Canadian public.¹⁹ (127-8)



Figure 1.3 Photographer Unknown, *Tearing Down the Fence*, April 2001.

This action against the fence, in its organizational stages, its execution and subsequent reflections on it, also worked to recover the knowledge that these unwanted barriers (both physical and non-physical) are both vulnerable and removable.

¹⁹ The *Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes* (Anti-Capitalist Convergence, or CLAC) and *le Comité d'Accueil du Sommet des Amériques* (The Québec city based Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee, or CASA) are often credited with preparing an atmosphere in which this could occur (Milstein 2004, 128). The CLAC released a *Basis of Unity* statement (included as Appendix B) that employed the language of a “diversity of tactics” and a rejection of reformist projects. Milstein states, “Many have written elsewhere that this principle allowed for heightened militancy in Québec City” (128). However, she argues that organization around a diversity of tactics, “did not make room under the anticapitalist banner for militants; they were there already. What the diversity of tactics stance did do was create a welcoming space for those many more antiauthoritarians who perceive themselves to be less militant. It widened the margins not of militancy, in other words, but of what it means to reject capitalism as an antiauthoritarian” (129).

An activist group called the Deconstructionist Institute for Surreal Topology (DIST) constructed a wooden catapult designed to lob teddy bears across the fence. Police confiscated it during the demonstration (see fig 1.4) and prominent activist Jaggi Singh, who had been wrongfully linked to the catapult, was arrested and served jail time for possessing a “dangerous weapon” (Palladino and Widginton 2002, 97-9).²⁰



Figure 1.4 Gareth Lind, Police Capture Teddy Bear Catapult, April 2001.

The DIST released a claim of responsibility on 25 April 2001, pointing out that Singh had never been a member of the group and had nothing to do with the construction or use of the catapult. Its issued statement reads,

The DIST would like to applaud the brilliant satirical techniques employed by security forces. We thought we had reached the pinnacle of irony with our teddy-bear launching siege equipment, yet the security forces managed to upstage us with these absurd charges against Singh. We are humbled – this is even better theater than when they charged him with assault for speaking too loud into a megaphone. (DIST 2001)

²⁰ The action also sought to emphasize, through mimicry, the difference between those who were allowed access to that decision-making process to erase trade barriers, and those who were denied. Teddy bears were not allowed to cross the barrier, whereas state representatives were tightly guarded and flown across the fence in funded helicopters.

Through mimicry, the catapult parodied the actions of the riot squad. Riot squads employ equally large machines to deploy a range of crowd controlling substances such as water, pepper spray and tear gas (see fig. 1.5). The lobbing of teddy bears across the fence sought to reveal the differences between those allowed behind the barrier and those in front of it. “The contrasts,” Milstein writes,

could not have been sharper. Closed meetings and secret documents inside; open teach-ins and publicly distributed literature outside. The cynical co-optation of “democracy” via a gratuitous “clause” as a cover for free-floating economic exploitation versus genuine demands for popular control and mutual aid in matters such as economics, ecology, politics and culture. The raising of glasses for champagne toasts versus the rinsing of eyes from chemical burns. (Milstein 2004, 127)

The use of the teddy bear, a recognizable object of familiarity and comfort, meant that the parodic intentions of the action would remain easily translatable, even when reported by the corporate media.

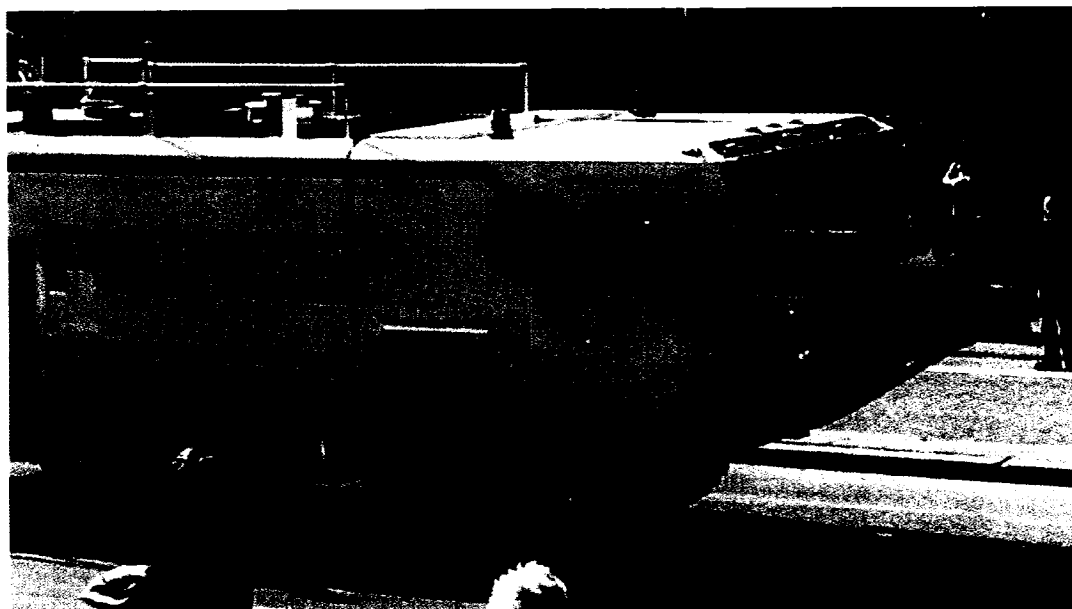


Figure 1.5 Ken Gould, The Water Cannon Tanks, April 2001.

The women’s caucus of the activist coalition Opération SalAMI called upon activists to join them in “Weaving a Web of Solidarity,” an action that aimed to mark women’s

resistance with a particularly feminine syntax (see fig. 1.6).²¹ Using string, ribbon, undergarments and wool, the participants inscribed their presence into the fence (Lauzon 2003, 59-62). Starhawk, a member of the group wrote,

Though they erect a fence to stop us, we will twine our web through its mesh to be the visible symbol of the power of women.... We will weave together our hopes and dreams, our aspirations, our indictments, our testimony, our witnessing, our demands, our visions. We will write on ribbons, on strips of cloth, on rags. We will draw, paint, knot cords, braid yarn, whisper into pieces of string. And from these materials we will weave our web. (Starhawk 2001)



Figure 1.6 Photographer Unknown, Weaving a Web of Solidarity, April 2001.

This action sought to register the marginalization of women's voices within the Summit proceedings, while at the same time signalling the refusal of these voices to be silenced.

Directed at a symbol of exclusion, this action became especially eloquent (see fig. 1.7).

²¹ Opération SalAMI (operation dirty friend) is a broad Montréal-based group dedicated "to raising awareness around the pernicious impacts of globalization" (Duhamel 2001).

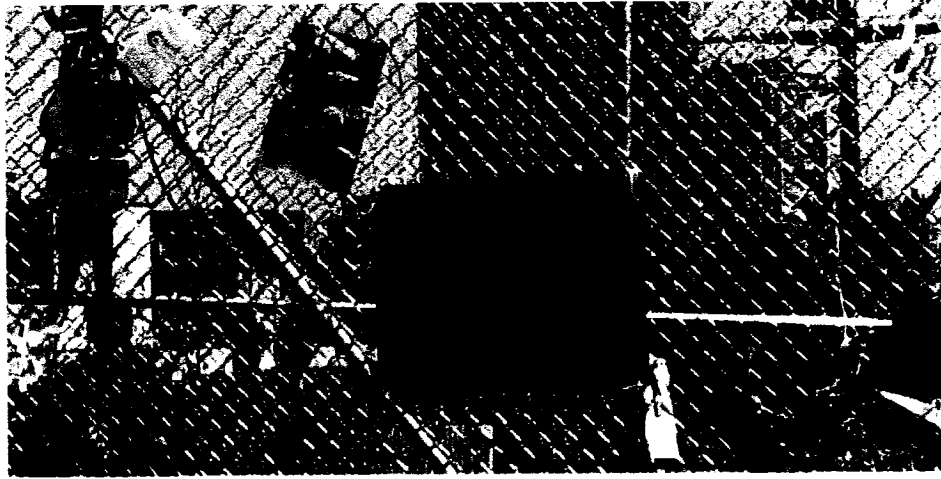


Figure 1.7 Ken Gould, *Freedom Can't be Fenced*, April 2001.

Something about this action has always made it memorable for me. I think it is the fact that chain link fencing reminds me of textiles. The long thin threads of wire linking together to form a material both strong and flexible echo the interdependent loops of string that constitute knitted fabrics. Thus, the combination of weaving and fencing seems fitting, and yet, also antithetical. A fence is masculine, made out of metal, standing to separate the private from the public whereas textiles are feminine and soft, inviting and welcoming. A fence is a security guard whereas a woolen covering is a security blanket. Although each is attached to a different set of notions, each is capable of engaging activist energies. The fence, with its easy metaphoric links to the oppressive systemic barricades of capitalism, and knitting, understood as a woman's craft, contain the elements necessary to constitute a tool of subversion.²² Actions engaging such familiar objects are able to enact an eloquent parody, one that rescues subjugated knowledges buried by commonsense notions.²³

²² It is, however, important to remember that knitting is not *necessarily* political, regardless of the history of those who have used it as a political tool (for further discussion of the history of women using craft, specifically, embroidery, to further a political agenda see Parker 1984, Tickner 1988, and Fry 2002). In order for knitting to be political it must be accompanied by a political intent. In the words of Paula Gustafson, "Craft is not a radical activity, although it can be" (Gustafson 2002, 16).

²³ I think there is something to subversions that employ the everyday, the mundane, that allows them to generate a more poignant, longer lasting message.

mapping a thesis

The body of this thesis traverses ideas of partiality, of odd combinations, of permeable impermeables, of binaried spaces, of marginalized postures, of haptic experiences and of invisible aesthetics. The second chapter, “activating notions: re-reading nostalgia as a tactic of resistance,” examines the historical construction of knitting, and its contemporary resurgence, together with critical writings that deal with the use of craft for political ends. It acts both as a literature review and as a place to establish a newly unstable platform from which to discuss the act of knitting, and the roles of artist and protester. It seeks to render conscious our preconceived ideas of knitting and activism in order establish space for illuminated re-readings of each. Suggesting that the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) utilizes nostalgia as a tactic, I argue that the group provokes such re-readings as it enacts the unlikely combination of knitting and revolution.

The third chapter, “stitching with their tongues out: eloquent parodies of the everyday,” explores aspects of parody within various activist projects. I discuss the ways in which contemporary knitters utilize the ideas I outline in chapter two to create an easily translatable parody, de-normalizing the everyday object to subvert the comfortably hegemonic ideas of activism, crafting and gender.²⁴ These projects are able to jar viewers, forcing them to re-evaluate their own commonsensical understandings of war, gender and activism.

In the fourth chapter, “gathering off the grid: the safer space of the uncontainable in between,” I discuss the potential for community building within these projects. Moving beyond readings of the group that distill its actions into a theatrics of parody, I examine its

²⁴ Paul Lichterman writes, “In search of an elusive balance, successful social movements re-work pre-existing traditions and ideologies, enough to promote political and cultural change, but not so much that activists become disempoweringly marginal” (Lichterman 1998, 402).

modes of gathering as a means to foster what I term haptic spaces. These spaces operate differently than the ironic veneer of its actions and create the conditions for emotional mending. Here, I suggest that these groups refigure alternatives, differently organizing, teaching and learning resistance in such a way as to create sustainable safer spaces in which to build community. In doing so, these groups prefigure alternative models of citizenship. Further, I argue that these spaces are able to remain as a residue within the body of each participant, creating the potential for these spaces to be affective beyond the *temporary* autonomous zone. I conclude by reading the actions of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) through knitted fabric, suggesting that these actions can unravel and loosen space, thereby empowering individuals through increasing available options.²⁵

Within this study, I access my personal experiences with, and memories of, participation in various Revolutionary Knitting Circles, initiating interviews with former and current participants, reading current weblogs and zines and participating in forum groups. By casting my net as widely as possible, I hope to activate disqualified forms of knowledge as a way to destabilize the everyday hierarchical ordering of information while uncovering often overlooked data.²⁶

Paul Lichterman suggests that “Participant-observation,” in which the scholar is immersed within the group studied, “is especially suited for asking questions about everyday, often taken-for-granted meanings of activism” (Lichterman 1998, 402). He argues that the

²⁵ There is often a difference between available options as they actually exist and as they are perceived. The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) seeks to share the skills necessary to build towards recognition of all available options.

²⁶ Linda Hutcheon states, “I guess I’ve always believed that theory had to be theorizing – in the sense that you had to theorize from something and that something should be as broad as possible in its definition. When working [in] the postmodern, it became crucial – because of the postmodern blurring of the boundaries between art forms, between high and popular... – to deal with that variety in theorizing [a] cultural phenomenon” (Hutcheon 1997). She asserts further that this strategy allowed her to bring in the work of those who are often not considered important and vital within scholarly studies.

“implicit meanings” of activism, such as, “the ways activists practice citizenship through participating in movements, the ways they build group ties, and the ways they define being an activist,” are particularly difficult for anyone but a participant to uncover (403). He writes, “By hearing how activists talk about their own activism in everyday settings, participant-observers can bring some new insights to old questions about the motives for activism” (410).²⁷ Further, Jennifer Reich suggests that the personal experience of the researcher is a rich source of data, because, as a participant, the researcher is unable to remain peripherally involved (Reich 2003, 352-4).

Stephen Richer discusses participant observation as “embodying the praxis of critical theory” and considers it “crucial in altering the power/knowledge axis” (Richer 1998, 4). Writing, “Indeed supporting the emergence of ‘organic intellectuals’ (Gramsci 1971), and hence what Foucault (1980) termed ‘subjugated knowledges,’” he asserts that participant observation “represents perhaps the most direct assault on hegemonic knowledge” (Richer 1998, 4).

By positioning myself as both a participant and as a participant-observer, and by activating devalued forms of publication and using them alongside conventionally accepted scholarly works, I present this thesis as a document that strives to revalue devalued knowledges, and as such, I situate this thesis as an act of resistance. It utilizes the voices of the academic, the activist and the crafter. These voices are not categorically distinct, nor are they necessarily opposed, although their conditions of speech are quite different. The first speaks within the accepted realm of academia, the second within the unaccepted realm of dissent, and the third within the condescended and underestimated realm of the marginalized. As someone who has participated in two incarnations of the Kingston

²⁷ Researchers, as peers, gain “facilitated access into the field site,” yielding information that would not have been otherwise obtainable (Reich 2003).

Revolutionary Knitting Circle, I speak from within all three. By reactivating under-published material within the scholarly realm, my work acts in resistance to the commonsensical othering of the rebel. In so doing, my thesis contributes not only to the scholarly study of activist art production, but also to the recovery of subjugated knowledges.

Chapter Two

activating notions: re-reading nostalgia as a tactic of resistance

notions

Clearly, Grandma has lost her monopoly on knitting. The acrylic monstrosities of yesterday are being replaced by chunky runway knockoffs. Both Valentino and Christian Dior have emphasized knitwear in their collections.

Flora Tartakovsky 2000

In an attempt to describe the contemporary resurgence of knitting, I foreground the words contained in the above statement, published in *Time*, a well-respected popular magazine, intending to use them to enlighten discussion of the deeply inscribed notions informing contemporary responses to knitting.²⁸ The words “yesterday” and “Grandma” rely heavily on the construction of the craft as an arcane and traditional hobby. Similar to constructions of many marginalized groupings, this statement places knitting solidly within the past. The word “replaced” situates the contemporary trajectory of craft-making as a separate practice, casting these old and new forms as disconnected. This statement reflects a belief that it is only through a new and separate practice that knitting can become *contemporary*. While there is an undeniable contemporary resurgence of knitting, I argue that these newest currents are not detached from past traditions but instead built out of a careful re-reading of them.²⁹

²⁸ Stoller writes, “Although women of all ages have always knit, it has been associated with grandmothers for at least the past hundred years.... Major media have embraced the craft, touting knitting as the ‘new yoga’ and ‘not for grannies anymore’” (Stoller 2003, 13). Rachel Herron, a thirty-one year-old knitter states that she has been called “grandma” for as long as she can remember (Herron 2004).

²⁹ “Today’s knitting phenomenon,” Stoller explains, “is just the most recent upswing in the history of a craft that has cycled in and out of fashion with the younger generation for the past two centuries. With legions of young knitters ‘taking back the knit’ (and more and more girls are picking up sticks everyday), the popularity of knitting is at an all time high” (Stoller 2003, 13). “Craft,” writes Tanya

The word Grandma, much like the word notion, which at once signals concepts and crotch zippers, is a word that is concurrently iconic and deeply personal. Grandma is often understood as a definable and containable role, easily cast as feminine yet non-sexual, warm, slow, traditional. Grandma is a marketing tool used to sell cookies. Grandma is a brand. Yet grandma is also a familial descriptive. Each grandma is unique and individual, and as such, cannot be coherently categorized.

In this chapter, I examine certain notions of crafters and activists that inform responses to the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) as a way to make these ideas conscious and contestable. In doing this, I aim to create a newly destabilized platform upon which these notions can be both recognized and re-read. While seeking here to destabilize notions of knitting and knitters, I do not seek to dissolve these constructions completely. I destabilize them to acknowledge the affects of these deeply entrenched ideas in a manner that foregrounds the ways in which non-knitters encounter knitters and the ways in which contemporary knitters situate, organize, and present themselves.

Conventional notions of knitting and knitter set up the conditions through which contemporary currents of knitting are easily read as parodic. These readings result from what I call the ironic veneer of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s).³⁰ Further, understandings of the Revolutionary Knitters, as activist crafters, are informed by a number of conventional notions of what is and can be revolutionary. In a brief discussion of recent media constructions of activism, I explore the ways by which these notions mould reactions to the group. While participants in the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) often access and

Harrod, "with its changeable, slippery identity is, as usual, a good barometer of current anxieties, hopes and confusions about modernity and our place in a world over which we apparently have little control" (Harrod 2005).

³⁰ In the next chapter I elaborate on these ironic veneers, and suggest that, by combining two conventionally opposed roles, these veneers create an unsettling display, which, in turn, is able to destabilize the normative notions through which they are read as ironic.

utilize these established notions to subvert the hegemonic, I argue that their modes of gathering work alongside buried histories of knitting, activate obscured resistive acts of collectivity.³¹ In this way, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) employs strategic nostalgia as a way to re-read and re-value the identities of activist and crafter.

Situating the Revolutionary Knitting Circle'(s) strategic use of nostalgia within Elizabeth Grosz's assertion that "Any discourse is repeatable, useable, transformable" (Grosz 1995, 16), I engage in a series of deconstructions and insertions that seek to contaminate the cohesive and understood history of crafting. Through this, I build a theory that positions the actions of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) as both parodic and non-parodic. I suggest that its actions contain both an ironic veneer and an invisible aesthetic of collectivity, a layered operation of subverting and converting, of refiguring and prefiguring. By rendering traditional notions of knitting and activism conspicuous, I create a base upon which constructed identities can be actively and carefully re-read.

scrapping a pieced history: re-piecing a scrapped history

Knitting is best called a craft. It serves life and is relatively ephemeral. It gets worn and wears out (hence museum collections are sparse). It can be expensive, but is almost never precious. Its structure is more limiting than the structures of tapestry and embroidery. Therefore is knitting widely practiced by non-professionals and tends to be a people's craft.

Rutt 1987

Marginalized histories are often subject to romanticization. *Wild By Design*, an exhibition of quilts curated by Janet Berlo in collaboration with Patricia Crews and Carolyn Ducey, sought to dispel many of the romantic myths inscribed into the lore of quilts and

³¹ Popular notions attached to knitting inform an audience's first encounter with revolutionary knitting. This encounter is also informed by the location of the gathering, whether in a coffee shop, a friend's house, or a on crowded street in a loud protest, and expectations raised by these locations inform audience reaction to the knitters' actions. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I seek only to explore and destabilize knitting as a construct.

their makers (International Quilt Study Center 2003). Janet Catherine Berlo's essay, "Acts of Pride, Desperation, and Necessity," included in the exhibition catalogue, *Wild By Design: Two Hundred Years of Innovation and Artistry in American Quilts*, argues against established notions inscribed into the history of quilting. A history of quilting necessarily runs into the problem of relatively few surviving documents. Because of this, historians have "pieced a history from scraps" (Berlo 2002, 9). Berlo argues that the pieces within these histories are especially subject to normative and nostalgic interpretation, limiting the histories constructed of them to expected and desired outcomes (9). Knitting is no different. Informed by many nostalgic and romantic constructions, it too has a history that must be re-read. Within this section I seek to dispel certain established notions of knitting and knitters. I begin by examining the destabilization of normative notions within other similar academic studies of craft theory. Using these studies as a guide, I then analyze notions of traditional knitting as a frugal, non-sexy, and feminine pastime, seeking to disrupt each notion's comfortable existence within the narrative of commonsense.

Pennina Barnett curated an exhibition of embroidery that built upon trajectories established within Rozika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984). Parker's book explored the categories "feminine" and "embroiderer" as a way to re-read the passive posture of the embroiderer as active and contemplative.³²

³² By uncovering the surprisingly revered position of embroidery within the middle ages, obscured by Victorian readings of the art that transformed these venerated and well-paid artists into mythic virginal ladies, Parker destabilizes contemporary assumptions about embroidery which has rendered it multiply marginalized. She writes, "embroidery was the natural expression of femininity," and continues, "unless embroidery was performed as a moral duty, in the spirit of selfless industry, it was regarded as sinful laziness -- redolent of aristocratic decadence" (Parker 1984, 154). By the beginning of the twentieth century, embroidery was a required part of education for girls in England: "for working-class girls, needlework was connected to domestic work in preparation for their future as wives, mothers or domestic servants; for middle-class girls needlework was increasingly taught as an art, following the principles established by the women at the Glasgow School of Art" (188). Examining the use of embroidered banners and handkerchiefs within the Suffrage movement, Parker

Barnett's exhibition similarly aimed to destabilize notions of embroidery and embroiderers. It was actually two separate but interdependent shows, one of embroidered works made between 1300 and 1900, and a second of contemporary textile work. Each exhibition concentrated on questions of social context, rather than on the formal aspects of the pieces. Barnett writes that the exhibitions were intended to act in conversation with each other, the first setting up, or buttressing established stereotypes, and the second, challenging and destabilizing them (Barnett 1995, 76-7).

In her analysis of the show and its reception, Barnett discusses the ways in which preconceived notions led audiences to ignore the intended destabilizations in order to situate the shows cohesively within their own anticipated experience (82). Responses (recorded both in published reviews and in the exhibition's guest book) focused primarily on the showing of contemporary work and were often negative (76-79).³³ Barnett argues that these expectations resulted from a disjunction between what the title of the show, *Women and Textiles Today*, was intended to mean and what it actually conveyed (82-4). Working to destabilize fixed identities she writes, "If we think instead, of 'women' and 'textiles' – like theory – as provisional, then we have a more expansive framework: one which enables other voices to be heard; diverse practices to be seen; and new discourses to be released" (84).

Similarly, Ruth Scheuing's "Penelope and the unraveling of history" explores notions of the textile and the textile worker by discussing shifting understandings of women

looks to early examples of revolutionary crafting within the feminist movement. Suffragists employed notions of femininity strategically as a way to argue, within an essentialist discourse, for their right to vote. In the last half of the twentieth century, embroidery again played a subversive role. Parker writes, "embroidery suddenly gained a new face. Embroidered suns rose over hip pockets, dragons curled round denim thighs, rainbows arched over backs. For the hippy era embroidery symbolized love, peace, colour, personal life and rejection of materialism. Everything in fact that embroidery and femininity had connoted since the nineteenth century"(204). By performing a careful genealogical study of embroidery, Parker's book reveals the slippery characters of embroidery and the concept of femininity.

³³ Barnett writes, "many, with a particular interest in textiles, felt cheated" (Barnett 1995, 76).

who craft. She writes, “Arachne began as a woman weaver of texts. She was transformed into a spider, an older, silent and self-generating weaver, but one that rendered the woman Arachne voiceless. The communicative power of her weaving [was] removed” (Sheuing 1995, 190). Scheuing suggests that this muting accompanies a more general silencing of women and a refusal to realize resistive potentials within the feminine.

Berlo argues against the notion that quilts were made by women “making do” (Berlo 2002, 9) with scraps of material worn from wear, and no longer useful for anything else. Quilts are often used to propagate an image associated with the American Colonial Revival. Berlo writes, “As symbolic objects, quilts give shape to an idealized story about American ingenuity and self-sufficiency in general, and female frugality, secrecy, originality, and artistry in particular” (9). These ideas rely also on a refusal to accept quilts as art objects.

While quilts certainly fulfill the intended function of keeping families warm, it must not be forgotten that this desired effect does not necessitate such arduous work. Logically, then, quilts also fulfill other, perhaps less obvious, needs. Berlo discusses the importance of the quilt frolic, which acted not only to foster social networks, but also to provide a space in which women were able to share skills, draw inspiration, and show new work. She writes, “The quilt frolic was the female equivalent of the art academy and the salon” (22). Often marginalized from institutions, women were able to create their own organized and self-determined communities within such spaces. These aspects of the history of quilting are often silenced in order to maintain the cohesive narrative of the American Colonial Revival.

Likewise, traditional knitting is often thought of as a craft of necessity, a method of frugality and a way to avoid idleness. “In my grandmother’s time,” Stoller writes, “knitting was not just a way to keep one’s hands busy – it was also a way to save money” (Stoller 2003, 3-5). She recalls, “My grandmother and her sisters were too humble to consider their work

‘expressions of their creativity’” (3). Notions that position traditional knitting as such deny the artistic and creative energies activated and used therein.³⁴ Stoller continues, “They were craftspeople, plain and simple, who were capable of taking on the most complex knitting projects” (3). Freed from these notions, contemporary knitting, figured as a leisure activity, is easily able to claim originality and frivolity.³⁵

The newest currents within knitting often position the practice as ironic.³⁶ As Rachel Herron writes, “Wham! Suddenly, it became retro and hip, although it was tongue-in-cheek.... Girls weren’t knitting scarves for their first projects, but bikinis, just to make a point” (Herron 2004). This irony arises out of a contradiction between the conventional terms through which knitting is understood and how it is perceived today. The stereotype of

³⁴ However, it is important not to impose undesired categorizations, or to imply victimization of those who actively chose to be identified as craftspeople. To do so would be to fall into the hierarchical trap of privileging the arts over the crafts. Sandra Alföldy’s book, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada*, examines efforts to professionalize craft making in Canada. Concerns over quality led some, Aileen Osborn Webb among them, to take steps towards developing a system for the production of ‘high quality’ crafts that would also be accepted within the art world. The production of this new system was highly influenced by the “modern art community, placing equal emphasis on the technical and the conceptual” (Alföldy 2005, 7). Non-institutional based learning, collectively-made projects, objects worked from patterns, and conventional iconographies were relegated to signifiers of “backward” amateur status. It is, however, important to note that elements of the traditional were not automatic grounds for dismissal. Traditional elements were sometimes highly desirable. Nostalgic desire popularized traditional methods of making, rejected the machine as an important tool, and valued raw and natural materials. Within the context of anti-modern ‘hippie’ movements, Alföldy quotes Paul Bennett: “Buying a wall hanging could be looked at as a way to enjoy taking part in the social revolution” (142).

³⁵ Stoller writes, “unlike my grandmother, I didn’t *need* to know how to knit” (Stoller 2003, 5). In a categorization of contemporary knitter types, Stoller identifies a range of knitters, those who spend exorbitant amounts of money on yarn, those who knit abstract and often useless things, and those who knit as a way to get the latest fashion. She writes, “Throwing away their knitting magazines and relieving themselves of the shackles of a pattern, these knitters, also known as artsy-fartsy knitters, like to grab some yarn, grab some needles, and just make something up.... The sweaters they make are one-of-a-kind, gorgeous concoctions, though you might not be able to get your head through the collar,” and “they just learned to knit last week but already they’ve spent more money on luxurious yarn than you did in the past year. Dilettante knitters throw themselves and their money at the craft of knitting for a short while and maybe manage to complete two-thirds of a sweater before they get bored with the whole thing” (122).

³⁶ The fact that a new current of knitting exists is undeniable. A study by Research Incorporated (a marketing research firm based in Atlanta) reports that the number of knitters younger than 35 years old doubled between 1998 and 2000 (Marer 2002, 76). With one in three American women knowing how to knit, this is no longer a subculture; it is uber-hip (Stoller 2003, 10).

the grandmother, that most non-sexual being,³⁷ would certainly be put off by contemporary patterns such as the “ribbed for her pleasure scarf” (Stoller 2003, 58), or the piece described as a “slightly sluttly string bikini” (224), which was featured within the Stitch ‘N Bitch pattern book series (see fig. 2.1).

Debbie Stoller, co-founder of *Bust Magazine*, started Stitch ‘N Bitch as a group in 1999, and as it gained popularity, she was approached by a publisher who urged her to translate the group into a marketable book (Stoller 2005). The group is positioned as a third wave reclamation of the craft, seeking to “raise knitting’s visibility and value” (Stoller 2003, 9).³⁸ She writes, “It was time to ‘take back the knit....’ Knitting had become such an arcane activity that doing it in public always elicited a response... young men and women would stare at me with openmouthed curiosity; as far as they were concerned, I might as well have been churning butter on the crosstown bus” (Stoller 2003, 9).

³⁷ Kate Boyd writes, “Taken at its surface, its most elemental, no human activity is perhaps less likely to be connected to sex. Quick: think of a knitter. What do you see? A non-knitter will probably answer with a description of what Western society stereotypes as a non-sexual being, an elderly woman” (Boyd 2004).

³⁸ Baumgardner and Richards write that third wave feminism allows feminism to “encompass all the tabooed symbols of women’s enculturation – Barbie dolls, make-up, fashion magazines, high-heels and say ‘using make-up’ isn’t shorthand for ‘we’ve been duped’” (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 136). Irene Karras writes, “The use of the term ‘wave’ in describing the distinct periods of feminist consciousness and revolution connotes a belief that each phase is building on the previous one, just as actual waves do. However, the use of the term ‘third’ is problematic for some second wave feminists who may not consider their contribution to the movement to be history. The very identification of a third wave implies that the second wave is over, and as many members of the second wave are still very active in feminist work and politics, they may be resistant to the idea that there could be a new feminism waiting to replace – or at least alter – theirs” (Karras 2002). Karras continues, third wave feminists “are struggling to define their femaleness in a world where the naming is often done by the media and pop culture,” and many are returning to it as a medium in which to make these definitions (Karras 2002). Indeed, Debbie Stoller’s reasons for founding the magazine *Bust* act as an example of this. After completing her PhD. dissertation on the ways in which the media influence women’s perceptions of themselves, she decided to begin her own magazine as a way to create space for the emergence of an alternative women’s culture. She recalls, “in 1993, I said ‘fuck it’ and I’m just going to start a magazine that I felt could be a feminist magazine, but not about feminism. *Bust* would be an alternative to what I see as the mainstream women’s magazines that make me feel unhappy, and I could just be more funny and more truthful – really embracing a separate women’s culture – and I didn’t feel like this was happening anywhere else” (Jones 2005).



Figure 2.1 John Dolan, *Queen of Hearts Bikini*, 2003.

Stitch 'N Bitch: The Knitters Handbook (2003) and *Stitch 'N Bitch Nation* (2004), both by Debbie Stoller, feature patterns that focus on infusing a self-confident sexiness into the knitter identity. In a section entitled “Sexy Summer Knits,” *Stitch 'N Bitch Nation* provides patterns for a tank top called “Sexie,” which is described as “a hot little number that can be dressed up or down, but will always inspire that sexy, sassy self-confidence” (Stoller 2004, 127), fishnet stockings called “Quick and Dirty” (“wear them with garters [sexy!]”) (137), and a “Mud Flap Girl Tank Top,” which, as Stoller explains, “was designed for all the strong, sassy, female-positive women everywhere. What’s better than a sexy girl sporting a sexy girl image and taking it as her own?” (132). In a study of her own experiences as a life-long knitter, Rachel Herron writes, “Knitting has never felt sexy before this era” (Herron 2004).

Old knitting patterns reveal, however, that contemporary knitters are not the first to combine sexiness with knitting. In fact, knitting technology actually opened up new possibilities for undergarment design. Its fabric, in contrast to woven work, is stretchable; it comfortably moves with the body. Consequently, knitting ushered in a new ability to form

fit. Close-fitting underwear, stockings and skin-tight tops all became newly possible (Kooler 2004, 10). Knitted underwear patterns often touted their ability to create warmth without inserting a bulky layer, thereby maintaining a trim silhouette. These patterns, with their detailing, suggest that the resulting garments were meant to enhance the aesthetic of the body whether worn beneath other clothing, or as outer garments on their own. The extra work involved in detailing the bust, which resulted in the “fishnet pattern” of an undergarment called “Slimline Undies,” suggests that the garment was also intended to have sex appeal (see fig. 2.2).³⁹ And, a pattern called “Wool Lace Party ‘Pretties,’” which was used to create underwear expressly to be worn to “dances and other gaieties,” was intended to substitute for silk “beneaths” in cold weather (see fig. 2.3).

³⁹ The act of knitting itself also has its own sensuality. Kate Boyd writes, “we who knit love the sensuality... of what we do. The soft fibers twining through our hands make up fabric that is meant to comfort, to warm, to heal, to clothe.... Go ahead and bristle, both at the stereotype of what a knitter is and what an elderly woman should be (I have always believed that the proverbial twinkle in an old lady's eyes didn't get there from a lifetime of baking cookies)” (Boyd 2004).



Figure 2.2 Photographer Unknown, Slimline Undies, 1935.



Figure 2.3 Photographer Unknown, Wool Lace Party "Pretties," 1933.

While Anne Macdonald writes that these undergarments did not often appear at knitting bees, but were made instead within private spaces, alone and at home, wartime knitting figured sock production as a way to get-together and quell personal and national anxieties (Macdonald 1988, 220-1). During the first and second World Wars, non-soldier citizens were asked to knit socks to support those fighting abroad (see fig. 2.4 and fig. 2.5). While wartime knitting was a means by which to support the war effort, it was also a way to calm personal and soldier unease.⁴⁰ Anne Macdonald writes,

⁴⁰ These actions are indeed sometimes part of a larger project of producing well-behaved citizens by casting war-support as an important and essential duty. As one Red Cross wartime knitter stated, "I can't fight, and I can't make munitions, but I can knit!" (Macdonald 1988, 209).

This sacrifice, this knitting and sewing, for that is where most women began, for someone else's husband, son or spouse when one's own fought shivering and hungry on another front, this scraping of lint for bandages that might cover the wound of another while one's own lay bleeding and in need, demanded singular courage bolstered by group activity. As all ages gathered for cooking, sewing and knitting, their chatter served as a safety valve for fear, [within] the moral support of collective activity. (119)



Figure 2.4 American Red Cross, Our Boys Need Sox, 1917

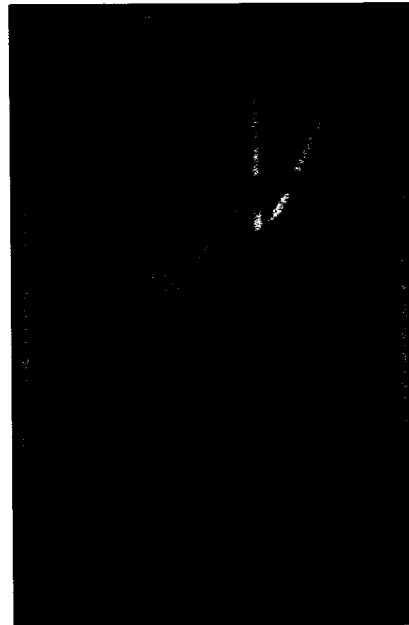


Figure 2.5 New York City WPA War Service, Purl Harder, 1942.

Although wartime knitting is considered a patriotic response to requests for work from the government and from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the American Red Cross, the articulation of these requests through official channels seems to have followed spontaneously-organized grassroots efforts.

During the Civil War, through letters and rumour, soldiers sent messages asking for socks. Outside the official channels of either union or confederate governments, these messages were received and answered (97). In her study of the social history of wartime knitting, Macdonald quotes a letter from a sister to her brother: "I have needles and yarn and a heart for any fate. If the stockings Uncle Sam provides are too thin or too anything, let me know and I will improve them with new ones, and you must tell me whether you want them long or short. I think they would be nice nearly up to the knee, don't you?" (Colton 1861; quoted in Macdonald 1988, 97-98).⁴¹ During the First World War, Civil War veterans echoed these efforts as they knitted socks for overseas soldiers (see fig. 2.6). These gestures reside within a desire to give back. In this sense, it was a continuation of the grassroots organizing that sought to provide soldiers with what they needed whenever their government failed to provide it.

⁴¹ These requests were answered on both fronts. A letter remaining from a wife of a soldier in Georgia reads, "And I want to know what you done about socks.... You must be certain to write for I am anxious to heare, so that I will try again to get some wool to knit your socks; and if you want anything else, if in my power to get, give me word" (Letter from Franklin, Ga. 1861; quoted in Macdonald 1988, 97).



Figure 2.6 Photographer Unknown, Civil War veterans knitting at the Navy League Knitting Bee, 1918.

While there is a remembered history of activist knitting, it is placed firmly within the institution. The church group craft sale, nationalistic wartime knitting, and various philanthropic efforts all seem to support the notion that knitting is inherently conservative. However, these histories can be re-read in an effort to unearth obscured currents of autonomous determination within them. In the next section, I examine the ways in which understandings of Revolutionary Knitting as craftivism are filtered, not only through established notions of knitting and knitters, but also through established notions of resistance.

craftivism: the double bias

Camped out on Stephan Avenue, a broad pedestrian street filled with malls, shops, banks and restaurants, protesters knitted, crocheted, and talked. One man played on a drum earning applause between songs from activist and onlooker alike. The soft click of the needles could be heard in the street as just over 50 protesters expressed their discontent with the G8.

Shepherd 2002

Anti-globalization protesters hit the streets here to protest this year's Group of Eight Summit armed with knitting needles instead of the bottles, petrol bombs and stones that rocked last year's meeting in Italy.

Agence France Presse 2002

Ever had the wool pulled over your eyes by some yarn? In that case this pearl will have you in stitches.

SchNEWS 2002

While the texts above suggest that such groups as The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) have often enjoyed positive reception by the media,⁴² they also find themselves defending the revolutionary potential of their projects within activist communities.⁴³ The May-June 2005 issue of *This Magazine*, for example, ran an article by Andrew Potter and Joseph Heatterh entitled "Feminism for Sale: the Lost Chapter of *The Rebel Sell*." The subsequent issue published a number of letters submitted by upset readers.⁴⁴ The magazine claimed that this was perhaps the most negatively received article it had published to date.⁴⁵ While readers challenged Potter and Heatterh's "lazy" readings of contemporary feminist

⁴² In an interview with Wes Lafortune, Grant Neufeld said, "I haven't had a negative reaction.... Oddly enough, the corporate media coverage was great" (Lafortune 2002).

⁴³ Examples of this criticism also arise within the popular press. Tonya Jameson, staff writer for the *Charlotte Observer*, casts the current interest in crafting as an antifeminist retreat in the wake of 9/11: "Too many sisters fought to free women from aprons and mops for me to voluntarily become Aunt Bee and pretend it's by choice. It is not a choice. It's peer pressure. In the last two years an undercurrent of conservatism has permeated American culture from the White House to Hollywood.... Instead of reconnecting with traditions, it seems like we're knitting, cooking and hiding in our homes because we're scared. Creating something with our hands gives us a false sense of control at a time when we have little" (Jameson 2003; quoted in Greer 2004, 23). In contrast, I posit that this resurgence in crafting energies is a choice, one that is taken as a way to *intreat*, a way to advance into a community relationship.

⁴⁴ *This Magazine* positions itself within the resistant community: "Forty years and still going strong, *This Magazine* is one of Canada's longest-publishing alternative journals. Founded by a gang of school activists in 1966, and originally called *This Magazine is About Schools*, the modern-day *This Magazine* focuses on Canadian politics, pop culture and the arts, but in keeping with its radical roots never pulls punches. Subversive, edgy and smart, *This Magazine* is the real alternative to that" (Magazine Masthead 2006).

⁴⁵ Interestingly, the magazine anticipated better reviews. It published the piece as a long-awaited follow up to "The Rebel Sell: the Real Reason You Can't Stop Shopping" (Potter and Heatterh 2002), in which editor Patricia D'souza writes, "rang in as our top seller of the year, and the piece by the same name is still the most popular link on our website" (D'souza 2005).

texts, many agreed that “making your own underwear” (Cohen et. al. 2005, 4) and “opting out to knit peace blankets” (Cole, Mattos and Paré 2005, 4) were not effective activist acts.

Part of this criticism is rooted in the history of the subordination of craft. Craft is perceived as inferior within the constructed and hierarchical dichotomies of art and craft, metropolitan and folk, educated and traditional, urban and rural, male and female (Barnett 1995, 76). Often, the validities of actions that employ craft are disregarded because of such a priori notions. The other part of the criticism arises from limiting notions of what effective resistance is.

Corporate media depictions of the anti-FTAA protest in Québec City demonstrate the prevalence of the idea in Canada that activism is necessarily violent. Claudette Lauzon analyzed photographs published in the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* during the Third Summit of the Americas. She divided the images into three categories, confrontational protest activity (CPA), non-confrontational protest activity (NCPA), and official summit portraits (OSP). Predictably, photos of confrontational protest activity were most abundant, and those of non-confrontational protest activity were most scarce, maintaining the dominant narrative of activism as violence.⁴⁶

While academic studies of resistance often work against these notions, they sometimes support and repeat other, perhaps more deeply entrenched and less conspicuous notions. Jennifer Anisef's *The Politics of Contemporary Craft Culture* (2004), for example, explores contemporary activist crafting by investigating the actions of a number of groups who strive to subvert gender, empower participants, and critique consumerism. At the same time, however, her analysis glosses over the importance of community building as a

⁴⁶ The average results for the *Toronto Star* are as follows: Confrontational Protest Activity, 67%; Non-Confrontational Protest Activity, 5%; Official Summit Portraits, 28%. The average results for the *Globe and Mail* are: Confrontational Protest Activity, 67%; Non-Confrontational Protest Activity, 4%; Official Summit Portraits, 29% (Lauzon 2003, pg. 143).

reparative experience and a means to share and revalue disregarded knowledges. She continually points to the groups' viability, regardless of their lack of direct campaigning; however, she treats this lack as an oversight rather than a tactical choice. Because her study does not situate the groups' actions within the contemporary activist climate, it does not establish any links between activism and the activities of groups working to prefigure alternatives.⁴⁷

Claudette Lauzon's *"Whose Streets?" The Visual Culture of Resistance During the 2001 Mass Demonstrations Against the FTAA in Québec City* (2003) focuses on mass-demonstration, limiting her investigation to something that is increasingly considered ineffective (see de Grosbois 2001, 43). While Lauzon does briefly discuss the community-building aspects of preparatory gatherings, she prioritizes mass-demonstration, and values this activity solely for its ability to create solidarity within larger temporary sites. In so doing, her study overlooks the revolutionary potential of working outside of these situations.

The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) does not actively campaign for governmental change, and does not figure its most effective resistive actions as those that take place within the mass protest.⁴⁸ Instead, it works towards an everyday social resistance located within the local community. The marginalization of the actions of a group such as the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) within studies of activism relies on the limiting and wide-spread notions of what is and can be revolutionary. Interestingly, the Knitting Circle willfully engages these

⁴⁷ As I discuss above, prefiguring alternatives does not involve campaigning for governmental change. Groups that prefigure alternatives build self-determined operational communities of resistance, regardless of conflicts with existent systems.

⁴⁸ Its largest mass-demonstration was organized as a Global Knit-In during the 2002 G8 meeting. However, the group saw this mass demonstration as merely a part of much larger, everyday resistance. As their web-published "Call to Action" clearly states, "As with all mass events, we look to this as an opportunity to connect people and educate – but the real work of challenging corporatism must go on every day of the year. We encourage you to take the lessons that will be learned through these actions and expand on them in the months and years that follow" (see Appendix C).

notions through its actions. Participants concurrently inhabit the knitter and activist identities as a way to disrupt the everyday narrative of commonsense by compelling audiences to carefully re-read their own assumptions and expectations. It is precisely the incessant tendency to read one identity as conservative and the other as delinquent that registers this combination as illogical and thereby subversive. The parodic potential of Revolutionary Knitting Circle actions requires normative constructions to remain effective. In this way, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) actually utilizes nostalgia to provoke subversion.

pastiche without parody: re-reading nostalgia

There were hills which garnished their proud heights with stately trees;
humble valleys whose base estate seemed comforted with refreshing silver
rivers; meadows enameled with all sorts of eye-pleasing flowers: thickets
which, being lined with most pleasant shade, were witnessed so to be by the
cheerful deposition of many well-tuned birds; each pasture stored with sheep
feeding with sober security, while the pretty lambs with bleating oratory
craved the dams' comfort; here a shepherd's boy piping as though he should
never be old; there is a young shepherdess knitting and withal singing, and it
seemed that her voice comforted her hands to work and her hands kept time
to her voice's music.

Sir Philip Sidney 1581/2006

We seek to revive and expand the social traditions around textile work.

Revolutionary Knitting Circle 2005a

Knitting as a radical act depends upon the conservatism of its history.

Robertson 2006, 25

In his prologue to *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, Ian McKay writes "The Simple Life of the Folk: This is the enabling framework I seek to identify, to explain, and to critique in this study. I view the reduction of people once alive to the status of inert essences as a way of voiding the emancipatory potential of historical knowledge" (McKay 1994, xvi). Kim Sawchuk counters,

I am not convinced that nostalgia obliterates history, condemning one either to the perpetual present, or to an obsession with an idealized past that never existed and that stops one from living in the present. Both of these contradictory states have been associated with the melancholy of the perpetually nostalgic. I wonder whether both nostalgia and the sadness and melancholy associated with it are unintentionally demeaned because of their association with the feminine, which is itself associated with irrationality and sentimentality. Can nostalgia also act as a step towards a remembrance of things past, towards a history that includes the senses, a history of home and hearth? (Sawchuk 2001, 161-2)

Perhaps active nostalgia, in contrast to a habitual and normative nostalgia, can act as a contaminating re-reader of constructed histories. Active nostalgia tactically invokes an embodied space, filled with the scent of home, tactile and friendly. “Nostalgia,” Sawchuk continues,

is not necessarily radical but neither is it an inherently conservative valorization of the past or of emotions against rationality. This thinking creates yet another false divide that sets myth against history, the premodern against the modern, the feminine against the masculine, and the emotions against reason.... This sentiment – and aesthetic practice – expresses a complex critique of modernity from within modernity, a critique found within the politics of the day. (162)

In “Fashion and Postmodernism” Elizabeth Wilson uses Fredric Jameson to theorize fashion’s recent reliance on “retro chic,” describing pastiche as “parody without laughter” (Wilson 1998, 393). At times quoting Kaja Silverman, she continues, “retro is a countercultural mode, a ‘sartorial strategy which works to denaturalize its wearer’s specular identity, and one which is fundamentally irreconcilable with fashion.’ Far from destroying the past, ‘it inserts its wearer into a complex network of cultural and historical references... there is a ‘masquerade’ quality about it... and this has radical potential” (396). I suggest that the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) invokes active nostalgia as tactic, seeking to work within an embodied and connective present, engaged in a conscious re-reading of the postures of the crafter and the activist. Because ideas of what textile art *should* be are so firmly entrenched, pairing the medium with contrasting ideas can be productive. I argue, further,

that it can be a useful tool of destabilization. However, as Wilson reminds us, nostalgic pastiche is unfunny. These invocations operate in affinity with the evoked, seeking to re-value them as viable tools of resistive self-sufficiency and community building.



Figure 2.7 Grant Neufeld, Global Knit-in: Calgary, 26 June 2002.

Revolutionary Knitting Circle knit-ins manipulate space through the insertion of the collective and visual act of knitting in places where, conventionally, it would not be.⁴⁹ In response to the 2002 G8 meeting in Kananaskis, the Calgary Revolutionary Knitters web-published a “Call to Action” urging groups to join in a Global Knit-In by organizing public knit-ins in their own communities (see fig. 2.7).⁵⁰ The knit-in sought to spread and celebrate skills of self-sufficiency as a way to counter corporate globalization, while building community and valuing socially-engaging activist actions.⁵¹

The largest satellite knit-in occurred in Ottawa and was organized by the Ottawa Committee of the World Women’s March. The committee asked women to contribute

⁴⁹ Richard Day writes, “structural renewal based on the logic of affinity is less Utopian than either reform or revolution in its orientation to the realization of desired forms here and now. It is about building spaces, places or topias in the most literal sense of the term” (Day 2005, 216).

⁵⁰ For a full transcript of the group’s “Call to Action” see Appendix C.

⁵¹ “Any unauthorized gathering...,” James Scott writes, has “been seen as potentially threatening” (Scott 1990, 61). He continues, “Large, autonomous gatherings of subordinates are threatening to domination because of the license they promote among normally disaggregated inferiors” (65).

knitted squares to be used as a part of a symbolic social safety net which would be created to draw attention to increasingly insufficient Canadian social programming (see fig. 2.8). It received over two thousand squares, a number far greater than anticipated, a number beyond what it was able to fit in the social safety net itself. As the Raging Grannies sang “no more greed and hunger, no more corporate power, share the wealth,” The Canadian Council of Chief Executives was criticized for lobbying the Canadian government on behalf of corporations to “put holes in the Social Safety Net” (Wright 2002).

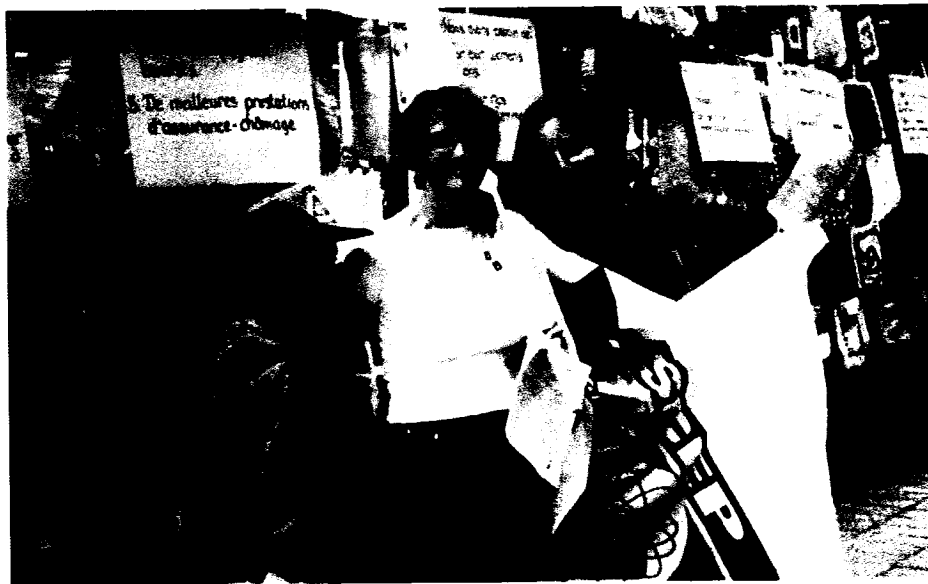


Figure 2.8 Photographer Unknown, Social Safety Net, 2002.

Grant Neufeld suggests that the spaces taken up and re-worked by knit-ins are then perceived to be safer because knitting connotes nostalgic and comforting notions. He posits that, by organizing socially, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) is able to draw a broader range of people, “people for whom involvement in the Knitting Circle is their very first time being [a part of] public activism, they may have never been to a protest before... never been

to an activist meeting or even some lecture on free trade,” but they feel comfortable engaging in its “peaceful, calm and productive” activism (Neufeld 2002).⁵²

Marginalized groups can tactically evoke active nostalgia to enter the discourse of dominant culture while destabilizing its foundation. “Women,” Hutcheon posits,

are often in the position of defining themselves *against* a dominant culture or discourse. One way to do that, a way with great subversive potential, is to speak the language of the dominant (which allows you to be heard), but then to subvert it through ironic strategies of exaggeration, understatement, or literalization. Parody is the mode that allows you to mimic that speech, but to do so through re-contextualizing it and therefore without subscribing to its implied ideals and values. (Hutcheon 1997)

By conflating two traditionally opposed roles, one understood as conservative, the other as subversive, Revolutionary Knitters are able to remain largely undisturbed by security forces, and have been able to garner positive media attention in countless independent media sources as well as *Macleans* and the *Toronto Star*.⁵³ The combination of knitter and activist roles, as an unlikely fusion, creates an ironic veneer able to destabilize traditional notions that limit each.⁵⁴ However, this irony is not the primary aim of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s).

Through collective action, the group builds communities of support and re-values social gathering as a tactic of resistance. Through this collective action, it is able to re-work both identities while re-valuing nostalgic notions of community. James Scott suggests that gathering is able to empower because it generates a “visual impact of collective power that a

⁵² As a way of playfully critiquing less inclusive activist organizing that preaches specific “ways” of revolution, Grant Neufeld often makes the remark that macramé is not welcome in the Knitting Circle because it has no potential revolutionary qualities (Neufeld 2002).

⁵³ The *Toronto Star* ran the article “A Close-Knit Community,” on 27 April 2002, and *Macleans* ran “Ready for the G8” in its 17 June 2002 edition.

⁵⁴ Because of this, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) is often driven to assert its seriousness. Within a section entitled “Frequently Asked Questions,” they respond to the question, “Are you folks serious?” by writing, “Absolutely, 100%. While we do make use of humour in our efforts, and occasionally boisterous language, we are fully committed to the actions outlined here” (Revolutionary Knitting Circle 2002).

vast assembly of subordinates conveys both to its own number and to its adversaries,” and that it also “provides each participant with a measure of anonymity, or disguise, thereby lowering the risk of being identified personally for any action or word that comes from the group” (Scott 1990, 65-6). The actions of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) are both effective and affective, operating to create positive change in both the audience and the participants as it re-figures resistance as something that can be accessible and emotionally sustainable.

Chapter Three
stitching with their tongues out: eloquent parodies of the everyday

slow food

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous.

Mao Tse-Tung 1927/2004

My kitchen window overlooks a community garden planted on the grounds of the neighboring school. Written across the wooden beams that surround and define the plant beds are the words “SLOW FOOD.” Hand painted in cheerful colours, the words seem at first cute and humorous. Contrasted with the titles of hundreds of cookbooks shelved at Chapters and Indigo touting recipes that take less than ten minutes, drive-through lanes, express versions of our favorite restaurants and grocery store self-check-outs, the word slow seems to position gardening as inefficient, counter-productive, a waste. In his book *SLOW: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed*, Carl Honoré discusses the “Slow Food” movement as part of a larger movement of the slow, set not in opposition to speed per se, but to what he calls the “cult of speed,” that is, the obsession with speed and increased production (Honoré 2004). Movements such as “slow food” operate as subversive through their inversion of normativity. However, this movement of slow does not rely upon parodic inversion to effect change. The slow food movement, in direct opposition to fast food, is in part a movement towards healthy eating and against corporate farming. It is, however, in whole, a movement that operates to slow down the participant. In this way, slow food creates change in both the audience and the participant.

In this chapter, I describe the characteristics of what I call the eloquent parody. When in a performance that combines two conventionally opposed actions, eloquent

parodies are easily read as parodic. Yet, because they are acted with diligence and concentration, they are also self-motivated activities. In this sense, the eloquent parody is effective, both internally and externally. I begin by exploring scholarship that examines parody, and then examine a series of case studies of activist projects that enact the eloquent parody as a way to situate its use within the contemporary activist landscape.

theorizing the eloquent parody

Laughter embraces both poles of change, it deals with the very process of change, with crisis itself.

Bahktin 1998, 254

Gender Trouble, Judith Butler's most celebrated publication, works to redirect feminist energies away from a politics hinged on identity to one that deconstructs it. She begins by asking, "Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?" (Butler 1999, viii). Butler argues that gender is not inborn, but rather is written on the body through a series of channels that compel people to habitually reproduce normative actions.

As a way of urging her words off the page and into the everyday, Butler proposes a tactical method of acting, subverting these constructed identities as a way of actually dismantling them. In her final chapter, she states, "parodic repetition of 'the original'... reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original" (31). An exaggerated form of the normative (her example in the final chapter is drag) renders discontinuities of the performance of the natural obvious, creating an environment in which "gender itself becomes a free floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (6).

Butler continually returns to the words of Simone de Beauvoir: “one is not born a woman, but rather *becomes* one” (111). By severing the link between sex and gender, and using Monique Wittig, she discusses possibilities beyond a binaried system. “If sex does not limit gender, then perhaps there are genders... that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex” (112). Normative ideas of sex impose “an artificial unity on an otherwise discontinuous set of attributes” (114). Coherent heterosexuality is, for Wittig, a dual set of identities that are “impossible to embody” (122). These impossibilities reveal it as constructed. While Wittig focuses on the oppressive forces of this normative discourse, Butler takes an unexpected opportunity to discuss the revolutionary potential accessed when these discontinuities are taken as “an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself” (122).

Wittig writes that the material body is constructed through societal discourses. Butler agrees, then asks, once we realize the constructed nature of these assumed truths, how is the material body to construct itself after its incongruencies have been theoretically proven? The materiality of the body does not simply fall apart, does not deconstruct itself physically. Butler suggests a method of acting that is able to grant these new bodies a strategic fluidity. Parodic performances, such as drag, offer a way to subvert and destabilize gender norms, as well as offering ways to construct new bodies, which form as others deconstruct. These are not reproductions of heterotropic norms; their exaggerations reveal gender identities to be performative rather than natural as they create space for newly emerging forms. Butler writes, “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself” (137). “The parodic repetition of gender,” she explains,

exposes as well the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance. As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an “act,” as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of “the natural” that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status. (146-7)

Butler warns, “Parody by itself is not subversive” (139). Performative subversions act to astound or confound the audience.⁵⁵ Those who are astonished may realize something new; those who are confounded may recognize inconsistencies within their previous modes of thinking.

Janis Jefferies’s “Text and Textiles: Weaving Across the Borderlines” deals with the evocative qualities of textile work and challenges these evocations as romantic constructions. In a manner similar to Butler, Jefferies discusses the resistive potentials of parody by addressing the contaminating possibilities of unlikely combinations that concurrently pull on romantic, patriarchal notions of textile work and challenge those ideas by using the medium in non-traditional ways. She writes, “In a constant slippage of identity, the ‘boundaried boundarilessness’ measures a fraying hem; a postmodern practice of not belonging to one practice or another” (Jefferies 1995, 166). The combination of the unlikely causes these slippages that critically question the possibility of the fixed definition, thereby destabilizing the notions attached to textile work and worker.

Toby Miller describes a politics of parody as “the playful satire of symbolic irreverency that sends messages of subversion as much through its mode of address as its substantive content” (Miller 1993, 203), and Linda Hutcheon states, “irony opens up new space, literally between opposing meanings, where new things can happen” (Hutcheon 1991, 17). The actions of Revolutionary Knitting Circle participants, both as performance and personal activity, disrupt the narrative of commonsense, combining the illogical to contradict indoctrinated knowledges. Bakhtin writes, “laughter is directed towards something higher – toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders.... Parodying is the creation of a decrowning double; it is that same ‘world turned inside out’” (Bakhtin 1998, 254). It is

⁵⁵ I would like to acknowledge Sean Haberle for pointing out the usefulness of the words astounding and confounding within this discussion.

within these discussions that I situate the enactment and reception of what I call the eloquent parody.

The eloquent parody is specifically political and deconstructionist in its form. Its appearance is seemingly inconsistent, seemingly odd, and this surprising appearance is able to compel the audience, whether intended or accidental, into a relationship that is attentive and sympathetic. Audiences are set “off kilter” as they encounter an operational example of something that is considered unlikely and illogical. By signalling already established notions of knitting and knitters as comforting, gentle and welcoming, the eloquent parody enacted by the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) is able to compel these audiences to remain thoughtful of its meaning.⁵⁶ Audiences are often confounded upon first encountering these actions, but thoughtful reflection urges their responses beyond this point and into an astonishing realization that these actions are not unreasonable, but are in fact reasonable. What become newly understood as unreasonable are the constructions upon which the initial confoundment was based. Thus, the eloquent parody is able to expose discontinuities within the meta-narrative of the everyday, and, in its simplicity, is able to convey the vulnerability of the dominant narrative.

poetic resistances

It's a metaphor and an action.

Neufeld 2003

In a discussion of the post-modern suspicion of narrative as a normative tool within feminist film criticism, Teresa de Lauretis asserts that potential feminist uses of narrative nonetheless exist. However, the narrative she argues for is a poetic one, oppositional to

⁵⁶ Sandra Flood writes, “Knowledge about objects comes in two ways, through formal education and through making. An enormous number of people have experienced craft-making as a leisure activity. If there is any special appeal of craft to a wide public, I believe it comes out of this wide experience of making” (Flood 2002, 97).

hegemony because of its ability to create a “self-subversive coherence” (de Lauretis 2000, 274). This poetic, or contaminated, narrative actively questions normative coherence through a disconnected layering of text, image and audio.

I suggest that eloquent parodies, as performances, enact this type of multilayered narrative. Conflating traditionally opposed actions, eloquent parodies create a jarring aesthetic that is able to captivate audiences and destabilize their deeply believed notions through public performances of the conventionally unlikely. Undertaken in a committed and dedicated posture, these actions hint at a possible re-reading of these performances as self-motivated activities.⁵⁷ I use the term “stitching with tongues out” to encapsulate both the childlike resistive action of sticking a tongue out, and the tendency to stick a tongue out while concentrating on work. Although not all of the activists discussed within this chapter stitch, they each assume postures both of play and concentration during their actions. In so doing, the activists create a performance that can be constantly re-read.

Through the following discussions of contemporary knitting projects, I accumulate evidence supporting the operation of eloquent parody within the work of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s). Each project is examined as a way to focus on certain aspects of parody within contemporary knitting. Barbara Hunt’s *Antipersonnel* utilizes the odd combination of the slowly hand-made, mechanized weapon to create an accessible and alarming critique of landmines. The zine *Knit Yer Own Beard* operates through a lo-fi aesthetic as a way to counter gender normativity in a format that questions the glossy magazines that help to construct and affirm these roles. Stitch ‘N Bitch inserts sexual references into knitting that contradict preconceived notions of grandma and an overt sexuality that opposes normative

⁵⁷ In a discussion of disguised resistance, James Scott explores the ambiguities aroused by mimicking the symbolism of the carnival. This ambiguity, he writes, causes the audience to ask “Are they playing or are they in earnest?” (Scott 1990, 181-2). This ambiguity acts as a potential disguise, affording participants protection from security forces.

femininity. Moving into a brief discussion of performative parodies within the realm of the mass-protest, I investigate the actions of the Raging Grannies, the Radical Cheerleaders, and the Pink Bloque in order to foreground study of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle's use of the already explicit constructions of the knitter to subvert notions of the protester. These activists, through unconventional uses of the slow, the grainy, and the irregular, perform a theatrics of the unlikely to confound and subsequently astound audiences, both intended and accidental, as a way to rupture commonsense notions.

antipersonnel

Knitting needles are also weapons.

Collette Whiten 2002

Barbara Hunt's *Antipersonnel* (1999-ongoing) is a growing collection of pink knitted landmines (see fig. 3.1). The project is a personal confrontation of an experience at a disarmament demonstration in Paris in 1998 called *The Pyramid of Shoes* (In Depth Art News 2001). While there, Hunt was disturbed by the astounding prevalence of landmines throughout the world. By conjuring established nostalgic connections with knitted objects within her critique of landmines, Hunt creates an environment in which a public can become personally linked to the project. Knitted objects, even filtered through panes of glass, remain tactile; we know what they would feel like against our skins. In her artist statement, Hunt writes,

I call this an "amnesty" project because I am transforming a destructive object into one that can do no harm. These objects deny usefulness, and privilege the private realm of personal exchange. The process of mass-production is replaced by the slow work of hand-knitting, and through this I hope to re-focus attention on the value of small personal gestures that can accumulate into a declaration of caring and hope. (Hunt 1998, 1)

Hunt's work plays on the oxymoronic, juxtaposing conventional notions of the feminine (pink, knitted, soft) with the masculine (war, weapon, bomb) to calm through

comforting associations, and destabilize through unfamiliar combinations. Drobnick and Fisher write that “at first [they] appear to be cuddly playthings, miniature UFO’s, tea cozies, potholders or erotic paraphernalia” (Drobnick and Fisher 2002, 32). The real weapons are also beautiful, sometimes resembling our mother’s Tupperware (see fig. 3.2). Appropriately, landmines are also often designed to look like something they are not. Although limited in material by their function, producers sometimes fashion them in colourful plastic to inspire a desire to touch (Drobnick and Fisher 2002, 32) (see fig. 3.3).⁵⁸ Others are simply buried beneath the surface of the ground, disguised as neutral land. These weapons restrict spatial options for people, channeling movements (or debilitating them altogether). In an informative pamphlet designed to accompany a showing of *Antipersonnel* in Kingston, Ontario, Hunt writes, “Innocent victims attempting to use their land, travel or even just play, can be killed or maimed by these horrific leftovers of war” (Hunt 2001b, 2). The movement to eradicate landmines is essentially about the returning of land to its people; it is about safe space.



Figure 3.1 Barbara Hunt, *Antipersonnel*, 2001.

⁵⁸ The landmine called the Butterfly is particularly criticized for targeting children because of its appealing and colourful aesthetic (Askew 2001).

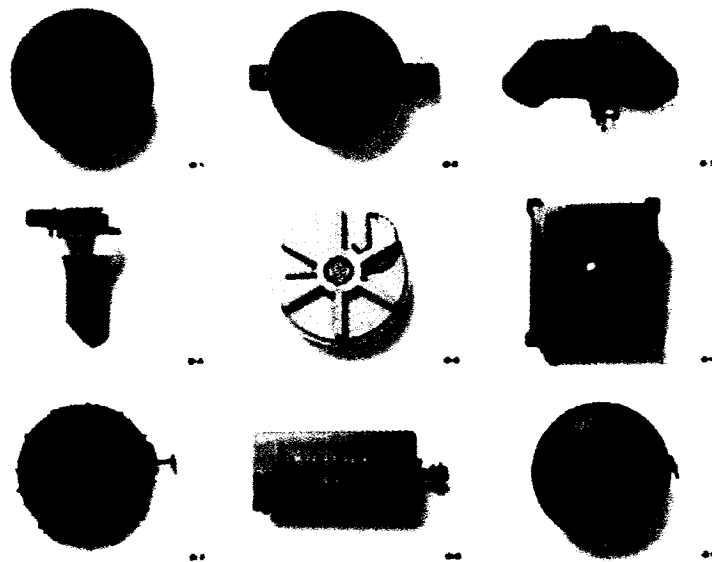


Figure 3.2 Cover art from the *No More Landmines* CD, 2001.

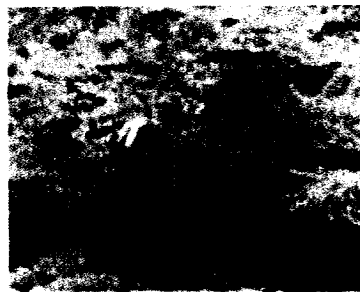


Figure 3.3 Kim Askew, *Butterfly Landmine*, 2001.

These objects are not what we think of when we consider landmines. The negotiation they arouse through the arresting combination of the banal and the explosive often manifest in uneasy laughter. Jessica Bradley, curator of an Art Gallery of Ontario showing of *Antipersonnel* wrote, “What better method than incisive humor to depose the hubris and tradition that protects figures of power and disarms those whose agency is repeatedly compromised?” (Bradley 2002). The work is further affective because it is understood through its tactility. Reflecting on *Antipersonnel*, Kirsty Robertson writes,

[S]omething that is slowly and carefully made slows down the viewer, causing him or her to stop and contemplate the knitted work as a space of difference within the museum... the odd juxtaposition of wool with weaponry...

subverts the tendency of the viewer to remain viewer alone, instead forcing them into a relationship of participation. (Robertson 2004, 15)

Hunt uses the medium of craft to personalize, to draw nearer. This acts in resistance to the increasingly impersonal technologies of war, distancing the relationship between soldier, weapon, and victim; and in resistance to a neutral museum space that traditionally places exhibitions within an impersonal and temporally disparate past. In *Museopathy*, Drobnick and Fisher write, “Both landmines and knitting bear a close, though inverse, association to the body – while one injures and causes pain, the other provides succour and warmth” (Drobnick and Fisher 2002, 32-4). This personalization of antipersonnel mines operates both within the instance of viewer reception and within the process of making itself; it is both affective and effective.

zine aesthetics

As to how we proceed against the pathological state structure, perhaps the best word is outgrow rather than overthrow.

Red Rosa and Black Maria 2002

Introducing the self-published zine-journal, *What Makes Together: Notes on the Life of Political Collectivities*, editors Adam Bobbette and Anna Feigenbaum write, “Here we have collected a series of textual and pictorial notes on the figure of togetherness” (Bobbette and Feigenbaum 2006, 4). The first few times I read those words I inserted an “r” into the word textual so that it read textural. I would like to add this “r” now. Published on various thicknesses and colours of sepia-toned paper, bound together with nuts and bolts, words and images are stamped, photocopied, punched out and printed onto already-used pages (see fig. 3.4 and fig. 3.5). The experience one gets from this textural book is not so much of reading it, but of smelling it, holding it, touching it, playing with it. It forces the reader into a sensorial relationship with the book, one in which it becomes haptically understood.

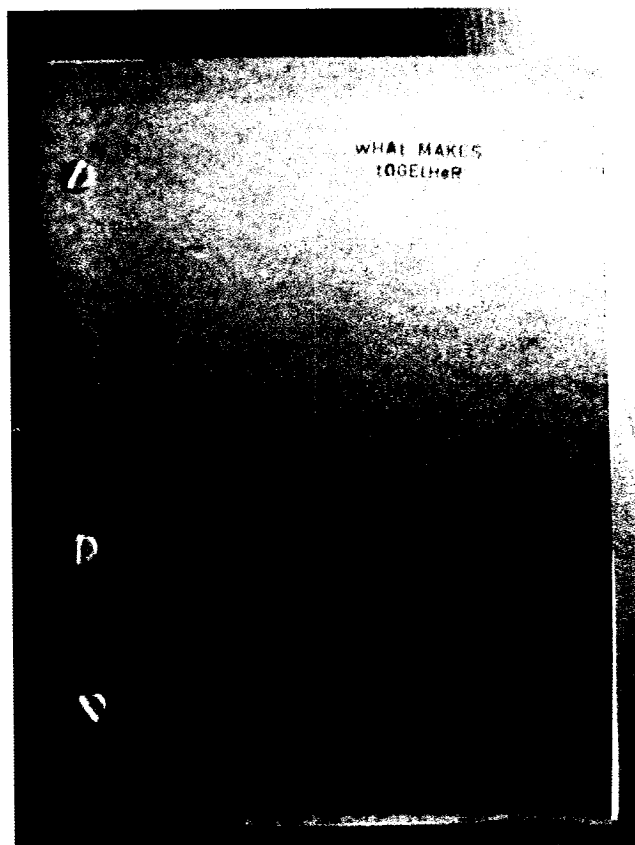


Figure 3.4 editorial collective, What Makes Together, 2006.

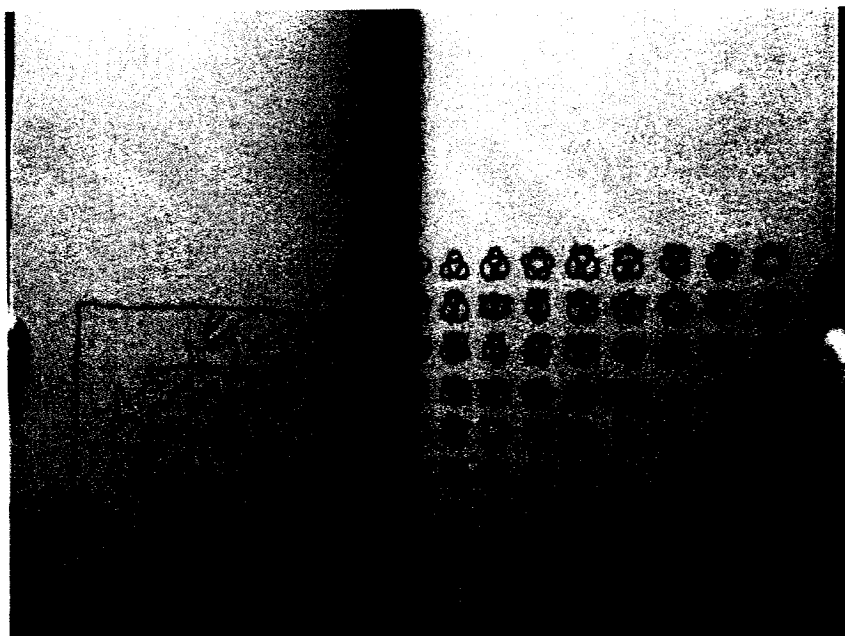


Figure 3.5 Sylvia Nickerson, Notes on the Life of Political Collectivities, 2006.

In *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura Marks writes, “Many recent experimental films and videos, flouting the maximization of visibility... are presenting a diminished visibility: their images are, quite simply, hard to see” (Marks 2002, 91). She terms these images “disappearing,” and writes that they often involve a process of degrading.⁵⁹ “Degrade” is understood as a negative process of taking away. To degrade in value is to lose value; degradation is a form of insult. Scratching and puncturing film stock can be seen as exercises in taking away; however, the visual effect is not one of negativity. In a discussion of Joyce Wieland’s experimental film, *Handtinting* (1967-8), in which the filmstrip is recoloured with fabric dyes and punctured with quilting needles, Kay Armatage suggests that such degraded film stock offers its own visual excess. The holes, scratches, and fragmentary edits *add* texture and rhythm, creating a textural film (see fig. 3.6). These ways of making render their process visible, leaving an obvious residue on the final product. Janine Marchessault has written, “The emphasis on process over product, on the artisanal over the professional, on the small and the personal over the big and universal... poses a resistance to an instrumental culture which bestows love, fame, and fortune on the makers of big feature narratives” (Marchssault 1999, 142). In this way, opting for textural images is a subversive act.

⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the choice to label any image as disappearing rests comfortably within a normative idea in which images are intended, important and actual. It is more accurate to refer to these images as textural.



Figure 3.6 Joyce Wieland, *Still from Handtinting*, 1967-8.

Amy Spencer writes of the aesthetic of recent Do It Yourself (DIY) currents as “lo-fi” (Spencer 2005). This lo-fi aesthetic, arising out of a process of cutting and pasting, photocopying photocopies, and hand folding and stapling, often yields textural results. It is an oppositional inversion of the glossy, the professional, the *hi-fi*. The self-published zine, *Knit Yer Own Beard* (Rebecca 2004), offers a basic, adaptable pattern for a knitted beard to be worn on cold days together with mittens, toques and scarves. Accessible to most, the instructions refuse to use the language of knitting patterns, as these abbreviated directions tend to be illegible to all but the already knitting savvy; it opts instead for wordy descriptions and photographic illustrations.⁶⁰ The cover image positions the female beard wearer as a superhero of sorts, scarf blowing in the wind, ready for anything (see fig. 3.7). Juxtaposition of historical quotations and contemporary play is used as “an end in itself because of its destabilizing effects” (Miller 1993, 206).

⁶⁰ Further, the history of zine-making positions this as an accessible project because the medium itself is an experiment in accessible publishing. The zine’s obvious cost-effective production on black and white photocopied, hand stapled and cut sheets, word-processed on an old typewriter, with a casual attitude for grammar and spelling, lends itself to any budget. This is *not* a glossy copy of *Vogue Knitting*. Here the zine inspires another kind of DIY project, that of personal media making (see Duncombe 2005, 198-208).



Figure 3.7 Rebecca, *Knit Yer Own Beard*, 2004.

Positioning the history of knitting not as a women's activity, but rather as a survival tool used by men, suitable and useful for "the wilds," the zine, *Knit Yer Own Beard*, recalls Lord Baden-Powell's instructions to Canadian Boy Scouts in a 1954 manual: "Shackleton's men in the arctic expeditions were all able to knit their own socks and mitts, and I have known many hunters and travelers and soldiers, especially those from Scotland, who could always knit their own stockings" (Rebecca 2004, 1). The zine subverts the widely-remembered, blanketed history of knitting as a feminine domestic activity, and uncovers an alternate and often suppressed masculine history. Contradictorily, the zine also includes photographs (often used as tools to convey historical evidence and as registers for memory) that show women knitting.⁶¹ This juxtaposition plays with preconceived notions of knitting that subconsciously frame our understandings of it. With avenues to conventional understandings disturbed, the reader/viewer is now also ready for anything.

⁶¹ Susan Sontag writes, "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge.... Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it" (Sontag 1977, 5).

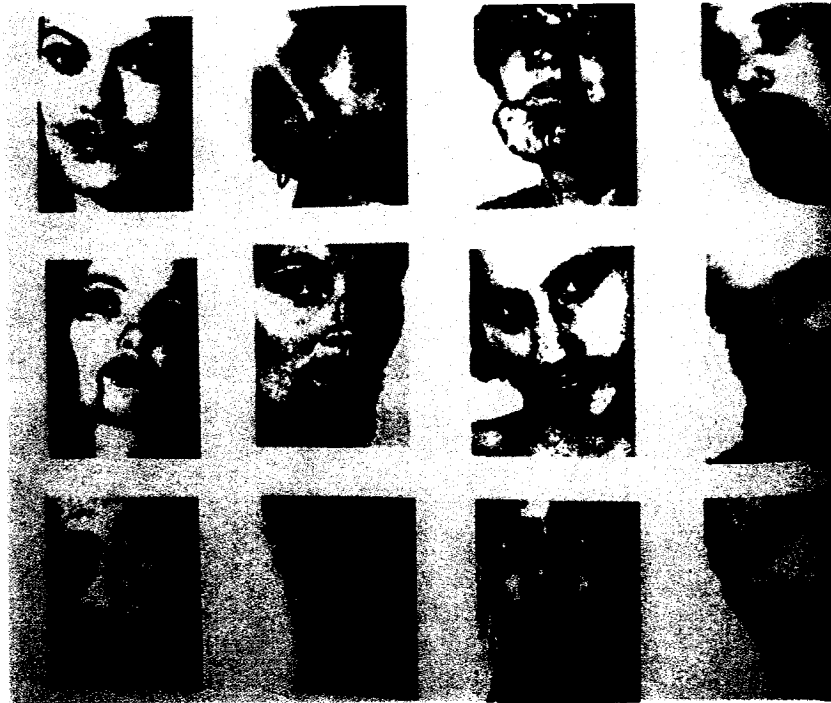


Figure 3.8 Rebecca, Beards are for Everyone, 2004.

Next, definitions of beard are destabilized. Text firmly places the beard in the realm of men: “A beard is defined as a ‘heavy growth of hair on the chin, cheeks and adjacent parts of the face of the human adult male’” (Rebecca 2004, 3). However, upon turning the page, photographs of women wearing knitted facial hair are revealed to playfully subvert this definition (see fig. 3.8). After hegemonic gender norms are destabilized, Rebecca, the author, explains the exercise: “Knitting is no longer a tool of survival. It’s a leisure activity... beard wearing might be risky, a statement, a group experiment. I hope you are up to the challenge” (Rebecca 2004, 5). This layering of contradictory images and words within a lo-fi aesthetic, amounts to the contaminated coherence of a different kind of narrativity. These images are themselves a part of a haptic play able to enact an eloquent parody.

chicks with sticks | men with balls

Wanna question my feminist cred? Watch out for the flying needles.

Maureen McClarnon 2004

In “New Technologies to Form New Selves,” Toby Miller explores how parody can act as a tool both to destabilize and subvert dominant ideologies and to “establish the possibility of fashioning ourselves anew in a distinctively postmodern way” (Miller 1993, 208). Gender-benders are using knitting to destabilize hegemonic heterosexual discourse. Using sexual puns to play with stereotypes, they dismantle dominant knowledges, ushering in a new and fractured idea of knitter. Within this movement, everyone from manly men to domestic goddesses are getting their knit-on, unravelling norms, rendering material to create new and disparate costumes for disparate selves (see fig. 3.9).

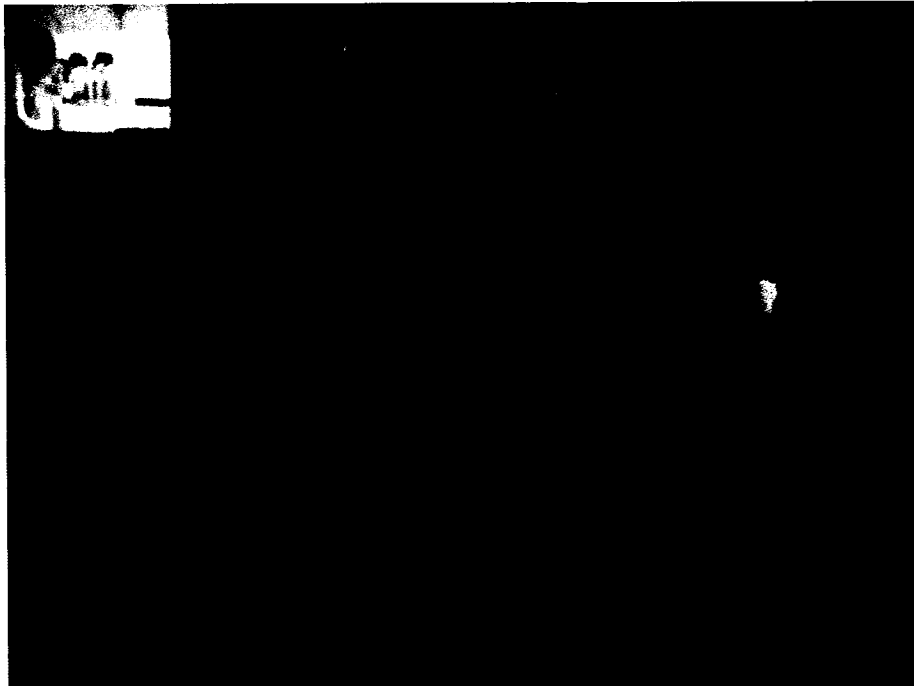


Figure 3.9 Los Angeles Stitch 'N Bitch, Randi's First Three Rows, Nice..., 2004.

Stitch 'N Bitch, the 1950's phrase borrowed by *Bust Magazine* editor Debbie Stoller, frames knitting as a third-wave reclamation of girly crafts.⁶² She writes, "By loudly reclaiming old-fashioned skills, women are rebelling against a culture that seems to reward only the sleek, the mass produced, the male" (Stoller 2003, 10). Stoller renewed her love of knitting on a cross-country book tour and became obsessed. Not only out of a love of doing it, but also out of a desire to rescue it from its un-cool and anti-feminist reputation, she began the first Stitch 'N Bitch gathering in New York at a coffee house in 1999.⁶³ As a way to heighten the visibility of knitting, she started publishing a series of pattern books (see fig. 3.10 and fig. 3.11).

Stitch 'N Bitch positions knitting as a tool of the sexually-liberated, crafty woman, rejecting the image of knitter as grandmother by featuring patterns with risqué names and descriptions.⁶⁴ Knitting was reintroduced to a feminist culture not as an oppressive task of the dominated-by-patriarchy-domestic-slave, but rather as an ironic way to get new, personally-tailored super-hip clothes. All over, people eagerly began their own groups.⁶⁵

⁶² Stoller writes, "When I'd tell people about my latest obsession [with knitting]... friends responded with "Really?" or "How interesting," both spoken with an air of disbelief, even a touch of disdain. After all, I had gotten a Ph.D. in the psychology of women and had started *Bust*, a feminist magazine – what was I doing knitting?" Finding that knitting was considered un-feminist, she decided to take it back as a way to re-value traditionally feminine activities: "I had a mission. It was time to 'take back the knit'" (Stoller 2003, 7-9).

⁶³ The craft lends itself well to an upwardly-mobile crowd. Projects are easily put on hold and tucked away, leading not only to unfinished sweaters, but also to collective crafting in various and changing locations. As Debbie Stoller writes, "Knitting makes for a great urban hobby because a ball of yarn and a knitting project are light and portable, they're easy to carry from home to work, and they don't take up much space in small, cramped apartments" (Stoller, 2003, 11). Unlike quilting, which requires a large furniture-like frame, and embroidery or cross-stitch, which require greater attention, knitting also allows close proximities and eye contact.

⁶⁴ Here, I recall the discussion in Chapter Two, where I point out that Stitch 'N Bitch knitting patterns are intentionally and self-confidently sexual.

⁶⁵ *Stitch 'N Bitch Nation* includes many self-written group descriptions from the United States, the British Isles, Australia, Japan, and Canada (Stoller 2004).

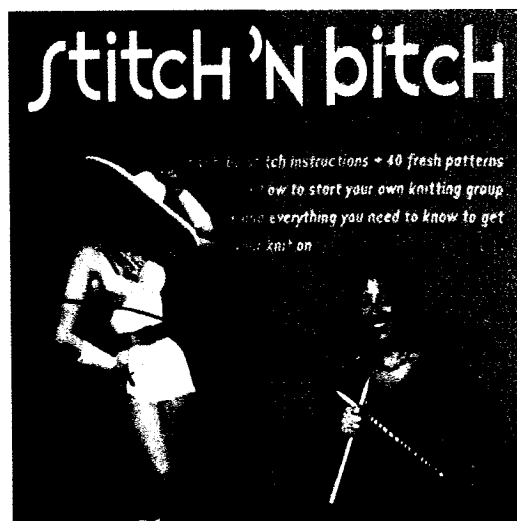


Figure 3.10 Vickie Howell and Marc Mann, *Stitch 'N Bitch* Cover, 2003.

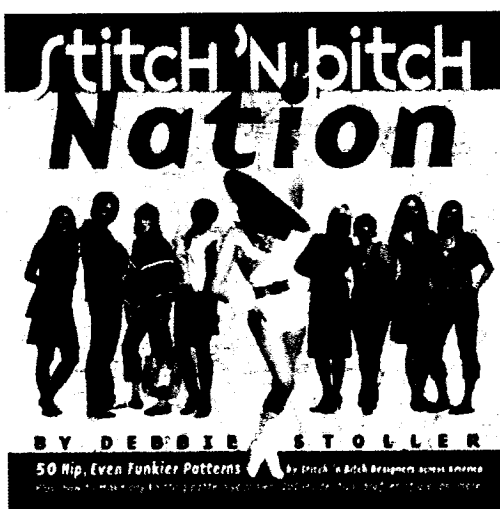


Figure 3.11 Karen Pearson, *Stitch 'N Bitch Nation* Cover, 2004.

Within this community male knitters are getting together under group names such as “dicks with sticks” and “men with balls,” measuring each other not by penis size, but by the size of each other’s yarn stashes.⁶⁶ These men are knitting with their tongues out, strategically using sarcasm while concentrating on stitch count (see fig. 3.12 and fig. 3.13).

⁶⁶ Kate Boyd links the size of a person’s yarn stash to the size of their sex drive. She writes, “Few among us are without the sin of overindulgence in yarn. While a certain, prudent amount of luxury fiber wouldn’t hurt anyone, a yarn stash that is too massive, too overflowing, too voluptuous, too unrestrained – well, such a stash might be construed as being suggestive of licentiousness” (Boyd 2004). In fact, code used within the KnitList, an online knitting community, refers to going to the knitting store as a “stash enrichment expedition” or “SEX” (Stoller 2003, 116).

They destabilize ideas of masculinity and knitting by juxtaposing jockey, macho names with the feminized craft, and reclaim knitting for men also.⁶⁷ As these puns are passed around, shared and spread, they expand a language of parody.



Figure 3.12 and Figure 3.13 Washington MenKnit Group, Our Group, 2005.

street theater: perverting the radical

Any public refusal, in the teeth of power, to produce the words, gestures, and other signs of normative compliance is typically construed – and typically intended – as an act of defiance... a throwing down of the gauntlet, a symbolic declaration of war.

James Scott 1990

A wave of feminist street theatrics have endeavored to re-imagine protest space as inclusive and fun. When interviewed by Kate Feld, Todd Gitlin stated, “Often people who organize demonstrations want to do more than apply their presence to political ends.... They want to project a presence that seems like an embodiment of their values. Cheerfulness says, ‘we are having a better time than they are.’ It promises recruits, ‘stick around, you’ll have more fun’” (Gitlin 2003). The Raging Grannies, the Revolutionary Cheerleaders, and the Pink Bloque each exaggerate the performance of the feminine role as a

⁶⁷ A list of men’s knitting groups is available at MenKnit (www.menknit.com). They work to reinsert the male knitter into the history of the craft and reclaim space for themselves within the contemporary practice of knitting.

way to assert a feminine presence while building towards a more emotionally sustainable resistance.

The Raging Grannies emerged in 1987 in Victoria, British Columbia. The first group was reacting against sexism and ageism within the peace coalition of which they were members. Carol Roy writes, “Relegated to making coffee, they found little receptivity for their ideas” (Carole Roy 2002, 235). The group sings satirical songs and performs in costume at public demonstrations.⁶⁸ They use the image of the enfeebled grandmother to their advantage, clothing themselves in exaggerations of the elderly feminine thereby protecting their right to speak (or sing) and be heard (see fig. 3.14 and 3.15). Through this, Burns asserts, “They reverse cultural expectations by empowering themselves in a society which belittles their experience and point of view” (Burns 1992, 21; quoted in Roy 2002, 236).



Figure 3.14 Photographer Unknown, British Columbia Raging Grannies, 2005.

⁶⁸ A sample of its song lyrics is included as Appendix D.



Figure 3.15 Photographer Unknown, Toronto Raging Grannies Sing on Parliament Hill, 2001.

The radical cheerleaders emerged following the 1996 Democratic National Convention in Chicago (Feld 2003). The group was originally founded to liven up boring protests (see fig. 3.16). They also loudly proclaim a female presence at demonstrations (although males are more than welcome to join, few do). Here again, the image of female is emphasized, although again, as with the Raging Grannies, this image is exaggerated and is slightly defamiliarized. Instead of a team icon, the group often opts for the anarchist symbol of the circle A (see fig. 3.17). Fake moustaches are sometimes worn, and lipstick is often applied just a little too liberally. Instead of “He’s our Man” cheers, the Radical Cheerleaders write their own radical feminist and anti-capitalist versions.⁶⁹ A radical cheerleader named Tricky states, “Radical cheerleading is protest+performance. It’s activism with pom-poms and middle fingers extended. It’s screaming fuck capitalism while doing a split” (Bisticas-Cocoves 2003, 9-10).

⁶⁹ Transcripts of some of these cheers are included as Appendix E.



Figure 3.16 Photographer Unknown, Radical Cheerleaders at the IMF/World Bank Meetings, 2002.



Figure 3.17 Photographer Unknown, Radical Cheerleaders at the March for Women's Lives, 2004.

The Pink Bloque, a radical feminist group, was inspired by a group of Radical Cheerleaders at the 2000 International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank meetings in Prague (Bisticas-Cocoves 2003, 9), and had their “coming out party on May Day 2002” (Caidor and Greenwald 2005). In costumes made of pink fabric, they perform dance routines set to pop-songs (see fig. 3.18). The Chicago group states, “The Pink Bloque decided that our approach to revolutionizing radical politics combines cute outfits, astute

social/political/economic/cultural criticism, catchy slogans inspired by pop music, and dance routines; in short, we bring the radical booty to shake to street protest and demonstration.” (Caidor and Greenwald 2005). Through this refiguring of resistance, the group seeks to make protest culture more accessible and sustainable: “We found some of the radical left's '60s protest tactics and didactic rhetoric alienating and ineffective at engaging the larger public – so we decided to make protests more fun and more visually engaging by using the sounds, images and lingo of contemporary corporate popular culture” (ibid.).⁷⁰



Figure 3.18 Photographer Unknown, Pink Bloque, 2004.

These groups pervert notions of activist and activism by combining conspicuous performances of exaggerated femininity with radical action, re-conceiving resistance as social and increasing its accessibility. Importantly, each of these groups also contains an invisible aesthetic of collectivity. Participants are deeply invested in what they are doing and the ways they are doing it. Even though they are not knitting, theirs is an eloquent parody; they too work with their tongues out.

⁷⁰ Though the original Chicago group has since disbanded, it maintains a web archive of its actions and philosophies at <http://www.pinkbloque.org/>.

the revolution will wear a cardigan

Needles are flying, the guerilla knitters are here!

Charlotte Higgins 2002

The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) aims to re-work damaging notions of the protester, dispelling myths of the “bomb throwing,” “buffoonish” rebel by couching anarchistic modes of engagement in a visually familiar nostalgic activity (Porton 1999, 4).⁷¹ During an action at the Kananaskis G8 meeting, knitters made tree cozies (CBC News 2002) to render visible the barrier between the activists and the secretive meetings, harking back to actions in Québec City in which the fence was decorated with an assortment of feminized objects (Lauzon 2003, 63).⁷² Visual oxymorons, such as an iconic ball of wool with a lit fuse, playfully confront negative conceptions of protester (see fig 3.19). Here, activists still love to lob bombs, but they are symbolic; they demolish concepts, not property.⁷³



Figure 3.19 Revolutionary Knitting Circle, *Bomb of Yarn*, 2002.

⁷¹ Anarchistic is used to refer to groupings or actions that operate in a way similar to anarchist modes of organizing, but do not self-identify as anarchist.

⁷² Neufeld states, “We use this humorous approach to show the contrast of the peaceful act of knitting and these forms of protest that have been to a large extent misrepresented as harsh conflict” (Revolutionary Knitting Circle 2005a).

⁷³ Scott writes, “What is left... is an allusion to profanity without full accomplishment of it; a blasphemy with its teeth pulled” (Scott 1990, 153).

The construction and carrying of the Peace Knits Banner sought to challenge the condescending label “peacenik” by celebrating a slightly re-worked version (see fig. 20).⁷⁴

The group writes,

Some people see the word “Revolutionary” and automatically assume violence. The knitting circle is not a revolution of violence and destruction. The knitting circle is a constructive revolution – we are creating community and local independence, which, in this corporate society, is a truly revolutionary act. (Revolutionary Knitting Circle 2005a)



Figure 3.20 Calgary Revolutionary Knitting Circle, Peace Knits Banner, 2004.

The actions of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) are cloaked in a theatrics of the familiar.

As Paul Lichterman writes, activists

⁷⁴ The Peace Knits Banner was constructed in preparation for the 2002 G8 meeting. Its message was especially apt in the wake of media coverage that aligned the activists with the 1960's hippie movement. Writing for *Maclean's*, Brian Bergman reported, “From the outset, activists were deeply conflicted about staging demonstrations in Kananaskis Country, fearing they might damage the natural environment. For months, they touted a plan known as ‘solidarity village,’ a kind of anti-globalist's Woodstock that would have seen 10,000 or more camp out on lands near Kananaskis for a week of music, agitprop theatre and consciousness-raising workshops. Those hopes were dashed when both G8 organizers and the Stoney Indian band, which owns a vast tract of land near the summit site, failed to buy into the vision. The activists then scrambled to find a suitable site in Calgary, asking the city to let them pitch their tents in one of the urban parks. No way, responded Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier. ‘Park space is there for the people of this city to use and enjoy,’ he told *Maclean's*. ‘It's not at the behest of others who want to take it and abuse it’” (Bergman 2002).

project identities that make dissenting views both more meaningful to their holders and more visible to the state. They enact rituals of solidarity and conversion that help people over the divide between bystander and participant and sustain them after the jump.... In search of an elusive balance, successful social movements re-work pre-existing traditions and ideologies, enough to promote political and cultural change, but not so much that activists become disempoweringly marginal. (Lichterman 1998, 402)

Conspicuously combining two familiar roles, those of knitter and protester, which in their very construction are opposed, the group performs an accessible and eloquent parody, couching resistances within the benign act of knitting. Grant Neufeld states,

using contradictory images, jarring images, putting the words revolutionary and knitting in the same sentence, gets people going, "Well, what's that all about?" It brings up questions for people and that's a very positive thing... I find for myself knitting in public, people will come up to me... because they're not used to seeing a youthful male knit. Then I explain, "Well, I'm part of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle and we challenge corporate rule..." and people will actually talk to me about that because they have started the conversation. Knitting [creates] a friendlier environment for dialogue to take place, it makes it possible for the people to feel comfortable entering into a discussion because there is this very peaceful calm and productive aspect to knitting, it's not seen as just a harsh attack of ideology, it's something that has a very positive social implication. (Neufeld 2002)

Tear gas, rubber bullets and pepper spray are less justifiable in the public mind when shot at those who appear friendly and idealistic on film and in print.⁷⁵ By performing the act of knitting, Revolutionary Knitters deny the potential for misrepresentation because they conjure peaceful and friendly notions of the grandmother knitter. This type of action can re-open space for a variety of resistant acts (Klien 2002, 254).

The Revolutionary Knitting Circle'(s) practices, as both performance and personal activity, play with the accepted, combining the unlikely to throw into question indoctrinated knowledges. Upon this newly wobbly ground, the group rescues important and often ignored tenants of activist activity and introduces them to an accidental audience caught off-

⁷⁵ Importantly, the group is anything but idealistic. Its revolution resides in the realm of the everyday politic, offering examples of how to begin living off the grid right now.

guard and interested by the spectacle. In doing so, they re-complicate anarchism through communication with passers-by who are often compelled to ask, “*What* are you doing?” In turn, this creates a platform for a discussion of the underrepresented and the unrepresentable.

Chapter Four

gathering off the grid: the safer space of the uncontainable in between

loosely knit gatherings

The visual alone cannot account for what is radical activism.... Protest as visual event is easily co-opted. Protest as sensory event is the perfect culture jam.

Robertson 2006, 159

Walking on a downtown street invites a certain kind of looking. Regardless of original intent, a walker becomes a window shopper, and is compelled to gaze at the displays, engaged in an act of consumptive desire. Café windows are no different, advertising a specific kind of atmosphere, a certain kind of imagined community that one has the option of fitting into for the price of a coffee. Through the front windows of *The Sleepless Goat Café and Workers' Cooperative* in Kingston Ontario, under the rainbow flag of the co-operative and the black and red flag of the anarcho-syndicalist, you can sometimes see a gathering of knitters organized under the name, The Revolutionary Knitting Circle (see fig. 4.1).



Figure 4.1, Photographer Unknown, *Sleepless Goat Café and Worker's Co-operative*, 2005.

By sitting in the front of this café, in full view of the shopping public, the group seems to offer itself as a product. In contrast to many resistant practitioners fearful of resembling or, worse still, becoming a part of mass-marketable culture, these activists do not appear to care that their actions are seemingly so co-optable. The process of co-optation, however, is not a simple process of absorption and consumption. Information transference does not travel solely from the othered 'activist' community to the mass-marketable. Rather, the subaltern takes from the altern, and the altern takes from the subaltern. This relational process of appropriation and reappropriation changes the information as it undergoes translation, rendering each intrinsically distinct.

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), James C. Scott discusses the ways in which power relations form patterns of interaction. Scott suggests that there are differences in speech (both in content and form) that occur when a person (or group) interacts with a person (or group) in a different position of power and that these differences are often the result of strategic choices. Scott refers to these different patterns of interaction as hidden and public transcripts.⁷⁶ Subordinate groups generate a hidden transcript (sometimes called backstage talk) as a way to critique the dominant without fear of reproach.⁷⁷ Scott writes, "The hidden transcript is... the privileged site for nonhegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive discourse" (Scott 1990, 25) and, he continues, it "comes, in this way, to be the repository of the assertions whose open expression would be dangerous" (40). Within spaces controlled by the dominant group, the subordinate group works from the public

⁷⁶ Michel de Certeau writes, "Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many 'ways of operating': victories of the 'weak' over the 'strong' (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning,' maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike" (de Certeau 1998, 490).

⁷⁷ Dominant groups generate their own hidden transcripts.

transcript.⁷⁸ At the same time, the public transcript, while appearing to conform to hegemony, can also register subtle resistance.⁷⁹ Therefore, while the dominant group often manipulates or limits modes of interaction available to a subordinate group, that group can also exercise agency and manipulate the situation itself without an open declaration of resistance that might incite retribution. In this way, information travelling between groups in different positions of power passes through a filter of sorts, germinating, fertilizing and protecting marginalized speech patterns. I propose that this filter acts in resistance to the process of de-politicization, salvaging valued elements of the otherwise co-optable.

The café window can be understood as a metaphor for this process of filtration. The glass eliminates smell, sound and tactility, aestheticizing a multi-sensory happening. The aesthetic appearance of the activist crafter is what I call an ironic veneer. While the ironic veneer of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) is co-optable, and has to some extent already been co-opted, the immaterial embodied experience and its refusal to be contained, denies co-optation.⁸⁰ While the ironic veneer is able to destabilize and subvert the hegemonic because it combines the unlikely to contaminate fixed definitions, the group situates its efficacy within its ability to build community bonds and local subsistence. As Hakim Bey writes, “‘Fight for your right to party’ is in fact not a parody of the radical struggle but a new

⁷⁸ The dominant group has its own public transcript, “the self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen.... It is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule” (Scott 1990, 18).

⁷⁹ Scott writes, “their politics... make use of disguise, deception, and indirection while maintaining an outward impression, in power-laden situations, of willing, even enthusiastic consent” (17).

⁸⁰ Non-activist pattern books line the shelves of Indigo and Chapters with such titles as: *Knitting for Anarchists*, *AlterKnits*, and *Teen Knitting Club*. Further, Jennifer Anisef writes, “Knitting is a trendy pastime; urban hipsters can be seen knitting in cafes and bars, and fashion magazines celebrate ‘Celebrities Who Knit.’ Mainstream teen magazines such as *YM* and *Seventeen* run regular craft columns that feature instructions on simple craft projects. Craft techniques have even infiltrated the largely digital world of graphic design, where magazines such as *i-D*, *The Face*, and *Elle* incorporate embroidery into their design layout. One could easily dismiss this phenomenon as merely a trend, if there was not something more substantial at play here” (Anisef 2004, 2).

manifestation of it, appropriate to an age which offers TVs and telephones as ways to ‘reach out and touch’ other human beings, ways to ‘Be There!’” (Bey 1991).

Within a discussion of new tendencies within activist art practices, Sophie Le-Phat Ho suggests that uncontainable and immaterial experiences such as those created by Revolutionary Knitting Circle actions contain an “invisible aesthetic of collectivity”:

As the distinction between front-line activists and artists has been blurred, activist burnout has also spread into artistic spheres – so that we have been recently witnessing a slight shift in approaches with regards to the creation of art that is self-consciously political. Where one is imagining posters with radical slogans and graphics, or processions of giant puppets, another route is being developed – one which I would qualify the aesthetics as being invisible; one where the artistic goal is not “a message” but “the collective” – in other words, an art that actually aims to “make together.” (Le-Phat Ho 2006, 7)

Understanding collectivity as an invisible substance explains the uncontainable yet substantial “something” that is not translatable through glass.

Suggesting that the parodic disturbance is offered solely as a visual, I intend to show how, within the sensory experience of participation, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) generates an uncontainable and invisible haptic space that sustains revolution as it works emotional support into its very operation. Knitting as a means to gather creates a space that is embodied and sensual. This textural space creates a common ground upon which people can easily connect, a space already linked to comfort through established notions of crafting. Resisting co-optation, these modes of organizing are able to spread as a subaltern virus.

Reading Revolutionary Knitting Circle tactics through the theoretical writings of Hakim Bey, Paula Gustafson, Richard Day, and Laura Marks, I suggest that Revolutionary Knitting Circle actions are capable of manifesting the conditions necessary for the creation of haptic spaces. Pulling from Paula Gustafson’s (2002) and Laura Marks’s (2000, 2002) theories on the haptic, and from Kirsty Robertson’s (2006) discussions of the embodied experience, I argue that because these groups mediate social interactions through touch, they

generate comfortable space and create a situation in which those spaces are able to move beyond the actual geographical location of the meeting. They are able to do so because they reside as well within the skin of each participant.⁸¹

Haptic spaces are mediated through touch. Revolutionary Knitting Circle meetings are structured in such a way as to encourage participants to be in intimate personal contact with a textile project, one that belongs to the individual, one that will be packed out of the meeting to be worked again somewhere else. Debbie Stoller writes, “one’s thoughts get worked right into one’s knitting... whatever I was thinking about when I last worked on a piece would immediately spring back into my mind when I picked up the work again later on, as though knitting were a sort of mental tape recorder” (Stoller 2003, 9). The collective experience of the group meeting is registered by the body through the haptic experience of knitting. Building upon Radka Donnell’s assertion that the act of being silent can function as actual space, I suggest that these registered experiences are able to re-create the actual space of the group meeting even within a solitary space (Donnell 1990, 18-20).

As such, the spaces created within these meetings are able to defy both space and time, moving them beyond, yet still in affinity with, Bey’s much-used theory of the TAZ. These spaces are able to transcend actual geographical terrain, existing as embodied space that remains as a residue within the skin of each participant.

⁸¹ The spaces created by the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) are certainly comfortable. Comfortable spaces are often criticized, and calls against them often originate within anarchist movements. (Both Bookchin [1995, 3] and Taiaiake [2005, 54] are examples of this). While a refusal to become comfortable can operate in resistance to hegemonic stagnation, it can also create unsustainable, self-defeatist movements. Comfortable spaces are not necessarily sites of palliation; rather, they can offer more effective spaces within which to meet internal criticisms openly, or to re-group after refusing comfort elsewhere.

haptic sensibilities

Writing on Laura Marks's *The Skin of the Film*, Donato Totaro explains that haptic cinema “embraces the proximal senses (smell, taste, touch) as a means for embodying knowledge and cultivating memory” (Totaro 2006, 3). This cultivated memory, called “pure memory” as opposed to “habitual memory,” has the ability to undermine learned or conditioned responses and can work to blur and subsequently deconstruct manufactured definitions and distinctions. Paula Gustafson explains somatic knowledge as “the pre-linguistic knowing gained from physical, sensory experience” (Gustafson 2002, 9). Linking haptic knowledge to a study of textile arts, she explores connections between touch and memory in a similar way, working to revalue the marginalized knowledges that arise from textural interaction.

The CrimethInc. Collective's book, *Recipes for Disaster: an Anarchist Cookbook*, offers over six hundred pages of ideas, anecdotes, and advice “to create, by any means necessary, a situation that goes beyond the point of no return” (CrimethInc. Collective 2004, coverpage). In hopes of escaping the current system, the collective gives practical advice concerning everything from sexual relationships to dumpster diving, and Molotov cocktail making. For the collective, skill-sharing is not only an important means of fostering relationships and mutual aid, but also of undermining hierarchy and oppression (18). The members write,

The way to dissolve the authority of the revolutionary organization is simply to communalize its powers by extending them to everyone.... The moment of revolution is the dissolution of the revolutionary organization – that is, the appropriation of its resources by all. (609-10)

The CrimethInc. Collective also offers advice on how to take itself over, undermining its own authority.

The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) operates in a similar way. It too acts as a forum for skill-sharing, spreading knitting as a viable alternative to mass-production thereby

undermining the authority of the corporation. A manifesto web-published by the original Revolutionary Knitting Circle states,

By sharing in the skills and resources of our communities, we shall become free to cast off dependencies on global trade for our subsistence. In so doing, we shall all be able to enter fairly into meaningful and equitable trade of not only goods, but also those cultural intangibles that are necessary if we are to bring about understanding, justice and peace to truly enrich our individual lives and our communities. (Revolutionary Knitting Circle 2005b)⁸²

The skills shared within the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) extend beyond that of knitting, spilling into the intangible. The group is non-branded; it offers itself freely as a suggested mode of acting. The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) claims no authority, and invites anyone to initiate her own permutation of it. Thus, it also shares a method of action. The sharing of skills acts to recover marginalized knowledges; it is an exercise in overcoming habitual memory. The addition of the haptic within its practices of skill-sharing internalizes and intensifies the learning process, as the sensory experience is able to cultivate the “pure memory” that is able to undermine the narrative of commonsense. Within the comfortable space of the open and welcoming group meeting, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) manifests and refreshes the skills necessary to “make together.” This “together” is both invisible and inaudible, a collective practice that denies co-optation while inviting participation.

in defense of silence

I work from silence and I speak out of silence.... I begin with silence not only out of experience and political conviction, but also because, though silence is a material condition, it is insubstantial and it cannot be localized.... Silence substitutes for actual space, for psychological distance, for a sense of

⁸² The complete manifesto is included as Appendix A. Like other self-spawned and directed groups around the globe, the Revolutionary Knitters are impossible to define as one entity. It is important to note that not all Revolutionary Knitters operate under this manifesto and it is likely that many have never even seen it.

privacy and intactness... silence is to be understood as an intrinsic part of the body's search for meaning amongst the noisy assaults of everyday life.

Donnell 1990, 18-20

The first thing a pattern instructs you to do is to knit a test patch. Measuring the size of this patch, and dividing it by the number of stitches made, results in what is called personal tension. Exactly how easily the yarn slips through the knitter's fingers, the way needles are held and used changes with each set of hands. The act of knitting is a personal and silent thing. But this private silence is also connective. Imagined links that we create, however consciously, to a long and variant history of knitters are conjured through the mantra of knit one, purl two. The act also registers more direct connections – to those who taught us to knit, or inspired us (our grandmothers, those hip girls knitting sexy tanks on the subway, bloggers, zinesters). Knitting pulls the knitter both inwards and outwards. It is at once solitary and social.

When I began attending Revolutionary Knitting Circle gatherings, I filed them alongside my other activist meetings, those planning for upcoming anti-corporate globalization protests, those continuing to fight against deregulation, and those more formal meetings considering the gathering and redistribution of funds through the local Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG).⁸³ When we talked about these meetings to our other, non-attendant and slightly skeptical activist peers, we lauded the group's ability to foster activist discussion and plan actions in a new and more inclusive way. It always felt like a bit of a lie. When our group gathered, we would discuss new projects, our social lives, or

⁸³ The homepage for United State PIRGs explains, "Public Interest Research Groups are a network of independent... citizen-funded organizations that advocate for the public interest" (Phelps 2006), and the Ontario PIRG homepage reads, "The membership of OPIRG Provincial is comprised of eleven autonomous, non-profit, university student-funded and directed organizations that conduct research, education, and action on social and environmental justice issues" (Ontario Public Interest Research Groups 2006). Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) often act as a home base for small or fledgling activist groups. Through these PIRGs, groups often gain access to support such as funds, meeting space, group facilitation training and administrative aid.

how exactly to cast-off.⁸⁴ Sometimes we would sit in complete silence, each working away on our own separate projects. These were our guilty pleasures.

I call these pleasures ‘guilty’ because they are seemingly so incongruous with everyday notions of productive and efficient resistant activity, and their effectiveness is often discounted, especially within resistant communities.⁸⁵ Existing notions attached to the feminine posture of crafter and activist, and an unwillingness to revalue these can result in the parallel marginalization of these actions, readings that view them solely as ironic. This reflects a failure to look beyond the aesthetic – to interact with what is really going on. In their article, “Toward an Embodied Home in a Climate of Global Alienation,” Doran George and Sarah Payton discuss the constructed and self-defeatist “hierarchies of hard-core-ness” in connection with the ways in which these criticisms arise, and argue towards the recognition of a different kind of strength. They write,

I want to talk about weakness as strength, empathy as hardcore social activism, and compassion as a tough skill to cultivate. Can we reinvest ideas of strength and recognition with concepts of flexibility, openness, confusion, kindness, foolish generosity, failure, helpfulness, and interdependence? Rather than allegiance to detachment, to celebrity, to rage, to success by any means necessary, we can help each other by placing shared value on these skills, which must be learned. At the same time, I think it’s vital that we not be made to learn these transitions alone. (George and Payton with Hartman 2005)

⁸⁴ Social discourses, such as gossip, are often discounted as important currents of information (Scott 1990, 142-3); however, Irit Rogoff suggests that the information rendered from gossip is “a radical model of postmodern knowledge which would serve us well in the reading and rewriting of gendered historical narratives” (Rogoff 1996), and James Scott discusses the ways in which gossip and rumor as subaltern channels of information can be used effectively to shield and protect resistive knowledge (Scott 1990, 142-145).

⁸⁵ Patricia D’souza, editor of *This Magazine*, discusses “calls for direct political action – rather than personal pseudo-political action – to achieve social change... knitting your own protest sign won’t get you any closer to freedom, but voting just might” (D’souza 2005).

The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) works to fulfill these desires. Gathering collectively, re-valuing the undervalued skills of textile work and social interaction, the group indeed refigures hardcore activism to invest it with all of these traits.

Recalling, for a moment, Sophie Le-Phat Ho's discussion of a recent shift in the approaches of political art, I have suggested that the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) aims to "make together" (Le-Phat Ho 2006, 7). Indeed, its goal is not the message so much as it is collectivity. The object of the Peace Knits Banner, discussed in Chapter Three, was not solely to communicate a message about protester stigma, but to build community through collective action.

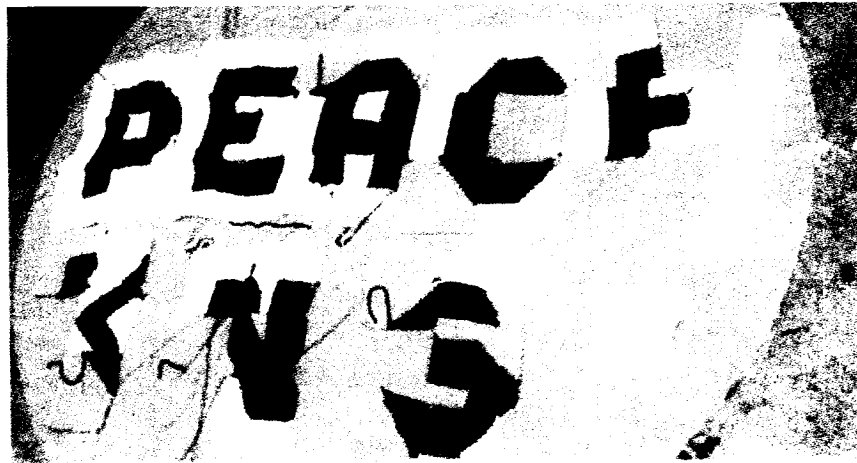


Figure 4.2 Calgary Revolutionary Knitting Circle, Bringing the Squares Together, 2004.

The banner itself is constructed of multiple squares, knitted in different wool by different hands. The pattern reads, "This pattern describes how to construct a banner from a number of squares so that the work can be divided across a number of knitters (the squares could also be made by crochet or other textile arts)" (Revolutionary Knitting Circle 2004).⁸⁶ As a way to keep the project accessible to knitters of various skill levels, the squares were listed in order of difficulty. The first banner was organized and assembled by the

⁸⁶ The pattern is included in its entirety as Appendix F.

Calgary Revolutionary Knitting Circle (see fig. 4.2 and fig. 4.3), and other groups have since organized the construction of their own versions of the banner (see fig. 4.4). As the received squares are stitched together, the community is metaphorically stitched together in a way that allows each member to be personally asserted within the whole.⁸⁷ To a great extent, all of the actions of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle are concerned with the community-building qualities of collective action. During Knit-Ins, participants are often more focused on social interactions with fellow knitters than the outwardly performative nature of their action (see fig. 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8).

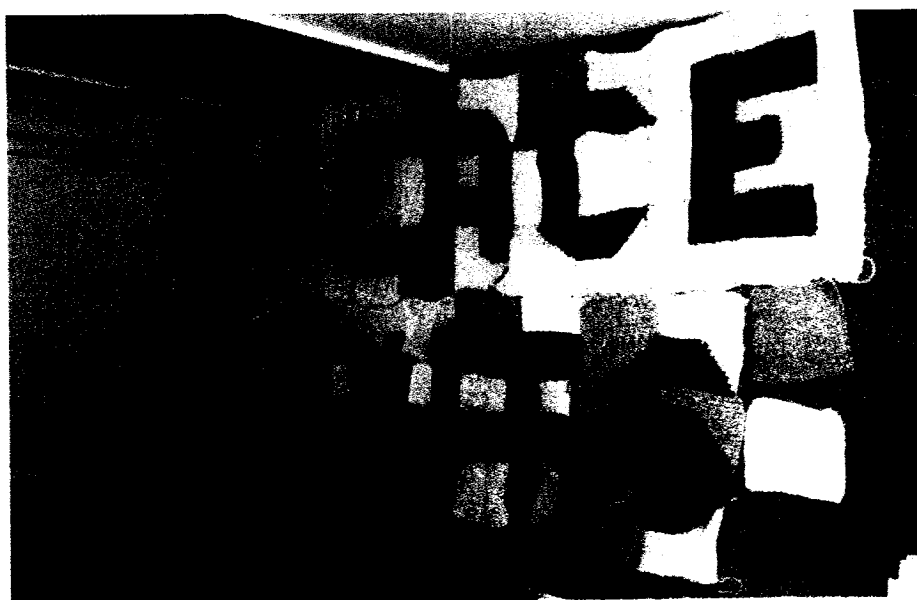


Figure 4.3 Calgary Revolutionary Knitting Circle, Assembling the Squares, 2004.

⁸⁷ Geraldine Chouard writes, “An art of juxtaposition, governed by the principles of heterogeneity, patchwork follows the rule of fragmentation that favours contact, contrast and difference... rhizomatic in the sense that it never starts from scratch but creates instead new relationships out of material gathered from all origins” (Chouard 2003, 53-4).



Figure 4.4 Photographer Unknown, Salmon Arms Peace Knits Banner, 2004.



Figure 4.5 Grant Neufeld, Knitting In the Park, 2002.

By refiguring resistance within a social environment these groups are prefiguring alternatives. These often hard to see and quiet resistances act against traditional notions of what is effective, while operating in a non-hierarchical, welcoming and sustainable way. Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) meetings, seldom organized around the planning for a specific resistant action, operate in such a way that each participant is able to work on her own separate projects within a common space. While working collectively, the group does

not have to arrive at any firm agreement. Conversations are never officially mediated, though they are always filtered through the clicking of needles.

Revolutionary Knitting Circle Knit-Ins re-work public space so that hidden transcripts can be generated amongst participants within a space often dominated by a governmental security presence. James Scott writes, “the subordinate group must carve out for itself social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above” (Scott 1990, 118). By creating communities of collectivity, and by taking on a benign appearance, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) carves out these spaces within contested space.⁸⁸



Figure 4.6 Grant Neufeld, Fun at the Global Knit-In, 2002.

⁸⁸ During the Global Knit-In, the Calgary downtown was indeed a contested space. Brian Bergman reports, “the Calgary police department and other civic authorities are mapping out an elaborate security and emergency response plan. During the 36-hour summit, at least 100 vehicles will be added to the force’s regular 500-vehicle fleet. The city police also paid \$1.1 million to purchase two RG12 armoured military rescue vehicles -- a staple of riot squads in the Middle East -- that could be used to retrieve injured police, activists or bystanders if protests turn ugly. Officers are being outfitted with enough riot gear, gas masks and tear gas canisters to help fill a 10,000-sq.-ft. warehouse. Three Calgary courtrooms will be reserved and open 16 hours a day for processing arrested lawbreakers, and current inmates are being moved from provincial to federal jails to make room for the overflow” (Bergman 2002).



Figures 4.7 and 4.8 Crystal Knoll, At the Calgary Global Knit-In #1 and #2, 2002.

These meetings oscillate between the audible and the inaudible, and in so doing, they chart their constant shift between the internal and the external, the tangible and the intangible. At once residing in, and transcending space, Revolutionary Knitting is able to move between and across binaried locations. In this next section I explore more deeply the space of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s), arguing that it creates and occupies an uncontainable “space-in-between.”

a space in between

The TAZ must exist in geographical odorous tactile tasty physical space (ranging in size from, say, a double bed to a large city) – otherwise it’s no more than a blueprint or a dream. Utopian dreams have value as critical tools and heuristic devices, but there’s no substitute for lived life, real presence, adventure, risk, love. If you make media the center of your life then you will lead a mediated life – but the TAZ wants to be immediate or else nothing. The TAZ exists in a more fluid relation to time than space. It can be truly temporary but also perhaps periodic, like the recurring autonomy of the holiday, the vacation, the summer camp. It could even become a “permanent.”

Bey 2003, xi

In the preface to the second edition of, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone: Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, Hakim Bey reflects on his widely-used theory, and in an effort to move it (or rather, allow it to be moved) beyond itself, he hints at possible

trajectories for new interpretations. The TAZ, in its most essential form, is specifically temporary and specifically substantial. Bey writes, “the TAZ has a temporary but actual location in time and a temporary but actual location in space” (Bey 1991). These zones are conspicuously resistant, and are sometimes aligned with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the ‘carnavalesque.’ Bakhtin writes,

The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival.... Carnival is the place for working out in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. (Bakhtin 1998, 251)

Defining the TAZ as “the socio-political tactic of creating temporary space that eludes formal structures of control” (Bey 1991), Bey argues that these spaces, created within the cracks and fissures of mapped areas, are able to render these gaps astoundingly visible, therefore exposing the “rupturability of those spaces” (Lauzon 2003, 109).

Permanent Autonomous Zones (PAZ) are constructed to be much quieter, employing a “touch of camouflage, a flair for invisibility, a sense of tact as a tactic” (Bey 1991). Such zones remain hidden, taking root in uncontested and ignored terrain. They are often constructed by converting abandoned houses in rural locations into usable and comfortable space. Their makers are not concerned with enacting conspicuous resistance, but rather focus on creating space within which to build long-term community spaces.⁸⁹

Both – the TAZ and the PAZ – are efforts in remapping geographical terrain. As Hardt and Negri write in *Empire*, “Global citizenship is the multitude’s power to reappropriate control over space and thus to design the new cartography” (Hardt and Negri

⁸⁹ In order to remain permanent, participants within such zones often foster a culture of security. Bey writes, “most groups will want to live out their natural span or trajectory in peace and quiet. A good tactic here might be to avoid publicity from the Mass Media as if it were the plague. A bit of natural paranoia comes in handy, so long as it doesn’t become an end in itself” (Bey 1993).

2000, 400). Focusing on the claiming and reworking of space, these theories envision the site of resistance as rooted within the substantial terrain of land. This space, however, is dangerously containable, dangerously solid.

Within the TAZ, impermanence is figured as a positive because such a form invites fluidity. Fluidity, within resistant groups, aims to satisfy a number of goals. It resists formations of hierarchy (both internally and externally), allows for changing contexts and new ideas, and maintains openness to criticisms surfacing both internally and externally.⁹⁰ The desire to work within the unfinished, the tactical, seems to preclude the possibility of effective resistance as anything but temporary. At what then, is Bey hinting when he writes that the TAZ can “even become a ‘permanent’” (Bey 2003, xi)? Is it possible to construct an elastic space, a fluid space, a space that is able to remain open while retaining a thread of continuity?

I suggest that the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) is able to build such spaces by operating between the concepts of the TAZ and the PAZ, at once acting conspicuously and inconspicuously, building towards permanence through impermanence. Their uncanny resemblance to the benign, and even to the conservative, has afforded them a certain protection, a certain invisibility. Couched in this assumed benign activity, the spaces they take up and rework are able to remain both oppositional and sustainable. Their veneer, sometimes interpreted as a cute and clever parody, sometimes as a benign incarnation of grandma’s church group, creates the conditions for a masked resistance. This sets up the conditions for their conspicuous inconspicuousness. But what became of their permanence through impermanence, and what exactly is their thread of continuity?

⁹⁰ Within a discussion of “infinite responsibility,” Richard Day writes, “Infinite responsibility means being aware of this privilege and refusing/diffusing it to the greatest extent possible. More than anything though, it means being willing to hear that you have not quite made it just yet, that you still have something more to learn” (Day 2005, 201).

In view of what Claudette Lauzon has called an “oppositional autonomous zone” (Lauzon 2003), that of the anti-FTAA protests in Québec City, as something that was able to manifest what Kirsty Robertson has called an embodied space, I would argue that a hint of something insubstantial, uncontainable and immaterial is often overlooked within TAZ theory. Arguing for what she calls “the tear gas epiphany,” Robertson writes of the experience of the protest as the single exception to Hardt and Negri’s claim that no space is actually binaried (Robertson 2006). An overwhelming and intense sensorial experience takes place within the unique space of the protest where tear gas canisters are thrown and thrown back, fences are erected and breeched, the banging of batons on riot shields competes with the sound of drumming on drums; all work together to create a “them” and an “us” that is able to radicalize individuals in a way that maintains this transformative experience beyond the location of the actual site of resistance. She writes, “though the performance stops at the end of the weekend, ... the bodily memory of it creates the conditions for an affinity of experience amongst participants that can spread across time and space” (Robertson 2006, 126).

I suggest that the actions of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) are able to create similar bodily memories that can transcend time and space. However, the conditions by which these memories are inscribed are quite different because the climate of each space has its own unique and often contradictory qualities. In contrast to the space of the April 2001 anti-FTAA protests in Québec City, the spaces created by the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) are gentle, mild, temperate; in a sense, they are underwhelming. Grant Neufeld writes,

We’re changing some of the dynamics of how we organize activists....
Instead of... being out on the street protesting all the time or in these really
intense meetings where you’re talking hard core ideology... we’re sitting

around knitting... it's not this overbearing intense feeling that people associate with a lot of activism. (Neufeld 2002)

This lack of intensity encourages people to be open to the experience through its easy associations with nostalgic notions of knitter. The memory is inscribed on the body through the combination of the haptic experience with collective action.⁹¹ These spaces, as bodily memories, while actual, are also insubstantial, flexible and fluid. Residing within the skin, these experiences traverse space as they are carried within the moving body and introduced into new settings and experiences. Thus, these spaces, as bodily memories, are able to continually reinvent themselves, to constantly shift, while maintaining a permanent collective connection with the experience of the haptic.

By combining this lack of intensity with an active nostalgia for community and a method of fluid organization, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) is able to create *safer* spaces. The distinction between spaces that are safe and spaces that are safer is that the latter resists perceived completion. On its website, the Berkley Autonomous Collective (Berkley Anarchist People Of Color (APOC)) declares "THIS IS A HATE FREE, SAFE PLACE FOR US!!" (Berkley Autonomous Collective 2005). Groups claiming to create or, even more limiting, to have created "safe spaces," such as the Berkley chapter of APOC, have already stunted their own growth. This is a claim of complete success. While congratulations and celebrations are important while working within a field that rarely yields material results, declarations of total success deny the potential to identify and work on internal problems. Often, as groups focus on constructing solid critiques of external structures of oppression, they assume an internal lack of oppression. As Caitlin Hewitt-

⁹¹ Further, there is always something material and something immaterial packed out from these meetings. Participants retain both their finished (or unfinished) projects and the memory contained within them of the collective experience. As discussed above, these objects create conditions through which bodily memories may be re-accessed.

White writes, “There seems to be an assumption at work that if we are fighting ‘the system’ that is oppressive, then we are somehow ‘non-oppressive’ by virtue of claiming to be ‘outside’ of the system” (Hewitt-White 2001, 152).

In this sense, a lesson can be taken from the *Mujeres Libres*’ concentration on *capacitacion* (a word that has no accurate English translation but that can be best described as preparation), rather than on directing participation, or on propagating a concrete manifesto. Emphasis on *capacitacion* can work to maintain a level of fluidity and openness while responding to a need to break with existing groups and to create non-hierarchical alternatives.⁹² The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) existence as non-branded, vaguely defined associations based around skill-sharing and community development, works towards a space that is specifically *safer*. Within these safer spaces, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) is able to foster sustainable communities of support. It builds towards an emotionally sustainable resistance, capable of making together as it values interdependence and compassion as a strength. A group such as this can actually prefigure alternatives. By engaging in activities that are structured non-hierarchically, participants become empowered and learn how to empower others. Perhaps most importantly, they become aware, and careful of, the ways in which their actions can unknowingly disempower others.

The organizational methods of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) fit into what Richard Day terms “non-branded tactics.” Day defines non-branded tactics as those that “tend to spread in a viral way, with no one taking ownership or attempting to exercise

⁹² The *Mujeres Libres*, translatable as “Free Women” (b. 1936) began as a network of women in Spain during an era of extreme gendered divisions. Female activists working within groups that contained both men and women began to feel oppressed, ignored and exploited. While largely understood as Anarchist, the group never officially aligned itself with a political philosophy. It set up spaces in which women could empower themselves through community-based skill-sharing, co-operative childcare and health work (Ackelsberg 2002). The Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) itself concentrates on skill-sharing, and on exercising the act of skill-sharing as a way to empower and work towards local-sufficiency.

control over how they are implemented” (Day 2005, 19). Revolutionary Knitting Circle members often describe these contemporary knitting groups as fluid, with membership changing from meeting to meeting.⁹³ A tactical method of political organizing, groups are able to form, dissolve and reform to suit altering contexts. There is no formal registration process, no official membership. Groups can and do form under the name, and use the manifesto (or not) without any contact to the original group.⁹⁴ I suggest that the tactic of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s), both as a non-branded tactic and a bodily memory, is able to spread like a virus, traversing space and altering its coding to adapt to new contexts.

viral spread

we ask you to organize a group of knitters and learners to knit... at one of the seats of corporate power in your communities. Transform those spaces through knitting. Create soft barriers of knitted yarn to reclaim spaces from the elite to the common good. As the community is knitted together, corporate commerce is slowed or halted and the community can prosper.

Revolutionary Knitting Circle 2002

A virus is a contamination, an often unexpected “something” that is able to incorporate itself within a body, altering its functions and actions for a period of time. The invisible aesthetic of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) is able to infect others who interact with it, altering relational modes, and suggesting and fostering local community as an alternative to corporate globalization.

Roberta Buiani discusses viruses as biological, digital and social in an argument defending them from their negative reputation and repositioning them as effective models for a post-structural dialectic. She writes,

Despite their ambiguous status as entities located in the limbo between life and death, and despite their assumed parasitical nature, suggestive of a

⁹³ As Grant Neufeld says, “The group is loosely knit” (Lafortune 2002).

⁹⁴ This charterless character is much like the organization of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence as described by Toby Miller in “New Technologies to Form New Selves” (Miller 1993, 211).

passive, yet exploitative performance, viruses seem to be governed by a quite active and dynamic agency. Maybe it is their ubiquity as entities that appear to transcend disciplinary boundaries and locations. Or maybe it is their unexpected and unpredictable behavior that seems to carry the potentials for novel discursive practices. (Buiani 2005)

Viruses have become an important site of theoretical inquiry. The ability to transcend confinement, to act unpredictably, to move untraceably, to respond to changing circumstances and contexts, together with the ability to reside at once in the biological (material) and the digital (immaterial), is perhaps what post-structural theorists find so engaging about viruses. For the contemporary protest these properties are again especially appealing.

It has often been argued that the Global Justice Movement (or, more accurately, movements) is able to remain diverse and vital through its use of new digital phenomena such as blogs, cell phones, emails and discussion boards. Here, embodied protests manifest out of a process of digital organization. Information travelling through the binary coding of the computer is uploaded and downloaded, placard and poster designs originating in Cuba show up in the hands of North American activists, and vice versa.

Resistance itself (like the virus) moves easily between and through the virtual and the biological. Day writes, “[non-branded tactics] easily morph into new forms appropriate to different times and places, and thus are beginning to display the kind of diversity and differentiation that is required for ‘survival’ in the hostile environment of neoliberal societies of control” (Day 2005, 20). This ability to respond unpredictably is fostered through a preference for vagueness.

Vagueness can be a strategic choice. Strategic vagueness,⁹⁵ in semantic opposition to strategic essentialism, can be defined through two methods – the first, by discussing what strategic vagueness is not, and the second, by discussing what it is. Strategic vagueness is not the type of vagueness that accidentally arises through oversights, or ignorance; it is chosen, yet it does not include vagueness deliberately employed to mask a lack of information where further details would be useful. Strategic vagueness is chosen precisely to resist specificities. It allows for the formation of material bodies while allowing those bodies to define and redefine themselves, to remain open to criticisms and to flow freely with changing currents. This strategic vagueness facilitates the conditions for an elastic and fluid space which, alongside the haptic, can foster and maintain a community, both permanent and impermanent.

As a resistant virus, Revolutionary Knitting Circle modes of organization are able to contaminate the narrative of commonsense, while remaining vital and fluid. As a bodily memory, it is able to remain affective beyond the space of the TAZ. As a haptic experience, it is able to re-value devalued modes of self-subsistence and community interdependence. As a social gathering, it is able to re-work activism as a sustainable and mutually supportive practice.

⁹⁵ My term.

Conclusion

moth holes and dropped stitches

I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of force, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present...

Michel Foucault 1996

In "Two Lectures" Foucault states, "Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain" (Foucault 1980, 98). Foucault has made a slight error in imagery here (assuming that the image brought to mind when one uses the single word chain is of the simple metal variety). If a link in this type of chain is broken, the chain is broken; it will fail to perform its duty. Because Foucault does not see power as a totality, he does not subscribe to the notion that power can be broken, or that it can be changed so dramatically with a single action. There is no magic link or underlying truth that has the ability to unravel power (Ransom 1997, 147). Power *can* be considered a chain; however, our notion of chain must be altered.

I thought, for a moment, of returning to the chain link fence. This type of chain is not totally breakable because it is constructed as a series of interlocking wires. On the other hand, perhaps this image is not effective because a chain link fence is too obvious, too studied, too recognizable, too conspicuous. It is, perhaps, not quite "everyday" enough. A sweater, however, makes no claims as it sits folded (or crumpled) on a shelf, as it keeps us warm, as it shrinks in the wash. Knitted fabrics are able to stretch, able adapt to changing surfaces. A sweater is commonsense. A sweater is something your mother tells you to wear.

As I put my heavy sweaters away for the summer, I wonder if the moths will get them. Moth holes are an interesting sort of damage. They can remain unnoticed, and seem to arise out of nowhere. They are not the result of wear; they are instead the result of deliberate actions. A sweater with moth holes does not fall apart; rather, the damage remains localized. However, because of the interdependent relationship of neighboring stitches, left unmended, these holes will grow.

I would like to consider these moth holes under the rhetoric of Foucault's concept of "error." Foucault describes error as "something like a 'mistake.' In the extreme, life is what is capable of error," he continues, "At [its] most basic level, the play of code and decoding leaves room for chance" (Foucault 1989, 22; quoted in Ransom 1997, 128). Here error, implicit within life, allows for mutations to arise randomly. Life itself, then, has the potential to engage in an eloquent parody. Thoughtful reflection on newly apparent disconnections within the narrative of commonsense can usher in new concepts, new ways of thinking and engaging. Through this process of thought, change can occur, power can be shifted, and commonsense knowledge can be dislodged. It is within this space that "we [can] imagine and build up what we could be" (Foucault 1983, 223; quoted in Ransom 1997, 127).

Moth holes, even mended, leave a trace. Darned areas, unlike knitted fabric, will not stretch, will not acclimatize to new contexts; they are easily discovered on a flexible landscape of smooth curves, their rupturability exposed. Quoting Levi-Strauss, Geraldine Chouard argues that textiles are "material objects which [are] also objects of knowledge" (Chouard 2003, 62), and Foucault writes, "There is no experience which is not a way of thinking" (Foucault 1984, 335; quoted in Ransom 1997, 132). Operating within a discourse of haptic knowledge, and rooting these processes of making specifically within the tactile,

specifically within the tactic|le, I argue that the Revolutionary Knitting Circle(s) enacts both an ironic veneer able to destabilize deeply entrenched notions and an invisible aesthetic of collectivity able to manifest prefigured alternatives within an emotionally sustainable action.

The dropping of a stitch will eventually work its way down through a garment, opening a pathway from one end to the other; creating a valley of loosened space. I consider the activist projects discussed in the body of this thesis – actions of eloquent parody that craft spaces for new configurations of the self – as intentionally dropped stitches. Activist knitting, a subversive practice of stitching with tongues out, de-knits the narrative of commonsense thereby empowering participants and accidental audiences by increasing available options. These projects are actions of dropping in another sense as well. Participants drop out of conventional modes of activism that petition for governmental change, and in doing so, create pockets of space within which to build self-determined communities of mutual support. As Barb Hunt writes, “small gestures, like stitches, can accumulate and eventually generate a web of effective political resistance” (Drobnick and Fisher 2002, 34-5).

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Appendix A

Proclamation of Constructive Revolution*

*From "RKC: Knitting Manifesto" <http://knitting.activist.ca/manifesto.html> (accessed 2 June 2006)

We hold that all communities should have the means necessary to meet every essential need of their own people.

To that end, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle calls upon people everywhere to take up the struggle through the tools of local production. We shall bring forth not only our voices raised for global justice, but we shall rise together, with the tools to liberate local communities from the shackles of global corporatism.

By sharing in the skills and resources of our communities, we shall become free to cast off dependencies on global trade for our subsistence. In so doing, we shall all be able to enter fairly into meaningful and equitable trade of not only goods, but also those cultural intangibles that are necessary if we are to bring about understanding, justice and peace to truly enrich our individual lives and our communities.

By returning production of the essentials of life to the community, we can eradicate the dependence imposed by the elites - giving communities the freedom to guide their own destinies.

We call upon all people who would see their communities freed from corporate slavery to come forth to share in action dedicated to removing the production of essential goods from the hands of multi-national corporations and returning that production to the people.

This is a daily struggle.

We shall put this struggle in the faces of the elites by engaging in knit-ins at their places of power throughout the world. We shall conduct workshops and skill-sharing at their major meetings, on the steps of government edifices, and - perhaps most significantly - in the banks, malls and even those 'hallowed' office towers of the richest of the rich.

We will remind ourselves - and those who would have us believe there is no alternative to the corporate doctrine - that we can have the ability to produce what we need without the destructive hand of the investment banker and his ilk at our throats.

So whether you want to knit, quilt, grow food, build homes, teach, heal or any of the other skills that can provide for a community, we call on you to come forward in solidarity to create production and learning outside of the dominant 'corporate economics'.

We look on with delight in our hearts to this action that will shine as we produce so much for our communities while providing no offerings to the elite's loathsome 'bottom-line'.

Let us join together in action to create a globalization of justice so that freedom can be made to ring out for all people.

This is our constructive revolution.

Appendix B

CLAC BASIS OF UNITY (translation from the French)*

*From "Anti-Capitalist Convergence"

<http://clac.tactic.org/en/index.php?section=0&subsection=2> (accessed 2 June 2006)

- 1 The Anti-Capitalist Convergence (CLAC in French) is opposed to capitalism. We fundamentally reject a social and economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and exchange. We reject a system driven by an exploitative logic that sees human beings as human capital, ecosystems as natural resources, and culture as simply a commodity. We reject the idea that the world is valuable only in terms of profit, competition and efficiency.
- 2 The CLAC also rejects the ideology of neo-liberalism, whereby corporations and investors are exempt from all political and social measures that interfere with their so-called "success."
- 3 The CLAC is anti-imperialist, opposed to patriarchy, and denounces all forms of exploitation and oppression. We assert a worldview based on the respect of our differences and the autonomy of groups, individuals and peoples. Our objective is to globalize our networks of resistance to corporate rule.
- 4 Respecting a diversity of tactics, the CLAC supports the use of a variety of creative initiatives, ranging between public education campaigns to direct action.
- 5 The CLAC is autonomous, decentralized and non-hierarchical. We encourage the involvement of anyone who accepts this statement of principles. We also encourage the participation of all individuals in working groups, in accord with their respective political affiliations.
- 6 With regards to the Summit of the Americas (April 2001) and the negotiations of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the CLAC adopts a confrontational attitude and rejects reformist alternatives such as lobbying which cannot have a major impact on anti-democratic processes. We intend to shut down the Summit of the Americas and to turn the FTAA negotiations into a non-event.

Appendix C

General Call to Action: Global Knit-In*

*From “Revolutionary Knitting Circle at the G8” <http://knitting.activist.ca/g8.html>
(accessed 2 June 2006)

The G8 claims to be a gathering of democratic leaders. The Revolutionary Knitting Circle proclaims that they are anything but. The G8 is a meeting of the wealthiest of the world to decide the fates of the vast majority of the world who are in no way represented by these ‘leaders.’

We call upon activists throughout the world to join together in a Global Knit-In to challenge the G8 and the global corporatism it stands for.

Our primary day of action will be Wednesday, June 26, 2002.

On that day, we ask you to organize a group of knitters and learners to knit (or some other subsistence-related productive activity) at one of the seats of corporate power in your communities. Transform those spaces through knitting. Create soft barriers of knitted yarn to reclaim spaces from the elite to the common good. As the community is knitted together, corporate commerce is slowed or halted and the community can prosper.

We will also be doing a mass knitting action at a location outside the G8 meeting (specific location to be determined based on the development of security and access at the meetings, but we will not be going into any environmentally sensitive areas). We will show the G8 what we want through our people – and community-driven production. We will knit and quilt clothing, blankets and other delightful creations. We will share the skills of production with each other. We will engage people of diverse ages, genders, classes and other identities in this peaceful reclaiming of our own subsistence.

On the subsequent days of the G8 meeting (June 27-28) we will join with other activist protests, marches, conferences, etc. – but always with our knitting in hand!

As with all mass events, we look to this as an opportunity to connect people and educate – but the real work of challenging corporatism must go on every day of the year. We encourage you to take the lessons that will be learned through these actions and expand on them in the months and years that follow.

Appendix D

Raging Grannies' Song Lyrics*

*From "Grannie Songs" <http://www.ottawagrannies.net/Songs.html> (accessed 6 May 2006)

Oh My, That's Our Georgie

(Tune: "Yes Sir, That's My Baby")

Oh my, that's our Georgie
Havin' a war-time orgy,
Oh my, that's our Georgie now.

Yes sir, he's decided
No one else needs be invited
His war will be a one-two pow!

By the way, by the way,
Did you hear what Georgie did say.....

"United Nations? We don't need it!
World law? We don't heed it!
Saddam needs to be defeated now."

Guess what? We don't buy it!
The world needs peace and quiet,
Not our bombs and not our killing now.

By the way, by the way,
We're the Raging Grannies and we say...

War? No! Peace will top it!
Grannies ARE gonna stop it!
We are RAGING Grannies now!

We Could Have Raged All Night

We could have raged all night
We could have raged all night
And still have raged for more.
So many things to change,
A world to re-arrange,
End poverty and war!
When children go to bed so hungry
We know damn well it isn't right.
We've got to close the gap
Of the poverty trap
We'll rage and work with all our might!

Working with all our might
 For a better world -
 You've heard it all before.
 It's time to shed some light
 To help us end the blight
 That makes us all heartsore.
 If we'd just take part of that money
 That's spent on all those tools of war,
 We could relieve real need
 And stop fuelling greed -
 Then we could dance, dance, dance, encore!

Low Level Threat

We're a menace to society
 The terrible bunch are we,
 A danger to security
 Of Canada, you see.
 We do such things as work for peace
 For health care and for schools,
 But all these things we do declare
 Must be against the rules.

But it's low level, low level,
 Low level naughtiness.

We sing about bad things they do
 To the environment,
 To get your rapt attention
 Ah, that is our intent.
 We work against all violence,
 Now is that really bad?
 We guess it is 'cause
 It has made ol' CSIS really mad!

But it's low level, low level,
 Low level naughtiness.

Appendix E

Radical Cheerleading Cheers*

*From "Radical Cheerleading Cheers"

<http://www.nycradicalcheerleaders.org/index.php?name=RCCheers> (accessed 18 May 2006)

No Justice

No Justice
Here's a piece of my mind
No Justice
A piece of my behind
No Justice
Piece it together you'll find

RADICAL CHEERLEADERS ON THE FRONT LINES!

Revolution--not if but when!
Revolution--I'll say it again!
Rev Rev Rev REVOLUTION!

Resist

R- For revolution!
E- For everybody!
S- Subvert the system!
I- Ignite debate!
S- Smash the state!
T- We're gonna tear it down!

Resist, resist
Raise up your fist!
Resist, resist
We know you are pissed!
Resist, resist
Fight the capitalists!
Resist, resist
Show 'em what they can kiss!
ugh
Show 'em what they can kiss!
uh-huh
Show 'em what they can kiss!!!!

Appendix F

Peace Knits Banner*

*From: "Peace Knits Banner"

<http://knitting.activist.ca/file/knit/peaceknitsbanner.pdf> (accessed March 7 2005)

Peace Knits Banner

Revolutionary Knitting Circle - web.knitting.activist.ca

This pattern describes how to construct a banner from a number of squares so that the work can be divided across a number of knitters. (The squares could also be crocheted or other textiles.)

Contributing:

Please contact knitting@activist.ca or (403) 262-2931 in Calgary to sign up for your squares.

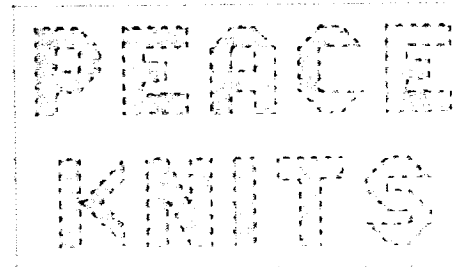
The Squares:

Each square is 6 inches (although you can scale it differently depending on how big you want to make your banner).

Use a knit stitch (not stockinette) to get a rib across the square. You can also get fancy with cabling or other tricks if you are feeling particularly creative.

The default pattern is to have the letters be dark on light. The 'patchwork' style of this pattern means that any combination of colors can be used on each square, so long as there is high contrast between the light and dark (medium range colors should not be used).

Many of the squares are identical, hopefully making it easier to divide up the work.

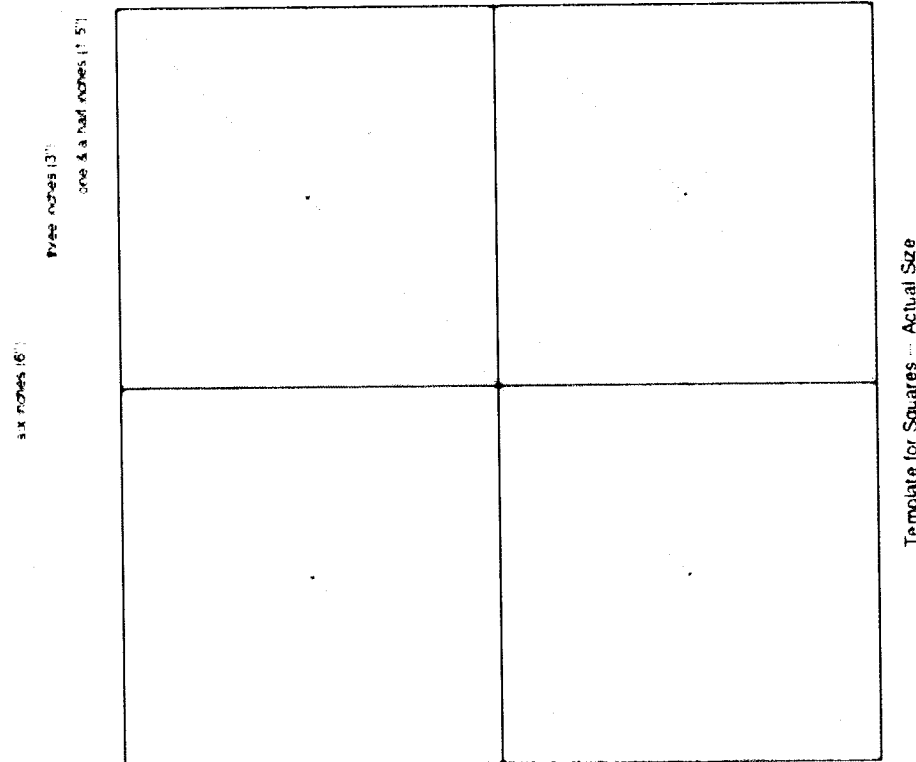


Assembling The Banner:

The squares can be knit, crocheted, or stitched together. The result will be best if the seams are tight. You'll also want to stitch a border around the whole banner.

To support a pole to be used for carrying the banner, you can either attach loops, or a long knitted cloth tube, along the top for the pole to go through.

Depending on how you are going to carry or hang the banner, you may also want to add some weight to the bottom corners.



Peace Knits Banner

Revolutionary Knitting Circle — web.knitting.activist.ca

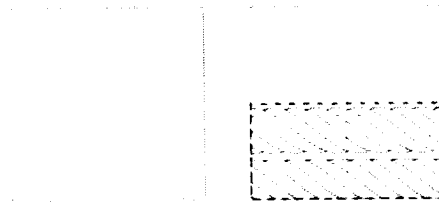
The squares are listed in order of easiness. New or inexperienced knitters should start with the first four squares.

Ensure that the yarns used have high contrast (light and dark). The shaded part of the squares is dark yarn, the white is light.

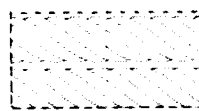
Each square is six inches, with most intersections of the pattern happening half way (3 inches) into the square. Some of the more complicated squares (#9, 11, 15) have some intersections at one quarter way (1.5 inches). You'll have to figure out the number of stitches per row, depending on your needle size and yarn weight (approx. 34 for 6mm needles with worsted weight yarn).

3	5	3	2	7	5	7	5	3	2	16
2	8	2	9	2	4	2	1	2	9	16
3	1	3	2	3	3	7	6	3	2	16
16	3	7	3	11	3	3	2	7	5	1
16	2	10	2	12	2	1	2	14	15	1
16	3	7	3	13	3	1	3	7	6	1

The second number (in brackets) under each square is how many are needed in total of that square.



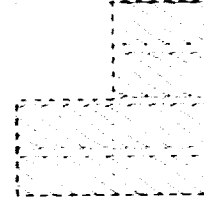
#1 (7)



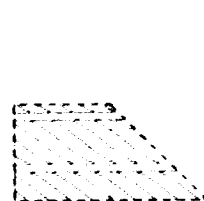
#2 (14)



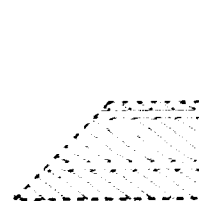
#3 (16)



#4 (1)



#5 (4)

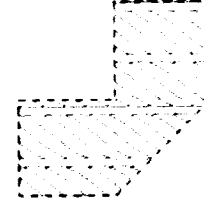


#6 (2)

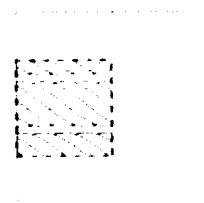
(These 2 are the same, it's on the flip them over.)



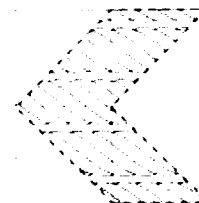
#7 (7)



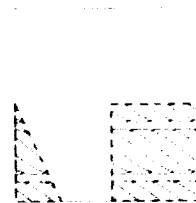
#8 (1)



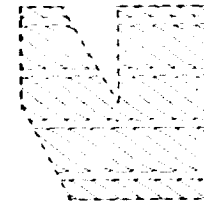
#9 (2)



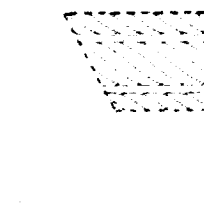
#10 (1)



#11 (1)



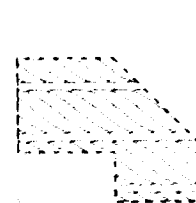
#12 (1)



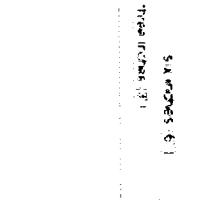
#13 (1)



#14 (1)



#15 (1)



#16 (6)

5 X SQUARES (5)
THREE CORNERS (3)