

METHODS OF CONTEXTUALISING

V&A Rapid Response

Through all our collaborative studio explorations we managed to pin point the following critical question: How can we use knitting as a social practice to enable difficult conversations about climate change?

We began by doing research on global warming and ways to make a positive impact, keeping the Australia fires and knitting in mind. At first we wanted to focus on the educational side by providing information on a website. Later on, we decided we wanted to go for an experience based concept, so we landed on the idea of designing a workshop where we would act as transmitters and facilitators. Why? Well, the first step to raise awareness is to start conversations. The idea is to provide a safe space where we can have valuable conversations not only to provide but to exchange information with the attendees. Regarding the visual identity of the project, we kept in mind that knitting is a repetitive technique so we went with a repetitive design, by integrating images with a grid that not only resulted in great visual quality and cohesiveness but can also be adapted to different workshops/topics in the future.

We chose the following references to act as a lens through which to view our research:

01. Modes of Criticism

Francisco Laranjo, *'Critical Graphic Design: Critical of What?'*, Modes of Criticism, 2014 [article]

DiSalvo talks about Mazé's take on criticality in design in three aspects which we've explored throughout our project.

To start with, we took a critical attitude towards our practice, which lead us to narrow down our research and pin point the concept we went with. We questioned our position within our practice and translated that to a community of discipline (knitting as a social practice) where we will approach the subject in a more open-ended way, where we provide and collect information.

We are being critical in the way that we've designed a workshop that can expand and evolve in the future depending on the context and topic we want to cover. So, the project's open-ended nature makes it ideal for future enquiry. Also, we chose to address a social and environmental issue of global interest; another form of criticality according to Mazé. By doing this we are stepping away from our personal practice as designers and thinking about our positions in terms of public and social interest. Essentially, we found Mazé's three forms of criticality present throughout our project overlapping and influencing each other to finally build and develop a critical design practice.

02. Adversarial Design

Carl DiSalvo, '*Adversarial Design as Inquiry and Practice*', Adversarial Design, 2012 [e-book]

For the purpose of analysing our project's concept, we chose DiSalvo's text on Adversarial Design. We specifically found pages 118-119 relevant as the ideas developed in the text enhance and challenge our understanding of the object we selected.

The subject we chose to explore gave us a chance to consider the role of "conceiving and making artefacts", in this case the joey pouch, to provide demonstrations of political issues and conditions and therefore make them known and actionable. In other words, to provide a course of action, which we translated into the design of a workshop that can be further developed in the future. The author comments on adversarial design as an intentional practice of inquiry as it goes beyond just raising awareness. In DiSalvo's words, 'Design can produce a shift toward action that models alternative presents and possible futures in material and experiential form'. Our project is about awareness through social practice. The idea is to pass on information about climate change, alternatives of action and a sense of hope while engaging in a therapeutic and social activity: knitting.

03. Conversation Circles

SARA Office at Stanford University, '*Conversation Circles*' (no date) Available at: <https://sara.stanford.edu/circles> (accessed 25/02/22)

In order for us to design and create a workshop, we did some research on conversation circles as a community building tool. This article was very influential in the development of our project as it allowed us to grasp the whole dynamic of this specific method and its main values and components. Climate change is a tough subject, which is why we needed to understand the best ways to approach the conversation. We've said repeatedly throughout our practice that our aim is to create a safe space, for which this article was crucial. We know that conversation circles facilitate talking and active listening but Stanford's guide gave us a better understanding of the values we need to keep in mind, such as empathy, respect and accountability. We were able to set some ground rules within the design of our workshop, but most importantly, we understood how essential it is for them to be in place, in order for us to maintain the "vibe" and tone of the workshop. Furthermore, this "guide" helped us understand the value of structure and how we can attain it through an open-ended narrative that carries a positive tone throughout.

04. Communication in a Knitting Circle

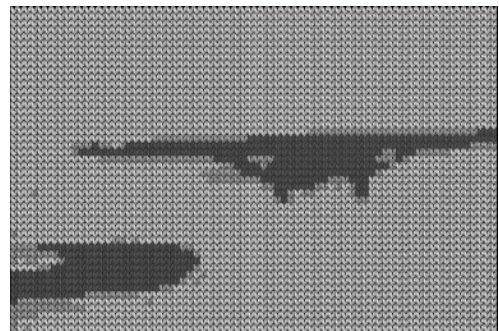
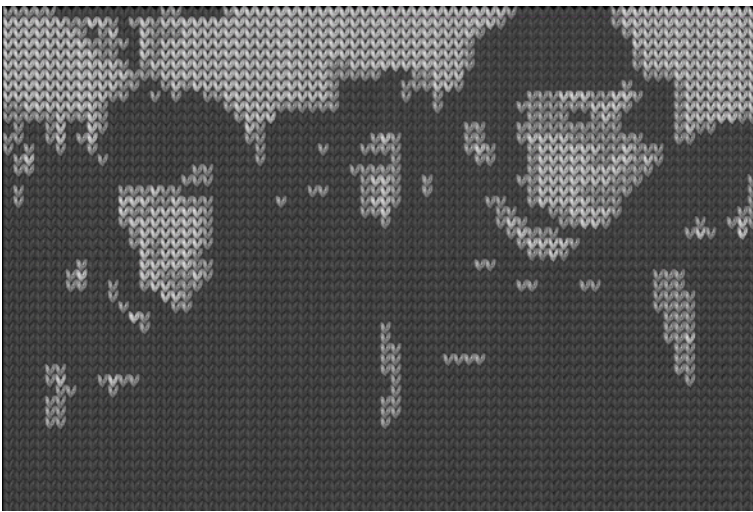
Jacobson, Anna '*Social Interactions and Learning in an Informal Setting: An Ethnography of Communication in a Knitting Circle*', 2001 (p. 10) Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED455547.pdf> (accessed 23/02/22)

While developing the concept for this project we thought about the idea of teaching a skill, as a transfer of knowledge. In other words, what does it mean to teach someone how to do/make something? We are taking Jacobson's essay to strengthen our understanding about teaching moments as interactive exchanges rather than just a one-

sided transmission. The author talks more specifically about sharing knowledge of the craft itself and how crucial that is for the knitting community. Our practice not only focuses on the idea of teaching someone how to knit; we intend to provide and solicit information and conversation about a chosen topic within the group.

Jacobson's essay details the ways in which one would communicate with the members of a knitting circle. For instance, how to request assistance and how to interact and connect with the rest of the participants. Essentially, the knitting circle is a "speech community" with a common goal: to provide a space for members to practice their craft where learning and verbal exchanges take place.

05. Knit For Defense



Stills from "Knit for Defense" (2012)

Mazza, C. 'Knit for Defense' [installation], 2012. Smithsonian American Art Museum (accessed 25/02/22).

Smithsonian American Art Museum, '40 under 40: Cat Mazza', 2012. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1yq0fyUuDU> (accessed 25/02/22).

Witkowski, J. 'Knit for Defense, Purl to Control', 2015 Available at: <https://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/knit-for-defense-purl-to-control/#fnref-3529-27> (accessed 23/02/22)

We took Mazza's project as inspiration for our project's visual identity. The artist makes use of a grid system which she produced using a custom software she developed called Knitroscope. The grid makes it look like images in knitted stitches, which actually encourages, or even forces the viewer to put a more focused effort to see the image clearly, which we thought was relevant in the context of our project. Mazza portrays moving images of World War II. At first, it might seem like the medium and the subject are disjointed, but like I said, as you pay close attention the images will start to make visual sense. In her practice, a tiny black pixel represents a soldier jumping from a plane, and in ours, it might represent a Kangaroo in the Australian fire. This practice utilises an ordinary, mundane medium that is often linked to conversation circles, women/elderly to portray strong imagery about a difficult subject and transmit a message that is completely unrelated to the practice itself. The use of the grid allowed us to create a visual identity that is cohesive and that can be transformed and adapted to different subjects in the future.

06. Wartime Knitting Circle



Gschwandtner, S. 'Wartime Knitting Circle', 2007. Acrylic, cotton, wood, various knitting notions, dimensions variable. Available at <https://www.sabrinag.com/wartime-knitting-circle/20q2wj5gnjn2odr4g2o8nmkk9xwp60>.

Sabrina Gschwandtner's "Wartime Knitting Circle" consisted of an interactive installation that invited the audience to sit down with her and discuss the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while knitting squares for blankets or socks to send to the victims of these. In the artists words, using knitting as an "outlet for political expression, and a provocation for dialogue among people with differing political viewpoints".

Gschwandtner uses knitting as a social practice to create community, enable conversations about a troublesome topic, raise awareness and produce a shift in action. Evidently, this project really enhanced our research and inspired our project as it is precisely what we had in mind. Even though our practice targets climate change instead of WWII, there are undoubtedly a lot of similarities between the projects in that they both use a therapeutical activity (knitting) to promote open-ended conversations about problematic themes. Nonetheless, I believe our approach is more educational. We are looking to create a positive and safe environment for open communication and exchange of information that are moderated and guided by the facilitators (us). In the case of Gschwandtner's interactive installation, the overall design of the conversation is non-existent. In other words, improvised and spontaneous.