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Chapter Four

Alice Kettle, Helen Felcey and Amanda Ravetz

'The colony does not hibernate but stays active and clusters together to stay warm'.¹

This chapter reports on *Pairings*, a project initiated at Manchester School of Art in 2009.

Pairings began as a way of fostering knowledge-sharing within the Art School but soon grew to include other institutions and makers. The imperative of *Pairings* was to recognise and realise the intrinsic and potential value of craft-based practices to each other, and the transferable value to other fields. The project arose from a misconception that craft values are obsolete, labour intensive and insupportably expensive. It sought to counter the pressure from government on universities to move from a model of art and design values steeped in craft, to cultural industries models seeing no apparent benefit from the contribution of craft. *Pairings* opened up a rich debate about collaborative working in art and design. Beginning with the experiential understanding that material-based research constitutes very specific ways of knowing and thinking, the project questioned whether craft—as a process-orientated approach to the field—could have a beneficial effect on Craft—the historical and conceptual approach that separates craft practices into genres such as glass, metalwork, ceramics and textiles. The result was the creation of new synergies between making practices traditionally perceived as distinct from one another, changed scales of production and new thinking across disciplines. By harnessing craft to Craft we were able to recognise wider potential roles for material practices in the fields of design and industry, replacing the perception of craft as a throwback to another time, with a vision of its responsiveness to the twenty-first century challenge of creating sustainable futures.

Originally, *Pairings* was set up to encourage personal and material-based relationships between staff at the Manchester School of Art. The project placed makers and designers together in pairs or in threes. Each participant, who already belonged to a distinct and established area of practice, was invited to exchange ideas, conversation, techniques and materials with colleagues in different areas. But while beginning in a small-scale and local way, it soon became clear that the project was initiating unexpected enthusiasms, ideas and processes.

While craft is no newcomer to collaborative practice, its history of shared labour is a complex one. On the one hand, it is the site of collaboration *sine qua non*, on the other hand an emblem of solitary practice. In her volume *The Crafts in 20th Century Britain*, Tanya Harrod invokes craft as a mode of production in which design and fabrication are enmeshed, carried out by the same person;² and even when applied into the broader fields of design and industry, the authenticity of craft and its ‘genred’ practices³ have been seen to depend upon the specialist knowledge of individual makers.

In the latter half of the twentieth century the teaching of craft was organised around distinctions of skills and materials and it is these delineations that until very recently have continued to operate in the spaces of the glass blowing studio, the ceramics workshop, and the weaving rooms, each with their different technical and aesthetic sensibilities, ethos and know how. While the studio-based picture of craft has begun to change over the last twenty years, with makers seeking many different kinds of collaboration, UK art schools have by and large retained a sole practitioner, material and skill specific model, both in how courses are organised, and in the know-how of lecturers trained in the ‘studio’ craft manner. *Pairings* was to become influential in a national move emerging in 2009, to redefine course structures and overlapping areas of practice.

Pairings set out to challenge the picture of craft solitariness and separation. Beginning from the physicality of materials, it used these to initiate dialogues between makers, giving birth to work and ideas that sought to redefine the nature of the object and of craft as a singular occupation. Individual materials, techniques and objects became conversation starters and the monologues of makers translated into something shared and external. The weaver Ismini Samanidou who paired with ceramicist Sharon Blakey described how the woven surface of her ‘home material’ closely resembled her concerns with the final surface quality of fired clay. While the separate nature of Samanidou and Blakey’s work mediated the nature of the dialogue, such that ‘our aim is to create works that sit together harmoniously but which are capable of exiting independently’,⁴ the emphasis shifted from production to discussions of ideology and ontology. The deep interaction of craft with the world that sometimes remains pre-conscious—for example resistance, socialisation and collective action—were in this way made visible, but *Pairings* raised further questions too, about authorship/ownership, about skill and the future of craft, and ultimately, about the collaborative power of craft itself.⁵

In this chapter three of us who were involved at different times and in different ways,⁶ reflect on the philosophies, politics and practicalities of collaborative craftwork as explored through *Pairings*. We elaborate how *Pairings* tested established working methods, shifted instituted borders and encouraged voices to cohere and sometimes grate together. The material-based dialogues between makers gave birth to work and ideas that redefined the very nature of the object and of craft. Subsequent artefacts or collections of pieces combined a fusion or alternatively, a parallel exploration of materials, of practices and of creative identities.

In contemplating the value of such collaborations, we suggest that the perspectives and knowledge gained through *Pairings* challenged preconceptions about the presumed

borders of practices, processes, materials and sociocultural identities in art and design—and that what began as an intuitive celebration of process, ended up by stimulating new applications, which could then be fed back into various strands of craft’s wider role within the creative industries.

Craft as Worker

‘In the bee hive, we could perhaps imagine fine art as the queen, design and media as the drones and craft as the worker.’

Given their iconic associations with 1960s protest, creative resistance and autonomy⁷ art schools have appeared the antithesis of entrenched institutional hierarchy, yet in truth their absorption into wider educational structures has exposed them to the same stratification processes sociologists observe in contemporary educational institutions.⁸

The evolution of artistic tribes of affiliation, ideology and solidarity and the nuanced phrasing of artistic practice, its various ‘material dialects’ have also long encouraged specific modes of allegiance in art and design. In textiles, talk is about flexible surface, tensions, folds; in ceramics and glass it is of form, substance, temperature and fire. Thus artists and makers experience and reproduce the divisions, stratifications, inequalities and mysterious territories of existing artistic domains through this language. They form clans, familial material groupings, and are capable of enacting thoroughly tribal behaviours, bound as if by kinship relations, reciprocal exchange and strong ties to place.⁹

The sub divisions of connection and division in craft take a strongly physical and material form. Textiles, metal, wood, glass and ceramics each share a requirement for workshop space and tools. As with ‘fold versus fire’ of textiles and glass, the *distinctiveness* of these various workshop spaces is salient. Craft splits its territories through the qualities of

material practice. Added to this, institutions reflect wider social, cultural and economic divisions. Beyond, as well as within educational institutions, craft is rarely afforded the same prestige as fine art. While the reasons for this are debated and disputed, craft and makers as a subset of the artistic field find it hard to shake off a sense of inadequacy and inferior status.

Pairings grew from just this territorialised and stratified landscape—one that paradoxically supports yet diminishes craft. Together with craft's 'internal' divisions, various 'external' pressures pertain such as the elevation of the conceptual in art, which can easily make craft appear naïve, unthinking and base. This pressure can lend craft a certain power of the other, the outsider.¹⁰ But in recent years the requirement by craft for expensive equipment, hands-on instruction, specialist technical skill and workshop space has been at odds with the climate of economic austerity and the impact of the digital revolution with its tendency towards the immaterial. The digital is not necessarily antithetical to craft though, offering up new tools and materials, processes and challenges and Alice Kettle, the initiator of *Pairings*, imagined a project in which participants could actively embrace technologies, new materials, concepts and evolutionary working methods. Because at the time collaboration was also emerging as a fashionable antidote to economic stresses, *Pairings* almost inadvertently captured the spirit of current politics and debate, signposting the power of cooperation and shared practice.¹¹

In 2008 the Manchester School of Art had established the Design LAB programme—a multi-disciplinary and project-led MA approach where the cross overs of material practices were encouraged to enable students to tackle design projects involving complex social issues. The mission of the Design Lab was to prepare students for working in the creative industries through live projects and partnerships with major public organisations and companies, small design studios and agencies. Craft soon became a key voice within the programme, used as a tool to soften, to draw attention to the overlooked, and to question. Students and staff were

challenged to recognize the particular role of craft in the process of flexing creative muscle in new and established ways, understanding the movements, the range and limitations of their creative abilities individually and collectively. Flexibility and adaptability on a material and social level enabled students to connect with the scope and profound nature of the issues in hand. Helen Felcey, programme leader of the Design Lab was to become an initiator, with Kettle, of *Pairings*, while Ravetz joined at a later stage, first as an advisor to the *Pairings* conference (*Pairings: Conversations, Collaborations, Materials* 12th–13th May 2011) and later as a co-author.

Unlike the focus of much contemporary craft at the time on objects and outcomes, *Pairings* was concerned with slowing down process(es). This was perhaps a counter-intuitive move at a time of threat and high pressure when the impulse might have been to demonstrate smart uses of accelerated technologies. It came from the sense that process—going through something together—would allow staff to ‘hold together’ at a time of risk.¹² In this sense, the project embodied an impulse towards the collective. By bringing together pairs, or threes the vision was of whole crafts panoply revealed through correspondence. Nevertheless, since relationships do not exist outside difference, the project involved as well the productive negotiation of friction.

If the idea that change and advancement can only be achieved through collaboration appears straightforward, this realisation took time to emerge. It required (and was inspired by) a belief in craft as something social and in movement.¹³ Perhaps residues of the secrecy of craft knowledge of the early modern age noted by Sennett (2008) have persisted in contemporary craft, because it seemed to those inside the process that *Pairings* cut across an intangible but ingrained secrecy, nurturing relationships between makers more usually contained by distinctive knowledge practices, tools and materials.

Safeguarding our environment

'Pollinators such as bees are vital to the environment and the economy and I want to make sure that we do all we can to safeguard them. That's why we are encouraging everyone to take a few simple actions and play their part in helping protect our bees'.¹⁴

The catalyst for *Pairings* was Place Settings, an exhibition in Special Collections Gallery at Manchester Metropolitan University shared by Helen Felcey and Alice Kettle that evolved into a collaborative response to each other's work. This was precipitated by the placing together of existing work that seemed uneasily compromised—the scale and delicacy of Felcey's porcelain in danger of being overwhelmed by Kettle's monumental colour work. As a result, new work made by Kettle and Felcey set out to build a delicate 'field' of cloth which allowed collections of ceramics to form an installation in relation to it. This accident allowed for spontaneous experimentation and drew in a large audience. In response, Kettle invited another MMU colleague, Alex McErlain, to work with her, exchanging sketch books and discovering the possibilities of shared drawing, visits to museums and animated conversations. This precipitated McErlain and Kettle, together with Stephanie Boydell, the curator of Special Collections at MMU, to develop a small formal project by inviting four individual partnerships between makers from The University of Sunderland, The Institute for International Research in Glass, Sunderland, Cardiff College of Art and Design with its Ceramics Research Centre, and Manchester School of Art, MMU. The response was so proactive on the part of the participants that the organisers decided to host a day to launch the project and devise a wider framework that could include around fifteen pairs or threes and further institutional links that ultimately included a total of thirty-eight practitioners.¹⁵

The attendees of the launch day were self-selecting and it was over-subscribed. The day was curated as a speed-dating event with intense snatched moments of conversation and

meeting. What emerged was the opportunity to hear about colleagues' practice and appreciate the subtleties of personality and skill. Each external participant was invited to nominate a partner and after some gentle manoeuvring and 'relationship counselling' by McErlain and Kettle, a decision was made as to who matched who. The desire to take part was tangible, as was the curiosity to understand the local ecologies of neighbouring institutions and practices.¹⁶ Alke Groppe-Wegener, Senior Lecturer in Contextual studies at Staffordshire University was invited to document the project.¹⁷

Each partnership had to find ways to negotiate their dialogue. Geographically challenged, they must devise ways of working. Some emailed, others sent parcels to and fro, still others met at designated locations. All kept asking 'how do we do this?'. For many, the connection emerged through returning to fundamentals, defining collaborative structures, methods, coding and plans. Words and instructions offered mechanisms to facilitate beginnings.

Louise Adkins (fashion, MMU) and Inge Paneels (glass, The University of Sunderland) used ideas of word association through the internet to explore themes that were both complimentary and in opposition. This provided a structure to interrogate light, and glass slides were used as textual message carriers and coding. Melanie Miller (embroidery, MMU) and Jenny Walker (jewellery MMU) similarly turned to associated word play to explore clothing types and wearable artefacts. For others, the use of props such as photographs, post-it-notes, drawings, lists, blog spots, websites and word clouds aided the conversations.

Drawing emerged as an important mode of dialogue and action to facilitate creative thinking and establish common ground. Many described the rediscovery of drawing as an important factor in transforming ideas into design and artistic principles. Often the collaborative nature of the shared drawing allowed for the balancing and merging of

difference. Claire Curneen (ceramics, Cardiff College of Art and Design) and Alison Welsh (fashion, MMU) described the indiscriminate trust which permitted the drawing onto each other's work, obliterating and remodelling the material forms and artistic identity of the other. McErlain remarked how drawing served to explore ideas which could then be translated into material form. Drawing was informed by the knowledge of its purpose which became changed through the sight of new application and process.

The merging of practices in this way exposed the deepest sense of personal creativity and the processes of learning. It allowed for deep emotional responses, from wonderment, to betrayal. Marian Milner in her book *On Not Being Able To Paint*, sees the experience of material transformation and freeing of creativity as an emotional transformation: 'as the alchemy which transmutes base metal into gold'.¹⁸ Her analysis of creative struggle shows how certainty must be let go, surrendered over a precipice, reeling and twisting as a 'beneficent state before creation' into emptiness, in order to make 'what has never been' come alive.¹⁹

Facilitating departure from the known should not be underestimated in this project. *Pairings* was carefully scripted to enable the coming together of minds, and to inculcate willingness, even a desire to create new frameworks of thought and action. Bringing two minds together can break habits and support departures from ingrained practice. For the makers involved, the difficulty and liberation of starting was to step beyond protocols, to de-programme and to understand that openness that would allow for what Clinton Cahill (graphics MMU) and Cate Wilkinson (architectural glass The University of Sunderland) called 'meander'.²⁰ For all participants the lack of expectation in terms of production and outcome provoked uncertainty and confusion.

For Kettle and McErlain there was a deep questioning in their roles as curators. In holding back from curating, in doing little they could be viewed as ineffectual and lacking.

Yet as was subsequently shown this ‘lack’ was experienced not only as confusing but eventually as empowering. Each partnership had the autonomy to correspond from their own singularity and to leave behind what Cahill and Wilkinson described as the security and constraint of the known, the directed and the briefed.²¹ In understanding the nature of meandering the pairs and threes appreciated the value of indirection. Meanwhile over a period of months, McErlain and Kettle soothed, reassured, fielded constant queries, anxieties and questions. McErlain as a father confessor, was calm and considerate, able to encourage a deep trust which allowed a surrendering into co-creative partnerships.

The buzzing hive re-meeting

*‘The buzz is very important - many use this sound to identify and locate potential mates. Each species has a subtle, characteristic sound’.*²²

After a few months, the organisers hosted a seminar since there was confusion about the unboundaried, ‘purposeless’ nature of the project. The partners stood up and started to talk about exchanges of conversation and struggles to find starting points. After a few moments the gentle buzz became a frenzied speaking. They began to finish each other’s sentences, to express excitement about entering the privacy of another’s intimate domain. The whispers of voices began to call to others, understanding that, as David Gates (furniture, Kings College) Alice Kettle (embroidery, MMU) and Jane Webb (material culture, MMU) pointed out, they did not need to become the same as each other, but could nevertheless see a reflection of themselves in the procedures of the other.

In transgressing known and familiar structures the intention was to facilitate fluid movement and quiet material anarchy. Clinton Cahill and Cate Watkinson referred to this as an interzone and Vanessa Cutler (glass, University of Swansea) and Kate Egan (embroidery,

MMU) saw it as opening up temporality into a new Zero Time.²³ For Adkins (Fashion, MMU) and Paneels (glass, The University of Sunderland) the movement occurred in a see-saw motion of being absent and present, both seen as having value. It was this exchange and movement backwards and forwards between each other's voices which enabled creative, improvised and unpredictable possibilities to open.

At the same time it was often points of connection that had led individuals to gravitate together in the first instance. Some were attracted by the particular skills of another, having a desire to bring these into their own practice. Steve Dixon (ceramics, MMU) wanted to see if bone china flowers could be incorporated within glass, a question directly related to Jessamy Kelly's (glass, The University of Sunderland) research. Helen Felcey (ceramics, MMU) was interested in Liz Wheelden Wyatt's (graphics, MMU) ways of thinking—how she operated as a more commercially focused designer. She wanted to explore Wheelden Wyatt's frameworks of thinking and in doing so, to depart from her own habits for a time—certainly to bridge and challenge her own frameworks with those of another.

If one was feeling confined by practice, abandonment could be attractive; but if not, it could be threatening—as for example when Gates described how he was afraid to open the parcel sent by Kettle. He simply stared at it whilst eating his breakfast. Kettle reassured him that he could put it in a drawer out of sight. In the reciprocity, a knowing-ness grew. As Gates wrote:

To be able to give and take back, listen and share. Trying to understand someone else, trying to find a way in and to drop in on the beat, in that space of trust and of knowing-ness crossing, something almost intangible might happen. A sometime humbling yet ennobling sensation that someone trusts you with something that is special to them; their voice, their view. Being nudged into unfamiliar territory the

specialness is in the process the experience and the journey. In all the exchange, the talk, the doing, new things are forged.²⁴

The specificity of these points of departures, were of course unique to each pair or three, but some commonalities can be drawn out. Dawn Mason in her essay for *Pairings II* writes of Deleuze describing how in creativity the travelling has been as important as arrival, or to put it another way: 'It's not the beginnings or endings that count, but middles. Things and thoughts advance and grow out from the middle, and that's where you have to get to work, that's where everything unfolds.'²⁵

What emerged was the playful, the carefully planned, the construction of a negotiated alliance that worked through the first flush of desire, the novelty, the troubles, and the superficial with the intensity of longing not to be alone or to be abandoned. For Duncan Aynscough (ceramics, Cardiff College of Art and Design) play underpinned his working relationship with Heather Belcher (felt, City Lit, London). For Kettle 'my work has been set free, it feels as though it is freewheeling in a way that it was closed before'.²⁶

A lyricism emerged in the weaving of voices. In some partnerships, each person appeared to dissolve into an entity of oneness. Others stood mirroring and watching each other as though the space in between was the place of action. Mostly there were multiple conversations of playful exchanges and experiments. For Sally Morfill (textiles, MMU) and Sylvia Vandenhoucke (glass, The Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp) there was a mutual risk taking, while Ismini Samanidou (weave, The University College Falmouth) and Sharon Blakey (ceramics, MMU) describe their experience as 'like a whirlwind romance: a passionate affair of fleeting encounters and intense assignations', but one which, 'revealed a deeply rooted, mutual aesthetic in the impermanence and beauty of the everyday and evidence of the transitory'.²⁷

Some found possibilities in new technologies and in alternative processes and tools. They applied these new discoveries to their own material. Claire Curneen's three-dimensional sculptural forms were transformed into two-dimensional digital stitch patterns on Alison Welsh's clothing. In some partnerships, there was a softening. Felcey and Wheeldon-Wyatt quite literally layered their languages of materiality and image which encouraged new readings of their existing practices, a softening of perception and boundary. Personal 'readings'—often out loud in conversation—were the meeting of minds—the opportunity to reveal or discover new pathways of thought, which in turn could reveal new pathways of materiality.

Fruition

'Gathering honey from wild bee colonies is usually done by subduing the bees with smoke and breaking open the tree or rocks where the colony is located'.²⁸

The focus of *Pairings* became a show, not seen as a conclusion but as a demonstration to a limited public of the activity. The show had an intimacy in being 'at home' in the Special Collections gallery at MMU, so that there could be an illusion at least of the brave risks of established makers, the fumbblings and the mess being revealed to an audience of mainly internal viewers. Previously at the outset of the project, Kettle had attempted to put together a touring show, but few galleries could be persuaded, since they needed to know the exact content of the show, which at this stage was invisible. It was planned to show an existing work by each maker alongside the collaborations that included scribbled working drawings, email discourse, and sampling.

It became apparent in planning the show that the normal conception of an exhibition and a gallery was wildly contrary to the workings of the project, threatening to trap it

motionless as a set piece without allowing for the momentum of change. A Lab exhibition was proposed instead where participants were permitted to alter work in a constant cycle of renewal.

After a month, this became a vast mass of material. Kettle enjoyed the traction of continual reinvention and reconstruction through the partnered works impacting on each other. Stephanie Boydell, Special Collections curator, decided it needed containment, so all work made outside the collaboration was removed, with much residual work too. The intention was to capture the atmosphere and affect of discourse, to show where authorship was merged, where trickery of becoming other offered alternative avenues of thought and insights into future applications and design initiatives.

The public responded positively to the rawness of the exposed thinking. The rough-cast gestures of some works evidenced intense conversations, whilst in the refinement of other works there was an acute aesthetic balance of one perceptive eye watching another. In the loss of the individual the work formed its own independent entity freed from ownership of possessive individualism. In the lack of resolution, the work allowed for the disguise of individual maker and specificity of material with the points of connection played out. The heightening of aesthetics was brought together through the negotiation of two or three separate matters and minds.

It was only when the exhibition had opened at MMU that a tour was put in place, culminating at Contemporary Applied Arts Gallery, in London during 2013. An invitation came from Stroud International Textiles to host a variety of events and exhibition around the notion of collaborative practice and to curate a second funded set of commissioned works.

Contemplating Futures

'We lived for honey. We swallowed a spoonful in the morning to wake us up and one at night

*to put us to sleep. We took it with every meal to calm the mind, give us stamina, and prevent fatal disease. We swabbed ourselves in it to disinfect cuts or heal chapped lips. It went in our baths, our skin cream, our raspberry tea and biscuits. Nothing was safe from honey...honey was the ambrosia of the gods and the shampoo of the goddesses’.*²⁹

Gröppel-Wegener suggests that makers become ‘ingrained’ as practitioners: ‘Working habits that had become ingrained through practicing for many years were seen through different eyes and subsequently questioned’.³⁰ If this is correct, then *how* did an unsticking occur? What is the value of this kind of disruption and challenge?

To become a skilled and respected craftsperson requires hours and years of practice. The acquisition of skill involves not only the adaptation of the craftsperson’s body to tools, mind to materials, but involves ecology in its fullest sense, the human person part of its wider ecology.³¹ Craft, art, and design exemplify the ecological integration of thought and action, informed by experience, informing experience. In the artistic field the individual is exposed to a variety of techniques, interpretation styles and kinds of knowledge, leading to what in music Kathleen Coessens has identified as ‘an expert habitus’.³² This habitus becomes interiorised and taken for granted, offering ‘available objective potentialities, containing things to do or not to do, to perform or not to perform, to show and not to show, in the face of probable situations’.³³ Trevor Marchand who has studied the interaction of ‘perceptual apparatuses, cognitive architecture, and biological constitution’ in craft as a knowledge making process introduces a special issue of *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* by pointing out the flux involved in (craft) skills, how:

perceptual abilities are sharpened or deteriorate during the course of people’s lives, livelihoods, and pastimes (Grasseni 2007; Rice this volume); synaptic networks and neural pathways are established and modified through practice, experience, disease, or

ageing (Downey 2005; Whitehouse 1996); and anatomical constitution is (re)configured, minimally, in activity (or lack thereof) (Ingold, Retsikas, Venkatesan, this volume) (Marchand, 2011).

Craft as knowledge-forming thus relies irrefutably on the specificity of ingrained practices. When the maker returns to a form with which they are familiar, fingers apply pressure in ways they are accustomed to and the exchange is two-way. In ceramics, for example, though we practice *with* the clay, the person—the mind and body—are almost indelibly changed *through* such practice. The material of practice becomes ingrained—with skin, with the touch of hands and the shaping of thought. The external evidence of these ingrained practices are evident through the form of the pot, the sound of music, the visibly worn keys of the piano, the rough tips of the potters' fingers. The internal evidence though, is usually quite hidden.

In certain circumstances these patterns can become uncomfortably and even dangerously confining. While looking at this in a different way from musical impact, a research project which considers the negative effects of practicing and performing on the health and wellbeing of musicians, *Pairings* was nevertheless an opportunity to share experiential knowledge and through this to understand the negative constraints of craft 'practice' more fully. It allowed participants to explore the value in breaking habitual patterns. Most would agree that departing from 'ingrained habits' can be useful at times. *Pairings* provided this opportunity, initially in the form of a 'point of departure'.

Pairings changed our view of ourselves and of each other. In understanding the potential of creative speculation, play, process and material, craft was re-visioned as a dynamic and active principle. Through *Pairings* we deconstructed the definitions of craft as we knew them, concerned with confined specific material practices, allowing a mutable version to fuse our material relationships with each other. We reclaimed the actions of craft to view making as an infinite cycle of material and relational engagement, which Morfill and

Vandenhoeck described as a way to avoid closure. In placing the focus on the open-ended dialogue the object was not dismissed but understood as something waiting to be discovered. Curneen and Welsh explained that the precious nature of this new object could emerge and evolve from a sustainable and fluid environment which encourages regeneration.

How might *Pairings* be understood politically? It teaches us something about the importance of ground level experiential knowledge and action. *Pairings* happened with a maximum of affective commitment and emotional labour and a minimum of institutional red tape and funding. At the outset there was small amount of internal funding which supported external practitioners to travel to MMU. The majority of the project was through the investment of time and materials by individuals without monetary remuneration which meant participation depended on the willingness and ability to ‘spend time’. The organisers could expect nothing from those taking part beyond a desire to be included. This can of course be critiqued as at some level exploitative and at another perhaps as elitist; but by at least temporarily, or in an *as if* fashion, sidestepping bureaucracy, a particular kind of vitalism was engendered which seemed to underpin the cooperative character of the project, a submersion into the notion of the collective and community.

Ernst Bloch describes the utopian alternative imaginary as one of hope, where movements and moments on the brink of change are a kind of ‘forward dreaming’ towards new structures and systems.³⁴ In looking for transformational potential, this collective drawing together was a powerful force beyond the strength of the individuals. Attempting non-competitiveness and relinquishing the ‘singular (secretly-skilled) maker, in favour of a collective ideal, allowed craft to emerge as the active agent, with the material and process as authors as much as the human collaborators. For Victoria Brown (felt, University of Chichester), Jane McFadyen (jewellery, MMU), and Kirsteen Aubrey (glass, MMU), as a three it simply made sense to work in this way. They describe how it returned their focus to

the nature of creativity, the questioning of practice and the inherent values in shared thinking as a development into creative industries and in the pedagogical role of academia.

Furthermore, *Pairings* explored the industry of craft as a concept. The definition of industry in *Pairings* was defined as integrated working methods and their application into other spheres of production. This expansion offered new outward-facing co-operative perspectives which filtered into the areas, networks and connections with the Creative Industries that we are positioned within. It allowed participants to integrate risk taking, recycling, testing of material and process, encouraging new versions of shared technologies, and variation in scales of production. David Binns' essay about these processes included in the subsequent collection of essays, *Collaboration through Craft*, talks of how his collaborative recycling of ceramic waste project started as an offshoot of a ceramic practice, became a collaboration with scientific and industrial partners and resulted in the establishment of an industrial manufacturing plant.³⁵ Binns establishes the important principle of *Pairings* whereby dialogue with an industrial partner challenges territories and practice and allows for ideological reinvention, negotiated through the desire to make the impossible possible. As a forward looking, *what if* space, the impact of the research is to show that channelling synergies collectively can encourage new scales of production and conception across disciplines without dissolving our specialist knowledges. In harnessing craft we recognise its wider role across fields of design and industry as an adaptable action that is unfixed by its material protocols.

The immediate legacy of *Pairings* was primarily in pedagogy where teaching and structural changes took place within the participating institutions. Unit X was specifically set up as a ten-week cross-faculty initiative at Manchester School of Art with students working collaboratively with businesses and organisations across the city of Manchester. This 'novel' and 'dynamic' experience of teaching and learning won the Misha Black Award in 2012.³⁶ In

looking back at *Pairings* after time has passed, we recognise the drive was for sustainable and socially engaged purposefulness. It is more and more familiar and unexceptional to be expected to work with one another as co-creators these days; but despite this, the role of self-determining collectives in relation to problems of economies of production and adaptability into manufacturing models remain.

Craft offers an adept, adaptable and vital role in facilitating creative clusters, organisations, cultures and institutions. The values that craft contributes are the essential relationships between making, sustainable production, ethical living, and everyday life. The skills and sensibilities involved in creative making align themselves to human organisation and relationships which determine how policy driven commercial approaches retain contact with their own heritage. Indeed, the Crafts Council reported that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Economic Estimates of 2016 show that crafts' contribution to the economy has grown by 14.6% between 2015 and 2016.³⁷⁰⁰

'Bee culture has adapted to fit monoculture, and that's not healthy,' says Browning. 'If we can instead invest in good sustainable practices in agriculture, we can still thrive'.³⁸

¹ http://www.bbka.org.uk/learn/general_information/honey (last accessed March 7th 2018).

² Harrod, T. (1999), *The Crafts in 20th Century Britain*, Yale: Yale University Press, p. 10.

³ Greenhalgh P. (1997), 'The history of Craft', in Dormer, P (ed) *The Culture of Craft*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, p. 20.

⁴ Groppe-Wegener, A (2010) *Pairings: Exploring Collaborative Creative Practice* (catalogue of the Pairings Project exhibition), Manchester Metropolitan University., p. 59.

⁵ This debate formed the basis of the edited volume: Amanda Ravetz, Alice Kettle, and Helen Felcey (eds.) (2013), *Collaboration Through Craft*, London: Bloomsbury.

⁶ Kettle who initiated *Pairings*, Felcey who took part in it, and Ravetz who joined the team at the conference stage to help think about collaborative practice in its wider contexts.

⁷ Coatman, A. (2016) 'Excessive past, sketchy future', in *Times Higher Education* [add volume and pages].

⁸ Kerckhoff, A. C. (1995), 'Institutional Arrangements and Stratification Processes in Industrial Societies', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 15, pp. 323–47. Trow, M. A. (2005), 'Reflections on the Transition from Elite to Mass to Universal Access: Forms and Phases of Higher Education in Modern

Societies since WWII'. Institute of Governmental Studies. UC Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies. Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/96p3s213> (date accessed July 2018).

⁹ James, P. (2006), *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In*, London: Sage Publications.

¹⁰ Although we will not attempt to perform the litany of craft's historical twists and turns here, craft is of course a contested concept, as described by Tanya Harrod and Glenn Adamson for example.

Pairings was in many ways a response to the more recent aspect of this contested history which has left many makers thinking of themselves as singular practitioners – the sole jeweller or ceramicist or glass blower being one legacy, if not the only one, of the twentieth century.

¹¹ The decline in craft courses in higher education over the last five years is 39% according to a Crafts Council report (2014). It is an alarming statistic, but also illuminating to ponder the stand point of such investigations, since where these figures represent craft as a diminishing practice *Pairings* reveals a deep seam of positive activity and energy.

¹² Greenhalgh, 1997.

¹³ Ravetz et al, 2013.

¹⁴ Quote from Lord de Mauley

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/beekeeping/10976690/Government-take-five-simple-steps-to-help-bees.html> (accessed 20th July 2014).

¹⁵ Alice Kettle, Stephanie Boydell, Alex McErlain, Helen Felcey, Jane Mckeating, Kate Egan, Jenny Walker, Melanie Miller, Sally Morfill, Kirsteen Aubrey, Sharon Blakey, Louise Adkins, David Grimshaw, Stephen Dixon, Alison Welsh, Jane McFadyen, Jane Webb, Nigel Hurlstone, Liz Wheeldon-Wyatt, Clinton Carhill, Annie Shaw, CJ O'Neil, David Crow, Rachel Kelly from Manchester School of Art MMU; Andrew Livingstone, Inge Paneels, Cate Wilkinson, Jessamy Kelly from The University of Sunderland, The Institute for International Research in Glass; Claire Curneen, Duncan Aynsough from Cardiff College of Art and Design Ceramics Research Centre; Ismini Samanidou from The University College Falmouth, Automatic Research into 3D Digital Design Production; Victoria Brown from The University of Chichester; Vanessa Cutler from University of Swansea; Alke Groppe-Wegener from Staffordshire University; David Gates from Kings College, London; Sylvie Vandenhoecke from The Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium; Dawn Mason, Janet Haigh, Jilly Morris from University of the West of England; Heather Belcher from City Lit, London; and Shelly Goldsmith from UCA Rochester.

¹⁶ The majority of the resulting partnerships (24 in total) were based at MMU in various research centres, and further institutional links were made with The University of Sunderland, The Institute for International Research in Glass, Cardiff College of Art and Design with its Ceramics Research Centre, The University College Falmouth, Automatic Research into 3D Digital Design Production, The University of Chichester, University of Swansea, Staffordshire University, Kings College, London, The Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium, the University of the West of England and City Lit, London. The project was set up with no preconditions other than a difference of material between partners. Partners simply started to work together, with the offer of an exhibition space curated by Stephanie Boydell in eighteen months' time.

¹⁷ Alke Groppe-Wegener produced and edited accompanying publication *Pairings: Exploring Collaborative Creative Practice 2010* (catalogue of the *Pairings* Project exhibition), Manchester Metropolitan University.

¹⁸ Michael Brearly's obituary of Marian Milner 10th June 1998 *The Independent*.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-marion-milner-1163951.html> (accessed 14th June 2014)

¹⁹ Milner 1950: xiv. [provide full reference for the bibliography]

²⁰ Groppe-Wegener, *Pairings*, p. 106.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²² <https://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080710050927AAFHPbP> (accessed 20th July 2014).

²³ Groppe-Wegener, *Pairings*, p. 62.

²⁴ David Gates, in Groppe-Wegener, *Pairings*, p. 90.

²⁵ Mason 2011:4 [provide full reference for the bibliography]

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- ²⁶ Mason: 2011:4 [provide full reference for the bibliography]
- ²⁷ Groppe-Wegener, *Pairings*, p. 58.
- ²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honey_hunting (accessed March 7th 2018)
- ²⁹ Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees* [provide full reference for the bibliography]
- ³⁰ Groppe-Wegener, *Pairings*.
- ³¹ Bateson, G., (1972) *Steps To An Ecology of Mind*. Chicago: Chicago Press.
- ³² Coessens, K. (2011), 'An Artistic Logic of Practice: The Case of the Performer', *The International Journal of the Arts in Society*, 6/4, pp. 1–12.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ³⁴ Bloch, E. (1986), *Principle of Hope*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 10.
- ³⁵ Binn, in Ravetz et al, *Collaboration Through Craft*, p. 88.
- ³⁶ <http://www.artdes.mmu.ac.uk/unitx/> (accessed 14th Aug 2014).
- ³⁷ <https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-brief-november-2017/#growth> (accessed 13th June 2019)
- ³⁸ <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/130510-honeybee-bee-science-european-union-pesticides-colony-collapse-epa-science/> (last accessed March 7th 2018).