

Suzie Attiwill

Urban. Interior. Craft. A World in Making

Introduction

This paper brings together three seemingly divergent concerns and practices – urban, interior design, craft – to pose the value, contribution and potential of craft and interior design practices to urban environments through a particular focus on the question of inhabitation as a ‘a world in making’. A motivating force of this paper is the significant transformation that is happening globally in relation to cities and urban density where by 2030, it is predicted that at least 60 per cent of the world’s population will live in cities. This is a significant increase from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when only 2 per cent of the global population lived in cities. The twenty-first century has been called ‘the century of the city’ by UN-HABITAT, the United Nations agency for human settlements (Tibaijuka 2010). Urban density, globalisation and mass migration are radically transforming ideas of place, context, site specificity, belonging and modes of living. ‘Globalisation has evicted us from the world we thought we knew’ (Buchanan and Lambert 2005: 7). The question of habitability – how to live in the world – becomes critical and vital. The proposition of this paper is that practices of craft and interior design, when plied together, offer a way of attending to these concerns. To do this, however, also involves teasing open common assumptions about these practices so as to ply them anew. The paper draws on research conducted through practice and situated in the disciplines and fields of craft and interior design; this practice is positioned as curatorial and one craft is valued as a way of working and thinking in relation to a practice of interior design concerned with interiorization and spatial-temporal design.

A plied practice

This practice has been produced through a nexus of craft and interior design. For many years, I have been involved in both disciplines. I studied weaving and practised as a weaver after completing a degree in art history. I then decided to undertake a degree in interior design and developed a practice as an exhibition designer and curator. My connection with craft was re-established through an invitation to

design an exhibition, *Production Reproduction*, for the Jewellers and Metalsmiths Group of Australia’s annual members’ exhibition and conference in 1995. This was followed by an invitation to curate an exhibition for Craft Victoria and guest edit their members’ magazine. The exhibition I curated and designed was called *box: an exhibition of boxes* from different disciplines including craft practices such as jewellery, metalsmithing, ceramics, glass, textiles and wood, as well as architecture, interior design, painting, magic, graphics and others. Gathered together in a space of craft, i.e. the gallery of Craft Victoria, viewers were invited to consider what could be said and seen about the differences and similarities between disciplines in terms of techniques and material. The boxes were displayed on the four walls of the gallery as distinct from the conventional plinth-form of craft display and viewers were situated in the centre of the space. The exhibition became a boxing ring with the works surrounding viewers like an audience to watch as viewers become boxers in their grappling with ideas. It is interesting to discuss this exhibition design and curatorial strategy within this paper as it has made me aware of the implication of interior – as enclosed space/boxes – and how craft inflected this practice even in these early projects.

As the guest editor of the Craft Victoria members’ magazine, the bringing together of these two practices was more explicit – as space and craft. As noted in the editorial, the initial intention was to address the issue of the space of craft however:

Now in the assembling of this issue, I find I have lost the ‘of’ and that my thoughts lead me to spacecraft. Singular sightings and unexpected encounters surface while reading the texts ... spacecraft is defined in dictionaries as a vehicle (or receptacle) which is capable of travelling in space. There are spacecrafts which are built to fly to the moon. There are those which appear on horizons or in the sky at unexpected times. With these latter craft there is a singularity about their appearance. Their visibility leads

to speculation rather than identification. A UFO; a flying saucer; its intentions, flight paths, destinations, occupants, physical form, trajectories, language are unknown. As I mentioned at the beginning I have lost the 'of', the particle of possession, which sits between space and craft. In the process something unidentifiable has been assembled – a spacecraft. It emits different kinds of light and moves at different velocities, twirling and whirling, carving up space and pursuing invisible trajectories. (Attwill 1996: 17)

In late 1996, I became the inaugural artistic director at Craft Victoria and worked with the organization until 1999. Craft Victoria is a membership organization that advocates for, and promotes, contemporary craft. During this time I was also responsible for the direction of both the exhibition program and *Craft* – the magazine of Craft Victoria which we redesigned and relaunched to position the publication as a critical vehicle for the publication, advocacy and dissemination of the value and distinctiveness of craft. After leaving Craft Victoria, I continued to work with craft practitioners and craft as a curator and experimented in several projects with the ideas of spacecraft – and the bringing together of interior design and craft.

In 2001, I was invited to curate an exhibition of craft and design for the Monash University Gallery in Melbourne. I worked with the concept of spacecraft again. This exhibition was titled *SPACECRAFT 0701*:

A double reading of the word 'spacecraft' is explored here – spacecraft as UFO and spacecraft as space that is crafted. This engages with space that exists but is in excess – extraspace, space beyond, virtual space. In this exhibition, the conjunction between the object, viewer and space is one which is not reduced. The moment of encounter becomes a creative moment of interiorization. Rather than a neutral space where meaning resides either in the object being viewed or the viewer, a new meaning happens *in* the excess. Sensed rather than reflected, what the affect is can only be made intelligible after the encounter. (Attwill 2001: 16)

This exhibition was followed by an invitation to curate the *16th Tamworth Fibre Textile Biennial*, an exhibition of Australian textiles and fibre that toured nationally for two years. When the biennial began in 1975, it was a survey show. In 1996, this changed to a process

involving a guest curator who was invited to develop a curatorial proposition and exhibition with the view to engaging Australian textiles and fibre practice in a critical discourse addressing contemporary issues. My curatorial provocation was not a theme or a brief but a quote from an introductory essay by craft theorist Sue Rowley in a book she edited called *Reinventing Textiles*: 'It is useful to think of craft in terms of multiple temporalities' (Rowley 1999: 13). At the time, her quote also made connections for me with interior and interior design as I was bringing the question of time into a rethinking of the history and theory of interior design which had been dominated by ideas of space and in particular enclosed space, i.e. the inside of architecture. The exhibition – *a matter of time* – was composed of the work of twenty-six practitioners and toured Australia from 2004 to 2006. I installed the exhibition at each gallery and changed the arrangement each time through different juxtapositions of work, thus producing new encounters and different inflections.

In 2006, I was invited to curate a craft and design exhibition for Contemporary Art Services of Tasmania – the first curator of three 'outsiders' (i.e. curators who were not from the island of Tasmania) as part of an initiative to address the exhibition of craft and design in a state where there is no dedicated craft gallery; *making relations* presented the work of twenty-two Tasmanian practitioners whose practice and artefacts made relations with exteriors through techniques of making and materiality.

During this period, I was referred to by colleagues and critics as a spatial curator and became known as someone who worked with craft and design. The interior design practice plied with craft in the projects above is one that poses interior as a question where the question mark comes beforehand – ?interior – to effect a pause and pose interior as a contemporary problematic where interior is not defined in advance as being inside something, but is produced through designing and practices of interiorization. I am interested in interior design as a practice of interior-making, which attends to questions of interior and interiority in relation to habitation – the arrangements people make so as to live. Posing ?interior opens interior to an exterior of contingency, chance and variation.

Interior. Craft.

Hence my connection with the disciplines of interior design and craft produced a practice that plied the two together. This plying did not seek to homogenise

them to produce an interdisciplinary practice but to maintain the vigour and the knots of both so that the inflections and flexes of each contributed to, and were apparent in, the projects and my practice. There is a sense of working in the midst of these forces, the conversations and debates with other practitioners. When plied together, the inflections of craft as a practice, which values making and materiality, highlights practices of interior design that engage with making and materiality where there is a sense of a hand(s) in making, a valuing of haptic encounters and an attention to the relation between people and surroundings. Plied with an interior design practice, craft is engaged with spatial and temporal concerns to produce a space crafting. Together an attentiveness to signs of matter, a privileging of the haptic (a tendency that invites close attention) as distinct from the optic (a tendency towards detachment), a working and reworking that differs from design techniques of abstraction. Both craft and interior design are practices situated between people and things and/or environments, making relations of closeness and immediacy as lived, live and living relations.

In this practice, expanding ways of thinking about both craft and interior has been enabled through engagement with the writings of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz. In relation to rethinking craft, Grosz offers a shift from thinking objects to things in a way that makes connections for me with craft as a spatial and temporal production. She writes:

The thing is the precondition of the living and the human, their means of survival, and the consequence or product of life and its practical needs. The thing is the point of intersection of space and time, the locus of the temporal narrowing and spatial localisation that constitutes specificity or singularity. (Grosz 2009: 125)

This idea of the thing made as a 'locus of the temporal narrowing and spatial localisation that constitutes specificity or singularity' connects also with the practice of interior design as a temporal and spatial practice as one of interiorization to make specific and singular, and through this to enable inhabitation physically, mentally and socially. This idea/potential of specificity or singularity is what interests me in relation to craft, interior and inhabitation; a way of making specific and singular as a response to the contemporary city and urban environment of increasing density shaped by forces of globalism and migration; a plied practice that

enables an inhabitation of cities as a counterpoint to the vastness and remoteness of globalism. Here, both the thing and inhabitation involve processes of slowing down forces to coalesce, to stabilise and make specific through a 'temporal narrowing and spatial localisation'. As expanded practices plied together, craft and interior design have much to contribute to modes of habitation, the urban environment and the twenty-first century as the century of the city.

Urban. Interior. Craft.

This plied practice of interior and craft has been experimented with in relation to the urban environment in various projects including undergraduate interior design studios, exhibitions and journal papers. For this paper, I would like to focus on two research projects: *Urban Interior Occupation* (Attiwill 2008) and *A World in Making: Cities Craft Design* (Attiwill 2013). In September 2008, Urban Interior – a research group of designers from the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT University – occupied the galleries of Craft Victoria for two weeks. With the second project, a call for journal papers focused on the conjunction between craft and the urban environment, and attracted submissions that engaged the practices of jewellery, tapestry, urban planning, architecture and landscape architecture with cities and the question of inhabitation.

In this paper I would like to take the opportunity to think through what these projects offer to thinking about plied practices of craft and interior design in the urban environment. It is important to make a distinction here and note that these concerns were not necessarily those of the practitioners/makers/designers involved – although for some it was – rather the following text discusses what the projects have enabled me to think in relation to the concerns of this paper. And while I refer to my practice as curatorial, this does not mean that I was the curator of each project. With the occupation of Craft Victoria, my curatorial practice was one that came during and after the event rather than one that pre-organised the exhibition. The journal involved an editorial role and was perhaps more like a curator's role in the sense that I called for submissions and then selected and arranged them to make the issue of the journal.

Urban Interior, a research group with which I am involved, focuses on the relation between people and the urban condition, and in particular the material, sensory, physiological, cultural and experiential dimensions that create and affect social

relations. Members of the group are from different design disciplines including industrial, landscape, architecture, fashion and interior design. Questions posed by Urban Interior include: What might be the contribution of design disciplines to new modes of urban inhabitation? How can temporary, interrelated design actions in urban conditions mediate the qualities needed to sustain and enrich the increasing inhabitation of urban areas? With the project in the gallery space of Craft Victoria – the idea of occupation referred to not only Urban Interior’s occupation of the gallery space for a period of two weeks but, through the inflection of craft, an attention to occupation as one of work and the techniques one uses in practice, and the kind of occupation one had. As an interior designer, I focused on practices of interiorisation in the production of the project and referred to my occupation as ‘interiorist’; initially with an ‘s’ and later with a ‘z’ – interiorizt (Attiwill 2012: 149).

Over the period of two weeks in 2008, the galleries of Craft Victoria became arranged through acts of crafting as distinct from craft artefacts, by process rather than outcomes involving performances, actions, changes, discussions, presentations, night and day. Urban Interior members occupied the galleries in different ways and at different times redistributing and enfolding outsides and insides through design and craft. For a couple of hours on specific days, the interior of the main gallery transformed into the *Cycle Craft Workshop*, a workshop for customising bicycles and testing them out. The long length of the gallery was perfect for riding a bike. Mick Peel, who teaches in Fashion at RMIT University, moved his workshop into the gallery each time and made leather accessories for bicycles such as seats and handlebars. He arranged meetings with his customers there and also advertised the workshop through various networks of urban cyclists that brought others to come, watch, talk and commission. As Mick noted, ‘the *Cycle Craft Workshop* combines the making and exhibition of artefact with event to explore the relationship between fashion, bicycles, the city, the urban cyclist and the hand crafted’ (Attiwill 2008).

A cycle event – *Ride on Dinner* – also invited people and bikes into the gallery. People brought their bikes in through the gallery front door and then, after having a red napkin tied around their necks, they were guided out of the back door and down the fire escape stairs to an outside space between the back of the city buildings. Here everyone gathered to drink and eat an entrée that had been prepared on site.

Following this, everyone mounted their bicycles and collectively rode through the city streets to the next destination where the main course was served. This was beside the Yarra River just as night was falling. From there, we rode over to the other side of the river and further along towards the sea to stop for dessert. The exterior of the city was interiorized as a place for dining and hospitality. Participants experienced and inhabited the city in new and unexpected ways. The event was organised and orchestrated by Mick Douglas and his collaborators in *Cultural Transports Collective*. Mick is located within the RMIT Industrial Design program and has a practice engaged with issues of performance and mobility.

The process of interiorization of the city and urban environment also happened inside the gallery. Rochus Urban Hinkel, an architect teaching in the interior design program, inverted the interior of the gallery, bringing its exterior inside and in the process bringing an attentiveness to the materiality and activity of the urban surrounding. Along the length of the gallery wall, a series of photographic images of the exterior wall of the gallery space, taken over the course of twenty-four hours, were projected along the full length of the corresponding inside wall. On the wall at the end of the gallery, a live video feed of the street outside the gallery was projected. Entering the gallery then was a way of encountering and inhabiting the urban exterior – yet in a way where the inflection of craft was present and drew attention to haptic qualities of this selected exterior.

Malte Wagenfeld – a product and furniture maker whose discipline is industrial design – also selected and interiorized exteriors in the space of the gallery. He collected smells from around the outside of the building: cigarette butts, rubbish, restaurant smells as well as smells from craft practices such as oil, metal filings, wax. These were then placed in boxes made by Malte and displayed in a darkened space behind the main gallery wall. Visitors were invited to open the boxes and smell them, then asked to fill out forms saying what they thought they had smelled. Crafting air and smells, Malte described his contribution as ‘an exploration of the relationship between, space, place, materiality, body and the atmosphere’ (Attiwill 2008).

A different interiorization was made in the *Nomadic Archive*, a series of discussions and presentation organized by Robyn Healy, whose practice is curatorial and situated within fashion. At the time, Robyn was involved with the assemblage of an archive of Melbourne design. The archive did not have a public interface and so Robyn selected items

from the archive and brought them to the Craft Victoria gallery (via one of Mick Douglas's bicycles) where she would arrange them – either on display tables or in some cases, project archival film footage – and invite people to come (including the designers and others whose work was in the archive) and talk about the archive, bringing a temporal exterior (the past) to the present. The *Nomadic Archive* brought this historical material into temporal and spatial proximity – making an encounter which was specific and singular.

The second project I wish to discuss is a journal dedicated to craft and design. The journal was the initiative of Craft Australia, Australia's primary body for craft, with the aim of encouraging and publishing research in the field. (Unfortunately, in 2012, after forty-one years, Craft Australia ceased due to lack of funding. However, the journal continued and is now published by the Australian National University.) For each issue, a guest editor is invited and in 2011, I was invited to edit issue #5, for publication in 2013, with the suggestion that the issue could address the relation between craft and the urban environment.

I proposed to bring craft and the urban environment together – however with a spatial and temporal focus, i.e. plying my practice of interior design together with the threads of craft and urban. I titled the issue 'A World in Making: Cities Craft Design' and posed the following questions in the call for papers:

What are the potentials in 'this century of the city' for craft and design practices? What is the contribution of craft and design to cities and live-ability? What might a craft sensibility bring to urban inhabitation? What of an expanded idea of craft practice as a way of working and thinking which addresses spatial and temporal urban conditions? What of the emergence of new forms of practices to engage in the condition of the urban environment and the social, political and cultural forces of the twenty-first century? (Attwill 2013: 4)

During the process of editing the journal, assumptions about craft became apparent as people were surprised by the range of submissions that expanded craft beyond its familiar role within the urban context as a form of public art. The call attracted abstracts that situated the practices of jewellery, tapestry, ceramics, gardening, blacksmithing, graphic design, product and industrial design, service design, interior design, urban planning, architecture and landscape architecture

with cities. While not all the abstracts made it into papers, some of the inflections of craft which expanded the concept of craft are interesting to note: landscape rethought as patchwork; craft as a creative strategy for enhancing place, for engaging and producing communities; craft's relation and influence in the emergence of DIY and Open Source which has led to a transformation of the twenty-first century city; craft as a strategy in relation to contemporary social, political, historical, cultural forces; and the difference between crafting and designing cities in relation to colonialism and migration. The following is a discussion of the projects explored in some of the published papers.

In her paper, 'Jewellery, the urban milieu and emergence', Jacqui Chan invites the reader into a series of projects connecting jewellery and cities, specifically the cities of Melbourne, Ramallah and Christchurch. Her practice engages with the materiality of these cities; working with matter picked up from the urban environment which she then reconfigures into brooches. People are invited to wear a brooch and move through the city as an urban milieu. This process transforms people's sense of where they are and invites them to have a different awareness from the familiar and habitual; qualities surface as affects and intensities create feelings of specificity and connection. As Jacqui notes, through the projects she 'came to realise that colourising someone's experience, fostering a state of wonderment or provoking interactions with the city was a radical thing for jewellery to do' (Chan 2013: 31).

'The generative loom: Tapestry in the community' by Kirsty Darlaston presents her PhD research through practice: a practice of weaving situated within a public urban space. Over a period of time, Kirsty wove strips of photographed textile objects from other places and cultures to produce a map of the city of Charles Sturt, a local government area in the western suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia. As she wove, people passing would slow down to watch the process, her technique and the materials used as the image slowly evolved. Many of those watching were migrants from countries such as Iran and Afghanistan, who had first-hand experiences of weaving. Here now in the urban environment of Adelaide, people from different spaces and cultures were brought close in this world in making. The loom and process became generative in that each gesture of her hand wove not just a material thread but also cultural, temporal and spatial threads and memories that produced a new sense of belonging in the city of Charles Sturt.

Service/product designers Marzia Mortati and Beatrice Villari discussed their urban interventions which aimed to create ‘temporary communities of makers’. ‘Temporary’ in that it was gathered around a particular project; ‘community’ as a ‘collective subject’ that is different to the sum of its parts; ‘makers’ in that ‘the community originates to *make* something that is designing and developing an idea in particular contexts, sharing languages and tools’ (Mortati and Villari 2013: 135–6). For them, this approach involved a shift from design to craft and making; a shift that was vital to their project’s aim of regenerating the city of Milan. Mark Richardson, Susie Elliott and Brad Haylock’s paper addressed the transformation of cities in the twenty-first century due to contemporary technologies that have effected a shift from mass manufacturing to distributed making via home as factory. The situation of the contemporary city and the potential of craft is addressed by Erin Hinton and Craig Bremner in relation to the practice of urban planning. For them, the crafting process requires a dialogue between practice and thinking: ‘craft demands listening to its material’ and the inclusion of consistent interrogation. They point to these as critical to the designing and planning of the contemporary city (Hinton and Bremner 2013: 83).

Landscape architects Marieluise Jonas and Heike Rahmann address the voids that are overlooked and neglected in the urban environment, specifically in the cities of Tokyo and Melbourne. Referring to their practice as a dynamic urbanism, they intervene in these incidental spatial and temporal conditions in a way that does not attempt to transform them into purposeful designs, but enables and makes apparent transitory, fleeting, contingent and poignant moments. The scale here is different from that usually equated with urbanism, there is a focus on the experiential 1:1 scale between people and their surroundings with an intent to foster and nurture social, psychological and environmental relations that value and encourage attentiveness, curiosity and care.

A World in Making

In conclusion, the final part of this paper’s title: ‘a world in making’. This phrase has two inflections that are both in play here: as an immersion *in* a world of making, of craft and design, of practitioners and practice, of matter and techniques; and a theoretical orientation that poses ‘world’ as always in making – ‘a worlding’ (Massumi 2002: 128; Murphie 2008: 2).

Reflecting on these projects as urban, interior and craft in relation to ‘a world in making’, the question of habitability comes to the foreground and a number of ideas and future potentialities emerge. Each of the projects manifests a world of making where practice immersed in issues, momentums, interests and forces, produces interventions/projects that gather and slow down movement to bring in close and make arrangements in a way that enables habitation.

Urban Interior occupations encouraged people – practitioners and audience – to think about the role of craft in relation to urban environments. Relations were made between the city and people through bringing into proximity and closeness urban matter, smells, sound, air and atmosphere, and enabled an inhabitation of the city in a different way through new experiences. The potential of transforming and making new relations through craft practices become foregrounded. Craft Victoria curator Nella Themelios wrote of the value of the project:

As an organisation specialising in the exhibition of contemporary craft, this project represented for us a particularly pertinent series of provocations: To what extent are the relational elements of a space or environment relevant to the gestures of craft? How can the notion of ‘urban interior’ extend the conceptual parameters of contemporary craft practice? Is the strategy of ‘occupation’ a new elaboration of exhibitionary practice in this context? Importantly, this installation encouraged audiences to participate. (Themelios 2009)

Examples of this are encountered in the papers of the journal which discuss craft through projects where techniques and gestures are manifested as vital urban practices. For example, how jewellery can transform someone’s experience of the city through wearing; how the practice of tapestry weaving as a performative intervention in a public space enables people to traverse cultures, times and spaces to make connections which become critical to their ability to make a sense of belonging. The question of habitability in relation to the problematic of how to live in the twenty-first century urban environment is addressed here through craft and design practices – as a world in making produced and experienced through making and in the process of making.

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- Suzie Attiwill is associate professor (Interior Design) and deputy dean (Learning & Teaching), School of Architecture & Design, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.