

# Making research to explore emerging practices

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## Abstract

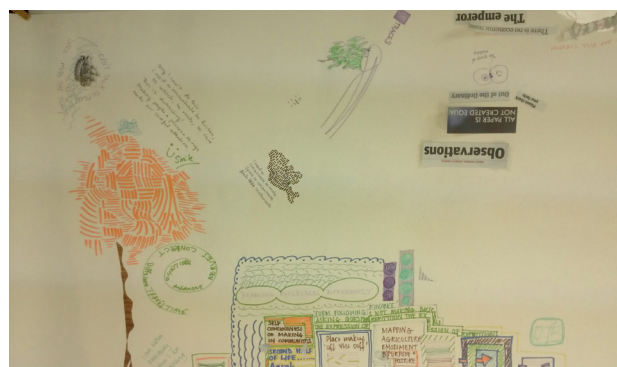
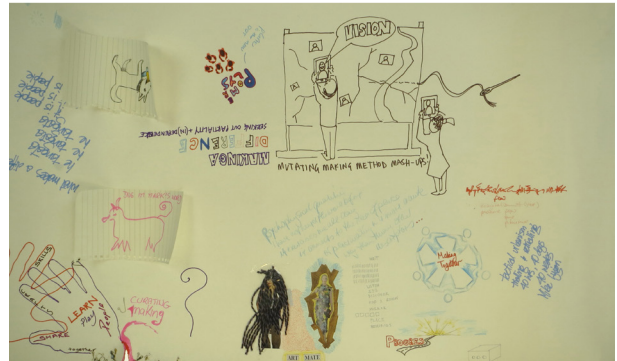
At Making Futures Conference 2015 Katie Hill and Lizzie Harrison submitted a proposal to facilitate a making workshop as part of the conference programme. The proposal built upon an emerging practice of using practical craft and making methods as part of research processes. Hill and Harrison had previously used these methods with maker communities to explore issues around ethical production and consumption as well as other applications of the methods. In conversation with the workshop chair, Nick Gant, this proposal developed into an activity that ran throughout the two day conference. Delegates were invited to contribute to a collaborative practical record of the conference material through the method of mixed media collage. The activity space was located at the centre of the workshop space directly in front of the presentation screen with seating around it. The activity was introduced at the beginning of both days of the conference, and Hill or Harrison were available throughout the conference to explain and facilitate contributions to the collaborative work. At the end of the two days there was a collective discussion around made piece of work. This paper presents images of the work with an introduction to the method. The intention is that it presents in itself a record of the conference that is open to individual analysis and elicitation of understandings of questions that were raised through the conference papers. The authors have decided not to offer their own analysis of this collaborative piece.

## Introduction

As more makers are explicitly addressing the problems of a global environmental and social crisis of consumption through their practice, questions are raised about how and why consumers engage in more sustainable approaches to making, and how makers can deepen the engagement of consumers in more responsible and ethical consumption. Recognising that change to a sustainable system of production and consumption requires the engagement of all stakeholders, and new knowledge and understanding, new approaches in research are needed to engage with both maker and consumer communities, and also to bring the two communities together. These new approaches to research must use languages and methods that are native and not disruptive to the exchanges and engagements taking place. Within this space the authors as active practitioners and researchers have collaboratively developed making based research methods. The authors have primarily used the methods in practice-based research environments, and are seeking opportunities to try the methods in different environments. The proposal to Making Futures conference was to facilitate a 'research making' workshop to enable delegates to explore questions raised by the conference through practical making activities and to express responses to questions and themes in a visual form.

The purpose of this paper is primarily to present a visual record of the piece of creative work that was made at Making Futures 2015 by delegates at the conference. In order to provide a context for the images the paper will also include a description of the workshop in which the work was produced, and a description of how this workshop fits in to the broader research and making practice of the authors.

A record of the work that was produced  
The following pages capture the collective collage produced by approximately 40 delegates over 12 hours.



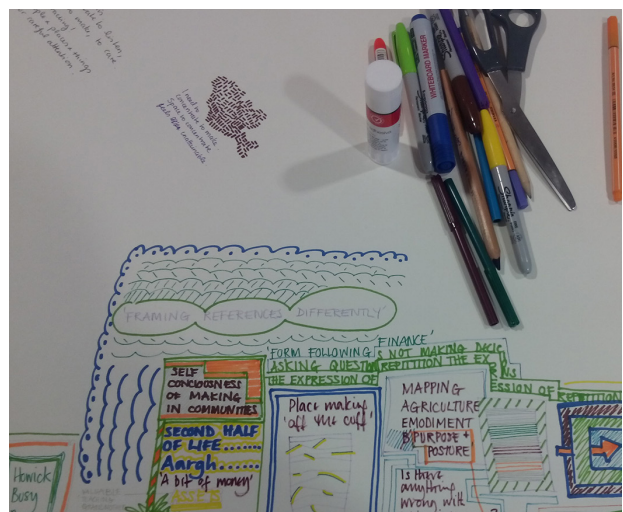
## Description of the workshop

The original proposal for the workshop was: 'to design a bespoke maker research activity for the Making Futures conference. The activity could be a discrete session of up to 30 minutes to explore questions raised by the conference (potentially identified in advance in collaboration with the conference committee), or it could be run as a drop in activity for delegates to participate in alongside the conference sessions, for example as a lunch time and break time activity, collecting feedback and 'data' as the conference develops. Hill and Harrison's workshops have, in the past, been run in restaurants, street markets, craft fairs, and village halls, with small groups, large groups, and passing trade – and as such are highly adaptable to different spaces and audiences. The proposed aim for the workshop would be to generate responses to a set of questions pertinent to the conference through engagement in quick making activities so that delegates could reflect through making on specific questions and could make responses which can then be shared as an installation that forms part of the conference programme, and can be discussed, recorded, and shared as an output of the conference. A more detailed proposal would be developed collaboratively with the organising committee prior to the conference.'

After the proposal was accepted by the committee, the authors were contacted by the session chair, Nick Gant, who suggested that the workshop might run throughout the two days of the conference as part of 'Place-Making-Space: a workshop of tools and methods for 'crafting communities' and 'making places' in the post-global / post-localism era'. The agreed aim for the workshop was to generate responses during the Place-Making-Space strand through engagement in quick making activities so that delegates could reflect through making on the papers and discussions throughout the conference and make responses which could then be shared as an installation that forms part of the conference programme, and could be discussed, recorded, and shared as an output of the conference.

The making station was set up centrally to the conference space interrupting the usual theatre style seating arrangements. Set out over trestle tables was a continuous making surface of paper surrounded by chairs. The table also held a variety of materials including: pens, decorative paper, magazines for collage, glue and tape. Delegates took up seats as they chose and were informed at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session that they were welcome to make or draw anything as the sessions progressed.

After each session the workspace was tidied. This is the first time the method has been tested in a conference setting. It is designed to be dynamic and responsive to the environment and in this example it disrupted the traditional seating arrangement of a conference to create a central making space. As the workshop developed the delegates started to improvise and additions of 'dog sketches' and recycled jewellery brought into the space by other speakers were added to the collage.



## Hill and Harrison's research making practices

As two trained designers, Hill and Harrison specialise in, amongst other things, designing bespoke research making activities to integrate into events. Hill and Harrison have collaborated on several research projects exploring themes of sustainability, design, and ethical production and consumption practices. Most recently they worked together on the Art and Humanities Research Council funded Connected Communities Create, Connect, Sustain: Community sustainability through making and trade co-design and co-production of research project (Hill et al. 2014) where Hill was the research associate project coordinator and Harrison was the community partner. Prior to working on Create Connect Sustain both were based in Leeds, UK, and working on creative projects through their respective social enterprises, Leeds Love It Share It CIC (Leeds Love it Share it 2016) and Antiform / Remade in Leeds (Antiform 2016), working with design process and methods to address issues around urban regeneration, community development and sustainability.

Through these projects research methods that integrate making into researching have been developed to explore the questions raised in community and sustainability focussed makers practices. These methods draw upon a combination of practice-based design research methods, such as user research (Aldersey-Williams et al. 1999), and visual methods from social sciences, particularly arts-based methods. Prosser and Loxley (2008) offer a good summary of arts-based research methods set into a broader field of visual methods, and draw together key literature in this area. Some of the braver scholars writing about arts-based methods claim that arts methods access highly meaningful sensory phenomena that are beyond text (and the restrictions of language) and therefore that arts based methods can expose more complex responses than text. However, within the social sciences which is dominated by language, arts-based methods struggle to be recognised as valid and rigorous research methods. This is changing.

## References

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