# Longing for *Now*

Max W. Westin

In remembrance of
Hanna Elofsson

# Table of Content

Over the past couple of years, I have spent countless hours crafting textiles by hand. Not only am I madly in love with this activity, but I have noticed how the act of making has become an increasingly important factor in sustaining my day-to-day life, through good times and bad. Crafting has taught me patience when feeling restless, provided me relief when feeling stressed, comforted me when feeling anxious, and aided me in times of sorrow-components that all contribute to greater personal autonomy.

My passion for this subject has left me curious to further explore the health benefits of engaging in bodily crafts activity. Consequently, in this thesis, I am researching the universal relationship between human well-being and textile crafts activities—the positive impact that the handmade has on our lives; as a means for intro spection, a coping strategy, and healing. The research is based on empirical evidence from qualitative studies, personal anecdotes, as well as compelling stories and initiatives started by passionate individuals who believe that crafting can transform our lives for the better.

The Old English *cræft*, German and Swedish kraft, and the Dutch kracht–meaning *strength* or *power*.[1] In the English language, there is a distinction between the words craft and craftsmanship–they have very much to do with one another, but have different meanings. Craft is usually thought of as a manual activity, to describe an occupation or trade requiring care, manual dexterity, and skill.[2]

When you hear the word *craft*, you might think of decorative, handmade objects such as pots, baskets, mittens, etc. If we consider the word in its active form, crafting or to craft, as a verb instead of a noun, we realise that there is a broader definition to it. Things as diverse as a set design, a website, or a suit are all crafted.[3]

Craftsmanship is thought of as the quality of work. It is embedded in the making, to do good work for its own sake. The word craftsmanship can be used in a much broader sense, not only concerning craft, but to describe the quality that gradually builds up in any kind of work done. It means that someone has taken time and effort to polish their skill in whatever they do or make.[4]

1 2021.

2 Sennet, 2016.

3 Adamson, 2018.

4 Sennet, 2016.

Fig. 1, House of Bavarian History, *"Spindle, two spindle whorls, spouted vessel"*, 6th century.





When speaking of textile, I'm referring to materials that are structured by pieces of yarns or threads, which in turn are made from raw fibres spun into long twisted lengths. One fibre itself doesn't make a thread (unless it's synthetically made), and one unworked thread on its own doesn't make a textile. Fibre by fibre, thread by thread, they interlock with one another and form a structural network–what we call a textile.

Fig. 2 Johannes Vermeer, *"The Lacemaker"*, 1669-1670,

## 2.2 TEXTILE CRAFTS ACTIVITY

The production of textiles can be done industrially, with the help of programming and machines, or manually; with the help of humanly bodied interaction. It is the process of the latter that I am interested in; the transformative process from fibre to yarn, and yarn to textile performed by hand; techniques such as spinning, weaving, knitting, crochet, embroidery, lace-making, etc.

Fig. 3 Own Image, Plastic doily & found objects, 2021.

Fig. 4 Faig Ahmed, *"Impossible Viscosity"*, 2012.

Through all times, and up until this day, humankind has tried to define what health means. According to the *World Health Organisation,* health is defined as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".[5] This concept of health is consistent with the biopsychosocial model of health, an interdisciplinary model that looks at the connection between biology, psychology, and socio-environmental factors. It stands in contrast to the more traditional medical model, which defines health as the absence of disease or illness, and emphasises clinical diagnosis and interventions.

This definition was adopted by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, an international agreement organised by the WHO in 1986, which further describes health as a resource for everyday life, not the object of living. Health is a means to living well, which highlights the link between participation in society and good health.

A common theme that has emerged from different definitions of well being is that of feeling good and functioning well. 'Feeling good' puts emphasis on the subjective experience, an individual's experience of their life, whereas 'functioning well' on the objective, a bigger perspective, where comparison of their life circumstances with social norms and values is in focus.[6]

## 3.1 Hedonic vs. Eudaemonic well-being

Health is one of the top influences on well-being, among other life circumstances such as education, work, social relationships, built and natural environments, security, civic engagement and governance, housing, and work-life balance. There is a two-way relationship between health and well-being, both affecting one-another.[7]

5 WHO, *Publication date unknown.*

6 Crinson, 2018 p.3.

7 2014.

**Fig. 5** Diedrick Brackens, *"shape of a fever believer"*, 2020.

To measure well-being or 'happiness', the concepts of hedonic well being and eudaemonic well-being are often used. Both schools of thought, important to philosophy and psychology, date back to Ancient Greece and are used to signify the 'good life' or the ultimate goal in life.[8]

In short, Hedonic well-being is considered subjective as it is more focused on the personal experience, attaining happiness by seeking pleasure and avoiding suffering–maximising positive emotion and minimising negative emotion. This means that, if positive emotions are more prevalent than negative, an individual will perceive their life as more emotionally satisfying which improves the quality of life.

The approach of eudaemonic well-being focuses on being in development toward expressing your

8 Pöllänen & Weissmann-Hanski, 2019.

**Fig. 6** Own Image, Hand spun plastic yarn & hair band, 2021.



**Fig. 7** Own Image, Hand spun plastic yarn, 2021.

true nature and realising your full potential. Only by living in accordance with your *daemon*, your true inner spirit, eudaemonia can emerge. Emphasis is put on experiences that are objectively good for the person, often characterised, for example, by self-determination, meaningful engagement, social connectedness, personal growth, self-actualisation, and excellence.[9]

Eudaemonia is about functioning well in life rather than the feelings one has towards life, meaning the well lived life is not necessarily dependent on the current emotional state of the person experiencing it. One can feel dissatisfaction and sadness at times but still, have a functioning life.

In the eudaemonic approach to well-being, the emphasis is put on the involvement in activities that are inherently good for the individual, and are consequently associated with long-term and enduring well-being. The sense of well-being and life satisfaction derived from the experience of simple and physical pleasures (hedonic), is more likely to vanish long term. Eudaemonic theories maintain that the desire or pleasure that a person values, might not necessarily be good for the individual, and despite them producing pleasure, they might not improve well-being.

To illustrate this, I will use two examples that I can well relate to. Binge watching series on *Netflix* and crocheting a piece of textile may yield similar experiences of hedonic quality, resulting in both pleasure and enjoyment. However, crocheting is more likely to provide the opportunity for personal growth, self-development, and feelings of competency than spending hours and hours watching series, and is, therefore, more likely to increase well-being.

9 Ryan & Deci, 2001, p.144-147.



Further research on self-determination theory and psychological well-being, has found that behaviours of a hedonic approach may actually be causing harm to well-being long-term. For example, sensation and pleasure-seeking have been associated with several negative outcomes, such as compulsive or addictive behaviour.[10]

10 McMahan & Estes, 2011 p.3-6.

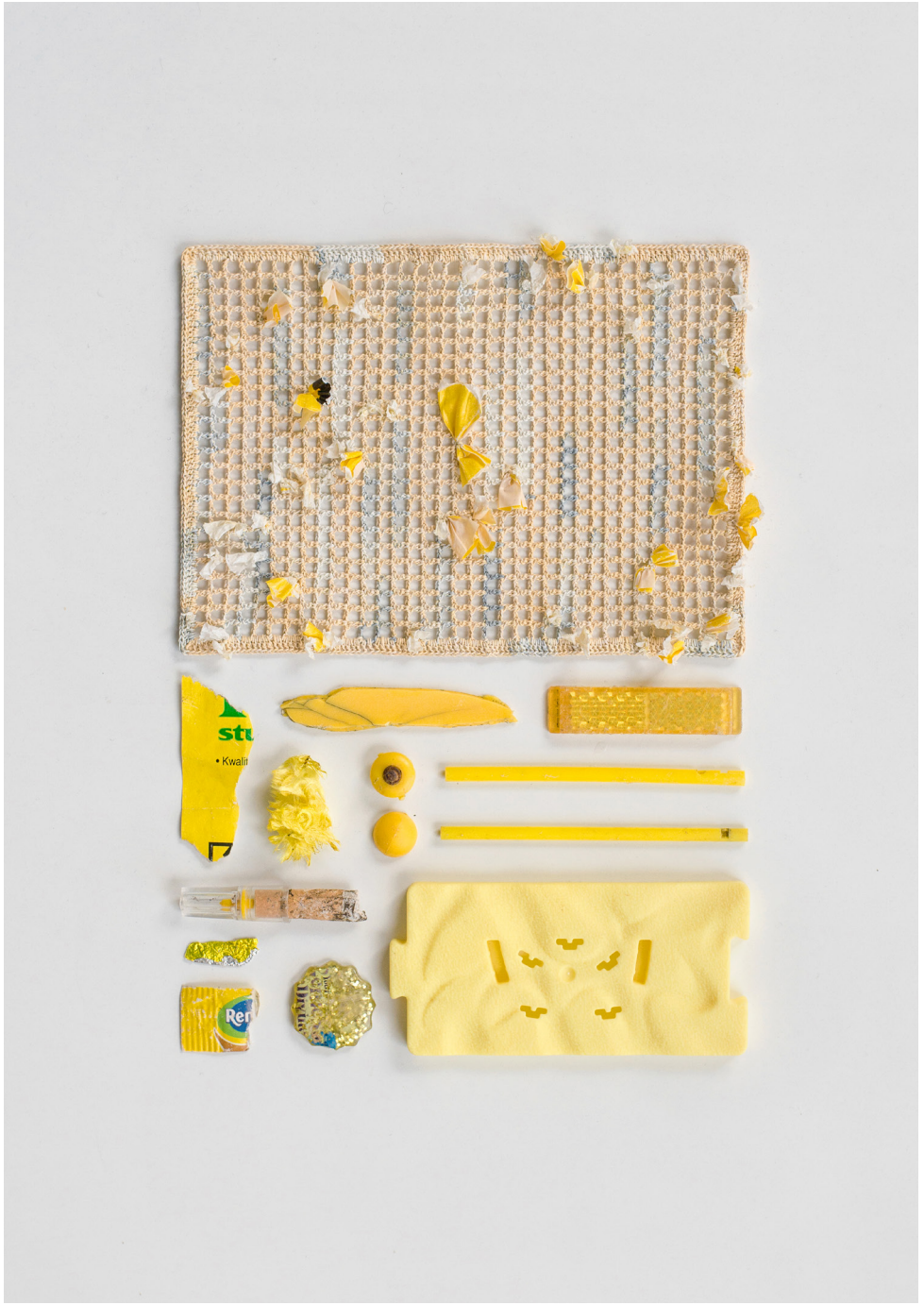
## 3.2 CRAFTING WELL-BEING

Evidence suggests that several common key elements for improved eudaemonic well-being are similar to the elements which are required for crafting. Activities that are usually associated with eudaemonia are ones where there is room to fulfil personal potential, practice one's skills, invest time and effort, clear and realistic goals, high concentration level, and strive for excellence. They are long-term and dynamic, and focus on optimal functioning rather than optimal pleasure and comfort.

According to Ann A. Wilcock, Professor of *Occupational Therapy at University of South Australia*, an activity like this is comprised of three notions– doing, being, and becoming. Doing refers to the involvement in human nature, maintaining and developing physical and mental capacities on which health is dependent. Being refers to introspection and meditative contemplation of the self, and becoming refers to possibility, growth, and the evolution of the personal identity.

Later added to this conception is belonging, referring to connectedness, engagement with social interaction, and connections. Belonging has a notion of mutual support and exchange, a sense of being valued and socially included in the given context, and doing with and for others. It also includes elements of connectedness to nature, culture, traditions, and ancestors.

Fig. 8 Own Image, Plastic filet crochet and found objects, 2021.



In today's Western society, crafting textiles is no longer necessary to acquire everyday items and clothing. Though it is a human-based need to escape from conventional paid work and domestic chores, and for many, there seems to be a desire for embodied interaction with the material world, to make things by hand, and to form the world surrounding oneself.

Participating in creative handicraft activities itself is not enough to enhance well-being, the crafting must be meaningful to the crafter. These acts of creativity don't need to be acts of a 'genius' artist, they can simply be acts of 'everyday' making, such as needlework, knitting, or crochet. This type of creativity is suggested to be essential in affecting our health and well-being, and a powerful tool for bringing each moment alive.[11]

11 Pöllänen & Weissmann-Hanski, 2019.

Craft-based textile activities are starting to be recognised for their important relation to well-being; improved self-esteem, providing a sense of community and belonging, the continuation of traditions, healthy ageing, and the development and sustainment of creativity. Though, some people researching this field suggest that the relations of textile craft making in everyday life and well-being still have not been investigated thoroughly enough.[12]

12 Kenning, 2015 p.9-10.

In my adulthood, I have often struggled with the feeling of nowness, losing myself in existential thoughts about the past and the future–worrying about what has been or what is to come. I used to turn to social media to pass time and to look for affirmation, but over the last few years, I have felt increasingly stressed, anxious, and worried about social media involvement and time spent excessively in the virtual world.

Consequently, I have replaced one detrimental compulsion with a more vital and substantial one. For the past couple of years, I have developed a close relationship with the handmade; it has become so essential in my life to make by hand, that I cannot imagine a well-functioning version of myself without bodily engagement with the material world.

As a way of coping and dealing with the everyday, making textiles lets me look for answers introspectively rather than mirror myself in others. It challenges my perceptions and values in life; the more time I spend on the making, and the more I interact with the material world, the less materialistic values I acquire, and the more autonomous I feel. What I make reflects my mental state, where I am, and who I want to be.

As rational beings, we often feel the need to control the course of life. Despite it being irrational to predict and predetermine the outcome of our actions, we are often left with the feeling of incapability and powerlessness when things do not work out as we wish. To some extent, I believe that the interaction with threads can help us to deal with everyday life and the struggles that we as human beings are confronted with at a higher degree.



*Undoing* a knot can teach us how to solve problems. *Repetition* can teach us patience and persistence. *Keeping* the tension in a yarn can teach us when to hold on and when to let go.

I think a lot about the presence but have had a difficult time feeling present. Since I started making, I have always been more drawn to working on a smaller scale, and I always preferred a finer thread over a thicker yarn. Something small-scale demands a certain quality of attention. To me, zooming in, focusing on micro rather than macro, shuts the surroundings out, it lets me be *here*. Working at a slower pace amplifies the feeling of the present moment; it makes me witness my own present time and it lets me be in the *now*.

If truth be told, I believe that my urge to craft is a manifestation of my longing–the longing for time, and the longing for *now*.

A Finnish research study from 2019 reveals that many textile practitioners perceive the making as fulfilment of human needs; not only bringing joy and pleasure but also as meaningful to their everyday life and improving psychological well-being.[13]

13 Pöllänen & Weissmann-Hanski, 2019.

The study reports that for many practitioners, crafting works as a distraction from worries and unpleasant thoughts, but also a relief from timetables, rush, and duties–giving a sense of control and privacy, and departure from psychological discomfort. In a sense, the activity helps to create your own space, where there is the freedom to contemplate on thoughts, hopes and develop a better understanding of the self, life, and personal relationships.

Some people suggest that routine craftwork is manageable and an easily handled activity even whe feeling exhausted, angry, or stressed, and thus crafting works as a stabiliser, helping to slow down and calm down. On the other hand, the report also indicates that the activity provides stimulation in situations of restlessness, or where there is too much time at hand. In this way, the activity provides relief from timetables; crafting helps you slow down and let the mind relax, contributing to the feeling of 'here and now', rather than stressing about the past or future.





A neuroscientist at University of Richmond believes that actively engaging our hands is key to making our brains happy. She came up with the term 'behaviourceuticals' as a substitute for pharmaceuticals, in the belief that by engaging in activities with our hands, we change the neurochemistry of our brain in such a way that drugs can. Putting things together using both hands creatively is more engaging for the brain. Neuroscientist Kelly Lambert explains how in the 19th-century doctors would prescribe knitting to women who suffered from serious anxiety.[14] From today's perspective, this might sound misogynist, but doctors of the time sure were on to something.

14 CBS News, 2018.

**Fig. 9** Louise Bourgeois, *"HEART"*, 2004.

**Fig. 10** Ernest Thesiger at home seated in a chair which he upholstered with his own embroidery, 1930s.



**Fig. 11** Back from the trenches in Washington, D.C, circa 1918.

As far back as the American Civil War, knitting and embroidery have been used in the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers, who would spend many long months in rehabilitation. At the time of World War I, various programs were developed to help veterans in recovery. Since the medical practice of the time was less developed, learning and practicing textile crafts provided great relief, both physically and mentally.[15]

After artist and actor Ernest Thesiger wounded his hands during the First World War, he found great relief in petit point embroidery, which he became a world-class expert in. He led the *Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry*, operating between 1918 and 1955, perhaps the most successful and high-profile project in the U.K that helped wounded and 'shell-shocked' veterans returning from the First World War, back to employment.[16]

Today, this practice is backed up by psychiatrists, doctors, and scientists and is an activity used to outbalance stress and anxiety to people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or severe depression. Knitting's repetitious movements can evoke the relaxation response, a meditative state in which heart rate and blood pressure decrease, breathing slows and the level of stress hormones drop.

Betsan Corkhill, a former physiotherapist working for the *National Health Service* in the UK, has researched the benefits of knitting for people who suffer from severe physical pain. After freelancing for a craft magazine that received numbers of letters about the health benefits of crafts, she got curious about the subject and started a knitting group at a pain clinic in Bath in 2006.

15 PieceWork Magazine, 2020

16 Tyler, *Publication date unknown.*



*"Pain originates in the brain, not in muscles and joints,"* she says. "*The brain has to pay attention to signals coming up from your body. If you're lonely or bored or unhappy, you'll experience more pain than if you are socially active and occupied and that's very well accepted."* As her research on the power of knitting proves successful, more and more pain clinics in the United Kingdom have started to use knitting as a form of therapy.[17]

17 Craft Yarn Council, *Publication date unknown.*

During and following a humanitarian crisis, the rate of violence that women experience increases radically. In reaction to this, the non-profit organisation The Common Threads Project has developed a transformative trauma intervention, a therapeutic process rooted in neuro-scientific and socio-cultural understandings of trauma, using practices from trauma-informed therapy, bodywork, and psycho-education combined with the old textile traditions of sewing story cloths to depict experiences that can be impossible to express in words.

Fig. 12 Common Threads Project, *"A girl is not safe in her own home"*, 2015.

Currently in Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, and Nepal, women who are survivors of sexual violence and trauma from displacement in conflicted areas, have taken part in this community project, aiming to heal, cope with stress and reframe their narrative.



In their mission to create a lasting impact on local communities, *The Common Threads Project* trains local mental health providers following their methodology, to ensure treatment is culturally appropriate and that the intervention will last beyond the organisation's involvement. The six-month therapy treatment is done in groups of 12–15 women. Initially, the women start with games and play, helping them to get to know one another and to create safety, comfort, and to build trust. They also go through psycho-education, learning about what trauma is, where the symptoms that they experience come from.

The idea is that instead of verbalising their difficulties orally, which to many is nearly impossible, they get the picture of the trauma that is stuck in their mind out, through sewing with needle and thread. It's not just about getting the story out, but to understand the story in a new way.

Most people who took part in the women's circles report that the treatment has helped them relieving symptoms that get in the way of their functioning, and clinical studies made post-treatment show a reduction of anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms in these women.[18]

18 Common Threads Project, *Publication date unknown.*

In the Finnish research study, textile craft making is described as a tool for self-reflection, self acceptance, and personal growth in difficult life situations; generating hope and faith in the future, which in the long run can strengthen the feeling of autonomy. Crafting can nurture the development of physical and cognitive skills, helping to cope with stressful life situations. People describe how a difficult life situation inspired them to take on more and more challenging craft projects, and during the worst of times, some suggest how they transfer the persistence and determination needed

for textile making to their own life. The analysis reveals how crafting and continuous experiential learning can increase the maker's sense of capability and positive thinking, and thus in the hardships of life, the bodily act of doing becomes an unconscious self-protection mechanism. When a relationship has formed with the activity, it becomes a catharsis for the maker; the feelings of achievements reduce unpleasant realities, and it allows the mind to begin, in small steps, analyse the disordered state. The making of physical objects empowers the maker, concretising their emotional perception in a tangible form.

This type of knowing by doing through craft-making can lead to narrative reflection, and thereby a better comprehension of oneself and one's life. Favourable outcomes in crafting can bring emotional relief, and empower the self to a higher level. More concretely, it can enable to reshape one's personal aims and the estimation of their outcomes. Expressiveness through creative craft making can bring new perspectives on life, and in that way help in handling difficult life situations, generate optimism, and provide new ingredients for narrative reconstruction, which in some cases can lead to personal transformation.[19]

19 Pöllänen, 2015.

**Fig. 13** Fine Cell Work, Embroidered cushion.



The charity *Fine Cell Work* is aimed towards inmates serving their sentences in British prisons. As prison populations continue to grow, and inmates are confined to their cells for endless hours, Fine Cell Work provides prisoners training in high-quality, skilled needlework. to foster hope, discipline, and self-esteem.

Started originally in 1997 by social reformer Lady Anne Tree, a frequent prison visitor and lobbyist for prisoner's rights. The thought of criminals having paid jobs while in prison has been controversial in public opinion, but Tree argued that inmates should have real jobs with real salaries, as she believed this would equip them better to re-enter society.


**Fig. 14** Fine Cell Work, Inmate performing needlework.

Twenty years later, the same organisation does not only provide prisoners with occupation but also runs a community-based workshop and post-release program. The current director of the organisation says that, even though the prison system is in place to serve justice in society, many people re-offend and go back inside after release, as they cannot function properly in society after

serving long sentences. The aim is to let prisoners finish their served time with work skills, earned and saved money, build independence and confidence in themselves to not re-offend.[20]

As of 2017, thirteen former inmates are provided with work experience, formal training, and employment support in the post release program. As a result of this, seven out of these people have found jobs in costume-making and leatherwork professions.

Participants have reported that taking part in the program has had a big impact on the life locked behind bars. One says that productively making fine needlework does not only sustain him financially but gives him meaning and a sense of pride when completing a project. Another one shares how the work has helped him deal with his mental health, manage his self-harming, and given back his self-esteem and sense of self worth. He feels that he can hold on to these skills forever.[21]

20 Greenhalgh, 2017.

21 Fine Cell Work, *Publication date unknown.*





Textile craft activities have provided challenges, creative outlets, social interaction as well as mental and physical stimulation for many generations. The character of craft and the relationship between craft and maker have various meanings across different cultures, geographic groups, and genders. Nevertheless, a common thread is that the maker is often emotionally invested, and continues to make throughout different stages of life.

With an increase in the average ageing of the global population, activities that can be performed by individuals with reduced mobility, and with physical and mental limitations as a result of ageing are becoming more and more essential. As a result of the increase in quality of life and life expectancy in the world's population, reported cases of dementia are expected to grow threefold globally by 2050.

**Fig. 15** Essie Bendolph Pettway, *"Two sided quilt: Blocks and 'One Patch'—stacked squares and rectangle variation"*, 1973.

**Fig. 16** Arthur Rothstein, *Gee's bend quilter Jorena Pettway sews a quilt as two young girls hold the fabric for her,* 1937.




**Fig. 17** Lucy Marie Mingo, Nancy Pettway, and Arlonzia Pettway work to attach the top piece of a quilt to the batting, 2006.

Research has shown that for many elderly, the making of textiles often contributes to healthy ageing and well being in a variety of ways, even through periods of transition, such as retirement or illness, many makers remain active. Additionally, not only the intrinsic qualities of craft making promote healthy ageing, but the engagement and social interaction in crafting groups is well-known to be stimulating to ageing individuals. These approaches are believed to support self-management and autonomy, as well as offer non-clinical alternatives to improve well-being and healthy ageing.[22]

22 Kenning, 2015 p.1-4.

In the small remote Black community Gee's Bend in Alabama, women have created numbers of quilted masterpieces since the early 20th century. The quilts proudly carry old textile traditions practiced by many African Americans and have made this pastime the literal fabric of their lives.

Most of the residents of Gee's Bend are direct descendants of enslaved people who worked on the Pettway cotton plantation, and some bear the slaveholder's name still to this day. Back in the days, the women would stitch together scraps of fabric to make warm blankets and insulations for their children when there was time over. The need for quilting arose from a physical need for warmth, rather than a pursuit to reinvent this art form. The quilting community gained national recognition during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's when the *Freedom Quilting Bee* was established and distributed their quilts across America. Ever since, their work has been widely known and immensely popular, shown in numerous art museums all over the world.[23]

23 Alison Jacques Gallery, 2020.

From generation to generation, grandmothers have taught mothers, who have taught daughters.



Today, while learning from each other's styles, they also strive for individuality in their works. Most quilts are improvisational, starting with basic patterns and take new forms further during the making process; transforming recycled clothes, sacks, and fabrics to design vessels of cultural survival and continuing portraits of the makers' identities.[24]

24 Souls Grown Deep, *Publication date unknown.*

The quilters of Gee's Bend are a great example of how textile crafts connect the past, present and future; how the notion of belonging from Ann A. Wilcock's theory of eudaemonic well-being manifests in its most distinct form. The quilts are personal reminders of the community's traditions and life histories, a visible evidence of kinship and love that strengthens intergenerational affiliation and provides a sense of hope and continuity.[25]

25 Pöllänen & Weissmann-Hanski, 2019.

A strikingly monumental community crafts project in the history of textile is the *AIDS Memorial Quilt*. The Quilt was conceived in 1985 by San Francisco gay rights activist Cleve Jones. Since the assassination of gay San Fransisco's supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone in 1978, marches honouring these men were held annually, which Jones helped organise. During the 1985 march, he had asked his fellow activists to bring placards with the names of their loved ones who had died of AIDS. At the end of the march, they taped all of the names on the San Francisco Federal building, almost resembling a patchwork.

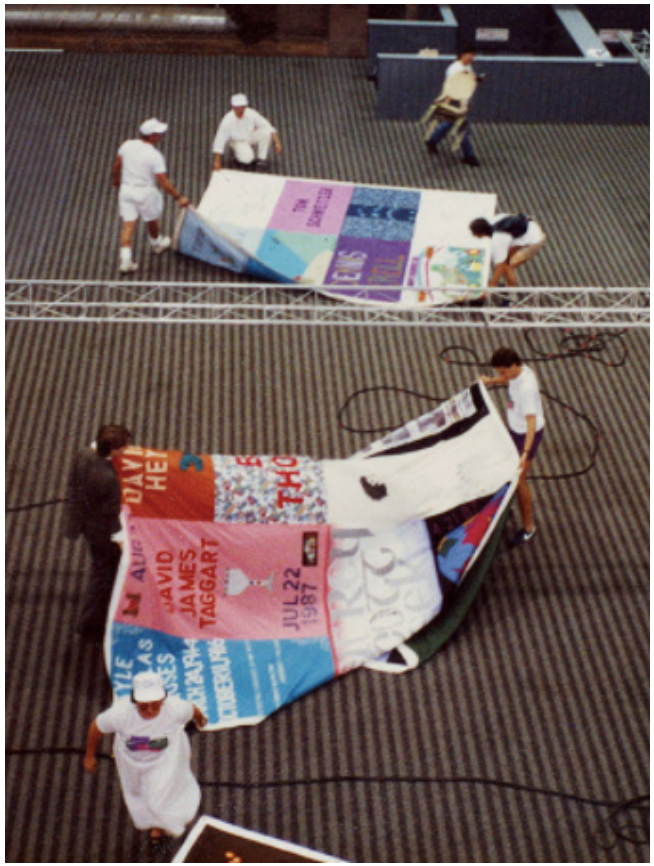



Fig. 18 The NAMES Project Foundation, *Volunteers unfurl the AIDS Memorial Quilt at an event in Boston, Massachusetts.*



This sight inspired him and his friends to plan a larger memorial for the AIDS pandemic, a personal expression to honour the dead and support the living. As a result of this, the foundation of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was created a year later. With immediate public response, people from all over the United States volunteered and sent panels to their San Francisco workshop.

On October 11, 1987, the AIDS Memorial Quilt was displayed for the first time on the National Mall in Washington D.C, consisting of 1920 panels and covering an area larger than a football field. Each quilt approximates the size of a human grave, a deliberate demonstration of how much land would be covered if all the bodies would lie head to toe, and a testimony to what the queer community went through.[26]

26 National AIDS Memorial, 2020.

Jones thought that the making of a quilt, a warm and comforting piece of textile, would serve as good therapy and healing for people deeply in grief, but also for the media to understand that there are actual human beings behind all the tragic numbers and statistics. Since then, this living memorial to a generation lost to AIDS has toured America many times throughout the years and keeps on growing and growing in scale. Up until this day, it is considered the largest piece of community folk art in history, consisting of more than 48.000 panels and is estimated to weigh 54 tons.[27]

27. Kesby, 2020.

Another study on elements of craft and well-being provides evidence of the importance of the sense of control that crafters feel over their bodies while making. Participants describe how, by engaging in textile craft activities, they are able to push away feelings of agony; feelings of control arise when handling materials and tools, as well as by performing different techniques.

Fig. 19 Vanessa Vick, The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, 1973.




The calming effect of crafting was described as deriving from the materiality of craft, and from performing the sort of activities, such as jingling knitting needles, banging the loom, cutting up one's sorrows into strips of carpet, or working in cross-stitch without any worrisome thoughts or feelings preoccupying the mind. In this way, crafting serves as an outlet for extreme and sometimes uncontrollable emotions that often arise when someone experiences personal illness, illness of a family member, friend, or death of a loved one.[28]

28 Pöllänen, 2015.

In the midst of working on my graduation project and writing this thesis, the passing of one of my dearest friends came to my knowledge through a phone call. Marked by uncontrollable emotion, my first immediate instinct after finishing the talk was to go look through all of my belongings to find a print that I had once bought from her. After moving around during the last year, the print had been packed and put away somewhere safe, but my instant thought was not only that I had lost my friend, but also the fear that the only physical trace that she had left behind in my life was nowhere to be found. After searching through all my belongings frantically, I finally managed to find the print and framed it first thing next morning.

At this point, it has come to my realisation, that physically, I will never meet my friend Hanna again. Looking back at the course of these events, grasping for what I had left of her, for some reason seems a bit irrational. It was not going to change the fact that she is gone, but it was the most sensible and comforting thing to do at the moment.

Hanna and I started studying textile together in my previous education, and we had been close ever since. We shared many beautiful memories

and conversations over the past years, both of happiness and sorrow. We would drink wine and gossip, and we would laugh together even in moments of sadness. We would talk about works that we had made, the ways that we are different, and the dreams that we would want to pursue in the future. Sometimes she would make fun of my somewhat stubborn and traditional, crafty attitude towards textiles. Hanna was great at making prints, and the last times we met she talked about applying for a course in graphic design.

Her print is the only physical trace I have left of her. To me, it has a meaning beyond our mutual passion for making–it is a beautiful reminder of our history, friendship, and the hardships of life, and frankly, if we hadn't had the common interest in textile, our paths would probably never have crossed.

Over these past few months, crafting has helped me immensely. I have been pulling plastic into long shreds, connecting them with knots and twisting them into threads and yarns–a mindful sensory occupation–and a relatively novel part of my practice. For countless hours, I have been pushing the two pedals of my spinning wheel rhythmically with my feet, while simultaneously letting the plastic shreds slip through my fingers–holding on and letting go. To me, the process of making these yarns and threads represents perseverance–the challenge of delay, and continuing the effort despite the difficulty.



Fig. 20 Own Image, Print by Hanna Elofsson, 2021.

Returning to the question of the universal relationship between human well-being and textile crafts activities– the positive impact that the handmade has on our lives; as a means for introspection, a coping strategy, and healing.

For a long time, humankind has philosophised around the concept of well-being; the importance of both *hedonism* and *eudaemonia*. Not all pleasurable activities of hedonic nature that humans engage in are sustainable, and therefore do not produce well-being. Solely crafting does not produce well-being, it has to be meaningful to the crafter and be performed regularly or occasionally. Nevertheless, numerous key aspects important to eudaemonic well-being are also implicit



to the act of *crafting* and the notion of *craftsmanship*–which essentially makes it a durable activity and can long term enhance well-being. Whether dealing with the past, present, or future, the notion of time is evident in most narratives and texts written about textile crafts.

Although crafting textile goods is no longer a necessity from a material or economical perspective in the Western world, there seems to be an inherent human need to perform bodily work, engage with the material world, and form our surroundings. Crafting a physical object can concretise an individual's emotional perception in a tangible form, helping to reframe one's narrative, and giving a sense of control. Success in making

something by hand is often experienced as rewarding, boosting of one's confidence, and can contribute to a more positive self-image – components making it worthwhile and increases the likelihood of repeating the endeavour.

Crafted objects can convey all sorts of meanings, not only for the maker. They can carry historical, cultural, political, social, and emotional values and associations between people, over generations, and across the globe; contributing to a sense of connectedness, understanding, belonging, and improving the well-being of both communities and individuals.

Creative bodily work positively stimulates our brains, changing our neurochemistry



in similar ways to that of a pharmaceutical/antidepressant drug. Repetitive motions of the hand used in textile work can help our body enter a meditative state which slows breathing, decreases blood pressure, and reduces stress hormones. Thus, routine craftwork can be calming and help to slow down–outbalancing anger, stress, and anxiety; and an equally powerful tool to activate or distract oneself in difficult life situations–when feeling distressed, in pain, dealing with trauma, going through depression or grief.

Most studies are empirical in nature–based on observations and experiences from crafters themselves–thus focusing on personal emotional narratives. There seems to be slightly less theory-driven research and

input from medical science on the subject, making the research somewhat inadequate and could be interpreted as rather speculative.

Nevertheless, few people seem to know better about the healing abilities of bodily making than the textile crafters themselves. Evidently, it is not for nothing that the word *craft* stems from strength or power; for some, crafting is the reason to get up in the morning, while for others, it is the reason they can sleep at night.

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APPENDIX

**Figure 1**
Creator unknown, “Spindle, two spindle whorls, spouted vessel.” 6th century. House of Bavarian History, <http://www.hdbg.de/frauen/>

**Figure 2**
Vermeer, Johannes. “The lace maker.” George Arents Collection, The New York Public Library. The New York Public Library Digital Collections. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-ce4a-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

**Figure 3**
Own image, Plastic doily & found objects, 2021.

**Figure 4**
Ahmed, Faig. “Impossible Viscosity”. 2012. New York Times: Faig Ahmed’s Mind-Bending Carpets, <https://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2016/05/10/t-magazine/artist-faig-ahmed-azerbaijan-carpets/s/rug- slide-9FYE.html?interstitial=true&prev=3&next=4&src=3>

**Figure 5**
Brackens, Diedrick. “shape of a fever believer”, 2020. Artsy: Diedrick Brackens Weaves 21st-Century Concerns into Moving Tapestries, 19 February 2020, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-diedrick-brackens-weaves-21st-century-concerns-moving tapestries>

**Figure 6**
Own Image, Hand spun plastic yarn & hair band, 2021.

**Figure 7**
Own Image, Hand spun plastic yarn, 2021.

**Figure 8**
Own Image, Plastic filet crochet and found objects, 2021.

**Figure 9**
Bourgeois, Louise. “HEART”, 2004. Artnet. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/ louise-bourgeois/heart>

**Figure 10**
Photographer unknown. Ernest Thesiger at home seated in a chair which he upholstered with his own embroidery. 1930s. University of Brisol/ArenaPal, 1930’s. Ernest Thesiger, <http://www.ernestthesiger.org/ Ernest_Thesiger/Embroidery.html>

**Figure 11**
“Army soldiers, Walter Reed Hospital. Back from the trenches in Washington, D.C.” Harris & Ewing Collection, circa 1918. Shorpy, <https://www.shorpy.com/node/ 5704?size=_original#caption>

**Figure 12**
Common Threads Project, “A girl is not safe in her own home”, 2015. <https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/en/ exhibition/1557984/the-fabric-of-healing story-cloths-by-survivors-of- trauma-war and-gender-based>

**Figure 13**
Freud, Esther. Embroidered cushion design, Fine Cell Work. Sewing Matters, <http:// www.sewingmatters.co.uk/ images.html#>

**Figure 14**
Fine Cell Work, Inmate performing needlework. Fine Cell Work, <https://finecellwork.co.uk/>

**Figure 15**
Bendolph Pettway, Essie, Two sided quilt: Blocks and ‘One Patch’ - stacked squares and rectangle variation, 1973. Alison Jacques Gallery, 2020 <https://www.alisonjacquesgallery.com/>

**Figure 16**
Arthur Rothstein, Gee’s Bend quilter Jorena Pettway sews a quilt as two young girls hold the fabric for her, 1937. Encyclopedia of Alabama, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/ article/m-2261>

**Figure 17**
Photographer unknown. Gee’s Bend quilters Lucy Marie Mingo, Nancy Pettway, and Arlonzia Pettway (from left) work to attach the top piece of a quilt to the batting at Boykin Nutrition Center, 2006. Encyclopedia of Alabama, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/ article/m-2261>

**Figure 18**
The NAMES Project Foundation, Volunteers unfurl the AIDS Memorial Quilt at an event in Boston, Massachusetts. WTTW, <https://interactive.wttw.com/ten/monuments/aids-memorial-quilt>

**Figure 19**
Vick, Vanessa. “The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt”, 1973. Science Source, <https://www.sciencesource.com/archive/Image/The-Names-Project-AIDS-Memorial-Quilt-SS2537271.html>

**Figure 20**
Own Image. Print by Hanna Elofsson along with other objects on sidetable, 2021.

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**Written by**
Max Willebrand Westin
student no. 3146502

**Department**
Textile & Fashion

**Supervisors**
Renee van der Hoek
Steef Eman

**Designed by**
Olga Elliot Schou
www.olgaelliot.xyz

**Paper**
Rebello, 90 gsm.

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