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In her Lap:

Embodied Learning Through Making

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“Art is valued for its truthfulness and educational efficacy.”

(Bishop, 2006, p. 183)

The significance of laps, specifically women’s laps, as bodily spheres in which making, learning and other informal activities take place remains predominantly unrecognised. The relationship between making, bodily spaces, places and laps is explored herein through self-portrayals of the three authors, or artist-researchers, each of whom provide personal anecdotes, observations and reflections on their experiences with lapwork. The chapter employs the methodological strategy of arts-based research (ABR), supported by a collaborative autoethnographic (CAE) approach. Research methods used include group discussions, observations, probes and self-documentation through note taking and photography. The contribution of this chapter to knowledge is the sustainable role of lapwork in making practices in extreme environments such as the North and the Arctic. The role of laps in supporting embodied learning enables the reinterpretation of spaces that support thinking and learning while doing and making.

This chapter will render audible and visible the making practices, art and research of the three authors. These artist-researchers have been working collaboratively over many years and on several projects globally; two are art and design practitioners from Finland, more specifically from Veikkola and Helsinki, while the third lives and works in both Rovaniemi in Finnish Lapland and the West Coast of South Australia. The chapter seeks to understand how craft and design practices that are executed in built environments within the extreme natural environments of the North and Arctic areas sustain practitioners, their identity processes and the transferral of skills. These built environments, including homes and work studios, are simultaneously limiting and enabling places.

Making is the “correspondence between maker and material”, says Ingold (2013, p. xi). According to Luckman (2015), making is a result of agency, of both individuals and groups, in the physical world through their “capacity to work with and upon materials” (p. 82). Since 2005, with the broad acknowledgment

of a new “making renaissance” that started with the launch of Etsy.com (p. 1), making is again closely associated with satisfying human needs and desiring a “good life” rather than purely with profit (p. 83–84). Making at home is considered “family friendly” work that offers choice, flexibility and the possibility of looking after children while at home (p. 89–90).

Working in one’s lap, also referred to as lapwork (Johnson & Wilson, 2005), is not a new phenomenon. Lapwork is an intimate and social practice that has been observed globally in the artefact-making contexts of many communities (Sarantou, 2017). Laps, and the capacity and role of the human body in expressive language (Sennet, 2008), support practices such as craft making that assist women in particular in identifying their place in this world (Johnson & Wilson, 2005). Skin, as a surface, is associated with external and internal fabric that is integral to feminine identities (Farber, 2006). The bodily surface and space of laps are similarly integral to femininity. Laps can sustain identities such as mother, craftswoman, maker and teacher. This chapter thus pursues the following research question: “How can lapwork contribute to sustainable knowledge transfer and learning?”

The previously established and trusted relationships amongst the artist-researcher group, which resulted from multiple shared working and research experiences, influenced the selection of the specific research approaches, ABR and CAE. Simultaneously collaborative and autoethnographic, yet not antithetical, CAE is a qualitative research method (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2016) based on a subjective approach that draws on insider knowledge and personal experience (Ellis & Adams, 2014). Lapadat (2017) describes the CAE approach as multi-vocal, as several researchers collaborate in sharing and reflecting upon personal experiences and stories, followed by interpretation of the data. Thus, CAE enables a shift from personal to group agency as the roles of researcher and the researched are vested in one person, who thus holds the potential to be personally engaged (Lapadat, 2017; Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008).

The authors’ selected methodology is integral to, and perhaps a result of their artmaking and ongoing conversations across vast distances. The following reflections and personal anecdotes of the authors Sillgren and Pokela on their

motivations for participating in the research and exploring the research question illustrate the engaging nature of both the ABR and CAE approaches. The authors explain:

I have changed the way I am doing my art due to my life changes, moving from a studio to my home, from a table to my lap. The change has been partially a spontaneous response to the fact that I became a mother. Downsizing my studio space for making art has given me more freedom in expression, and much to my surprise, I discovered that currently I have more time and variety in my creative processes. I am happy that my child can be central to the process, learning skills and knowledge. (Sillgren, 2019)

For me, lapwork has become a way of being. It is an important means of evoking thought processes, generating ideas and creating space for silence and tranquillity in the everyday. The outcomes of my work, its idea, shape, colours and finishing, are a result of my reflections during lapwork. I am interested in exploring how my improvisatory approach and studying of colour and technique lead the process. I find the physicality of lapwork calming. At times it has a meditative function. Especially in the dark, cold seasons, it strengthens my mental resilience and, as a side effect, fulfils the need to do something physical. These traits, the informal settings, my tools and accessible technology create fertile, sustainable circumstances for learning that motivate me to study and research in my individual way. (Pokela, 2019)

Due to the collective and reflexive approach of CAE, it is non-exploitative and accessible, thus enabling the researched to be more at ease with the research process (Lapadat, 2017; Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008). In other words, CAE retains a focus on self-interrogation, but it is a pragmatic and iterative approach to enquiry due to its joint elements of data collection and analysis (Chang et al., 2016). When considering the specific nature of this research approach to inves-

tigate lapwork, the artist-researchers were able to balance sensitive issues such as vulnerability and trustworthiness due to the interdependencies in the research with teamwork, which offers a distinct opportunity for CAE. The purpose of this chapter is to emphasise the role of bodily spheres in knowledge transfer, craft and design practices and care that is extended towards the self, others and making. The chapter will embark on a deeper exploration of the methodology, presentation of each participant's encounter with laps and making processes, as well as their personal stories. The final discussion will offer reflections on the roles of laps in making and learning processes.

Theoretical Considerations

This section of the chapter discusses themes including the relationship between surfaces and place, with a specific reference to Northern and Arctic places, learning and skills transfer, embodied practices and arts. Homes and household textiles exemplify the familiarity of the relationship between textiles and architecture, surfaces and place. The relationship between places and laps, as both spaces and surfaces, is discussed in this chapter. In connecting places, spaces and surfaces, Schatzki and Natter (1996) also refer to the surface of the body as “the slate upon which is inscribed the marks of culture, human coexistence, and social toil...the flesh that is symbolically and meaningfully punctured, incised, decorated, clothed, done up, disguised, stylized” (p. 5). This ancient familiarity is further supported by the crafting of textiles and other artefacts in places, including homes and work studios, where making often comes about in bodily spheres such as women's laps. The interrelationship of surface and place has been foregrounded (Carlin, 2017), while the role of women's laps as complex spaces for learning in which craft and cultural activities are practiced has been illustrated (Sarantou, 2017).

The North, including Finland and Arctic Lapland, are specifically referenced in this discussion of the relationship between place, surface and space. Grayling (2002) argues that “civilisation-producing leisure” used to be an organic part of work (p. 174). He explains:

In the season of plenty – which, paradoxically, was winter, when the grain and the salted pork were safely stored – darkness and hard frosts kept people indoors, making things, including songs, stories, carvings and textiles. From this change of occupation which the flux of seasons enforced was born painting, theatre and music. From it also came science, in reflection on experience gathered during the working parts of the year. (p. 174–175)

Learning in this chapter is broadly understood as the acquisition of skills or knowledge through experience, iteration, study or being taught. Sennet (2008) notes that skills development “depends on how repetition is organised” and that skills are expanded and developed through the open relationships “between problem solving and problem finding” (p. 38). Grayling (2002) understands liberal education as going beyond learning about doing an occupation well following schooling but instead extending to a continuation of learning throughout life, especially gaining an appreciation of the arts to supplement scientific and practical subjects. He defines learning as the ability to “think, and question, and know how to find answers” when needed (p. 158). The contributing role of practices that are underpinned by the arts in the improvement of the “means and ends of education” has been examined and established by Eisner (2002, p. 4). Grayling (2002) continues to argue that an appreciation for the arts and ongoing education enable reflexivity, which means living more knowledgeably and having consideration and tolerance for the interests and needs of others (p. 158–159).

The exploration of the sustainability of craft and design practices in Northern and Arctic places will focus on women’s laps as embodied surfaces and spaces. The chapter considers the role of perhaps more private home and bodily spaces, as well as embodied practices and learning. Importantly, Schatski and Natter (1996) consider the person as the “home of distinction between the self and body”, which they understand as a lived body (Chapman, 1998). Embodiment can be defined as “physical states that arise during interaction with the world and that arise from introspection” (Efron, Niedenthal, Gil, & Droit-

Volet, 2006, p. 2). On a personal level, one's own embodied experiences usually refer to the particularities and specificities of lived experiences (Chapman, 1998). Dialectical relationships between external appearances of embodiment, thus bodies as surfaces that reflect social values and morality, have been foregrounded (Longhurst, 1997; Ansell, 2009), whilst embodiment also refers to more private and emotional experiences (Ansell, 2009). Dialectical relationships between bodies and societies are also established as Ansell (2009) notes: "Society works on bodies while, in turn, bodies work on society." The body is therefore socially shaped through diverse techniques and practices, often referring to the ways families, organisations and societies function (Chapman, 1998). These practices include art and craft making, learning and other embodied practices, including cognitive functions.

Perspectives on embodied learning should not preference the body over the mind. Reflective practices may facilitate learning by drawing on a combination of embodied experience, our conceptual frameworks and levels of consciousness (Jordi, 2010). Embodied thinking and learning (Patel, 2008), which acknowledges and considers the critical role of bodies in work, balances more abstract notions of learning (Stolz, 2015). Embodied forms of personal experience also underpin processes of educational work and research (Chapman, 1998). As the divides between formal and informal education become more blurred, Jokela and Coutts (2015) call for more research into the "place and practice of socially engaged arts" (p. 9). Socially Engaged Arts (SEA) refers to the creative outcomes of our creative and participatory social fabric (Bishop, 2005). SEA is by definition multidisciplinary, lending a central space to social interaction as it depends on actual, and not imagined, social action (Helguera, 2011). With the call of Jokela and Coutts in mind, this chapter explores SEA and participatory practices that generate creative energies that re-humanize the world in the face of fragmentation by suppressive instrumentalities (Bishop, 2005), such as pressures on nuclear families and learning models, in ways that will enable future generations to cope with an ever-changing world.

Methodology

The CAE process, guided by the pragmatic approach of Chang and colleagues (2016), started with two group discussions and sharing sessions in Veikkola, Finland. In these sessions, the phenomenon or lapwork was discussed, methodology was selected, the research question was formulated and possible research papers were planned. This was followed by a physical exploration and examination, or probing, of lapwork by the three artist-researchers in their usual places of work. Research methods included group discussions, observations, probes and self-documentation through note taking and photography. ABR has the potential to address subtle nuances such as diversity, politics of gender and identity, and power and justice that are often overlooked by other approaches (Leavy, 2015). These nuances often emerge when participants have the opportunity to express their reflections, personal narratives and lived experiences through art-making processes.

Cultural probing involves the use of a set of stimulating tools and materials that may possibly offer a strategy for experimental design (Gaver, Dunne, & Pacenti, 1999). The strength of the cultural probing method is that the outcomes are specific to the purpose, people and environment of the research context (p. 29). The artist-researchers were responsible for selecting their own “probing kits” (Hemmings, Crabtree, Rodden, Clarke, & Rouncefield, 2002), which consisted of the tools for making and documenting their testing and examination of lapwork, such as smartphones, thread, beads, needles and crochet hooks (see the Portrayals section). This phase was followed by group sharing sessions that consisted of reflections, note taking and photo documentation via a smartphone application (*WhatsApp*). The artists continued unstructured discussions for one year whilst working on a series of art exhibitions that enabled proactive reflection on their lapwork, preliminary meaning making, group meaning making and theme searches. Finally, the emerging themes identified from analysis, narrative interpretation and ongoing reflection were processed through group writing (p. 25).

The benefits of CAE lie in the sharing of power between the researchers and the researched, the efficiency of the pragmatic and iterative process, and its mutual enrichment through deeper learning of self and other (p. 21). Further,

the benefits of the selected approach to the current research are, following the outline of Chang and colleagues (2016), as follows: (a) renders the researcher/artist-makers visible; (b) offers a critically dialogic approach to reasoned questioning and answering; (c) is experience specific to the researchers; and (d) offers reflexivity in analysis (p. 21–25). Evidence of these benefits will become explicit in the Portrayal section of this chapter.

The challenges faced by the artist-researchers during the research process involved the division of tasks and responsibilities that had to be conducted individually and collaboratively despite the logistical impacts of working remotely from one another. At times, the group was widely separated, dispersed over continents and divided by vast distances. As a result, they had to rely on virtual correspondence and technological applications to maintain connections, continue discussions, share insights, analyse results and co-author the chapter. These are, however, also some of the ethical considerations that may be integral to the selected research approach.

Portrayals

This section introduces three portrayals of the authors, or artist-researchers, followed by personal anecdotes about their observations and reflections on their lapwork. Due to the selected data generation approach and effort to follow ethical practices, the portrayals are written in first person with the aim not to reduce and translate the data but to uphold sensitivity and authenticity and share ownership and copyright (Leavy, 2015). This approach also upholds the meaningful relationships that existed between the artist-researchers before and during this research process investigating laps as flexible and expandable surfaces that extend beyond bodily boundaries to accomplish necessary tasks in private spaces, whether for making, child rearing or learning.

Reflections from Veikkola

Sillgren's higher education history is in jewellery making. For more than a decade, she professionally produced jewellery in a large shared studio in Helsinki.



*Figure 1. Sillgren's lapwork titled "Koko, Keiko and Laika", 2019.
Photographs: Sanna Sillgren, 2019.*

After having a daughter, she stayed at home for two years but felt the urge to continue to express her creativity. This led to taking up crocheting and making traditional quilts using granny squares. This suited her lifestyle as she could leave her work immediately when her child needed her attention. It didn't take much time before she started experimenting with crocheting techniques, starting with small items through which she wanted to experiment with processing of images derived from photos, memories and topics of personal importance. She wanted to explore making stories using crocheting techniques and materials such as metals and glass, combining hard and soft materials.

The artefacts she currently makes are wearable art and not jewellery. She uses tools such as crocheting hooks, scissors, her computer and photo editing software; her working space extends into a small drawer with wheels in her living room. After her parental leave, Sillgren discontinued her business and started to search for job opportunities. For the past five years, she has worked in the Finnish education system as a teacher.

I usually do my art at home in our living room. If I want to take it with me, I just need a bag to carry everything – usually the design printed on A4 paper, yarn, crochet hook and other materials such as metal rings or glass beads. My main profession is teaching, and I do my art when I have free time – weekends, holidays and evenings. Sometimes I do fifteen minutes at a time, because I don't have the luxury to do artwork eight hours a day, but I don't miss that luxury anymore. I love the freedom and easiness of dropping the work when necessary. At the same time, I love my full-time job teaching children. I do my artwork like people do their handicrafts at home, like knitting woollen socks during their free time. I relate to all sorts of yarn crafts that I learned from my mother and at school at an early age.

Not being economically dependent on the artwork has given me a sort of freedom of expression. I don't have to do the art, but I can, and I have a passion for it. Because of my history and the skills and techniques I learned from design, I use high quality and durable materials. I tend to do labour-intensive work. Some of my bags have up to 14,000 beads, each separately crocheted. For one year I worked on a collection of three bags. Because the work takes a long time, the theme of the work is important to tackle and complete in my lap.

My lap is a surface into which I can easily fit my work. Often, I need to put down my work if my child needs me or if I have other tasks waiting. I don't have to go anywhere to do my art, like driving to the studio for half an hour and back. My lap is where I am, and I can do my art when I have time. I don't need a large collection of expensive tools. The strength of my work is the creativeness, not the quantity of machinery or having a fancy studio in which to make it. At this point of my life, my lap is my perfect studio.

In Finland, we have four distinct seasons. I tend to do my art from autumn to spring. I am most effective during winter when we are forced to be inside. This has always been the way of women or people working in Finland. When I am doing my artwork, I start to plan summer activities, which include gardening, home improvements and building. During the summer, I am mostly outdoors, which I love as much as winter activities. When summer is turning to autumn, I start to concentrate more on my artwork.

I do many experiments before I choose a technique for a certain work. For each collection, I make many samples before starting the final bags. Image processing, making the templates, choosing material, and choosing the right crocheting technique takes at least a third of the processing time. Sometimes when making samples I have to go back to my drawing board and start again. From a picture or theme, I do a test template and then mimic the photo by crocheting in my lap. At that stage My main goal is not to achieve a good design. Therefore, my design decisions are not made next to my computer with image processing, but rather it comes together in my lap.

When my child asks me “What I should do?”, I do not have an answer. She has a room full of toys. My students have a repertoire of learning tools. For a child to be bored is the key to innovation, a gateway for imagination. I am always happy when there is a child asking “What should I do?” or when a colleague is in distress, because I know that is when imagination can take over. When my child is overloaded with YouTube and sees me crocheting, finding my peace in simple lapwork, she also wants to try. The end result can be a dance, a bag or an installation. For me, crocheting is slow enough and my lap is big enough. It’s a place where I can find my creativity and tranquillity. My child wants to find the same serenity and that is why she sometimes exchanges a mobile phone for doing crocheting with me.

Reflections from Helsinki

Pokela has a master of art degree in applied arts and works as a freelancer creating content for children's culture and as a design educator in an art school. Recently, she has worked on personal art and creating setups for plays and props for workshops. Her lapwork consists of material and technical trials, crafting pieces with yarns and textiles. Sometimes she makes functional pieces for home or mends her household textiles in creative ways. For her artwork, she now uses mostly recycled woollen yarns, sometimes cotton and linen. Her tools are crocheting hooks, sewing needles, scissors, sketchbooks and a smartphone.

I started with lapwork, doing needlework and knits, three years ago. It suits my current life situation, where I need flexible ways to do creative work. Surprisingly, it brought additional dimensions to my work. My main material used to be ceramics, but that demands a commitment to longer work periods and access to equipment. When I work



Figure 2. Pokela's lapwork titled "Knitting and knot experiments - processing idea and part of textile sculpture", 2019. Photographs: Laura Pokela, 2019.

with yarns and textiles, I am not place-bound and only need simple tools. This gives me freedom to engage in spontaneous work, for a limited time, without preparations. I have a studio, but lapwork I do at home. My daily schedule is filled with facilitating workshops, teaching and planning work. These contents in addition to family life determine the hours and space that I use for works that require hand labour. I adjust my practices to suit this life phase, bringing home labour-intensive pieces for lapwork. I can spend time with family and the space needed is minimal, just a few yarn boxes and a place to sit.

Usually I work by the window in our living room, observing our nature in our courtyard. I like to work in the evenings when life calms down, often alone at night, sometimes earlier in the company of my children, while they are doing their own things. When they get interested, we discuss ideas, techniques and colours. Sometimes they want to learn and follow my example next to me. At times they get jealous of my work when they need my full attention or lap space. I find it valuable for them to see the creative process, perseverance and concentration.

The lap as a surface is practical, personal and intimate. Crafting on the body is a tactile experience, I feel the weight and texture of the material. I am sensitive to tactile features of things and choose materials that feel comfortable. The tactility of lap as a surface supports my focus. Repetitive work on a labour-intensive piece leads to a flow-state of making and builds tactile learning. I tend to forget ergonomics, and many hours of work leaves physical marks and makes me aware of my trajectories. Overworking creates discomfort, tensions and even abrasions. The lap changes from a comfortable space to a physical inconvenience, despite the good outcomes of work.

My lapwork is seasonal and situation bound. My focus changes between the dark and light periods of our four seasons. As daylight

decreases, we spend more time indoors and darkness creates an introverted ambiance. Lapwork supports my coping and I focus on realizing plans and finishing work, engaging in profound thought processes. The light months bring an extrovert twist to the everyday. We spend more time outdoors, in nature and in social activities, and at ascetic facilities in summerhouses. Lapwork is carried along, although I only do them occasionally in the lightest months.

Lapwork leads to thoughts of generational ties and cultural perceptions of materials and skills. My technical skills with yarnwork are not fine-tuned, but I see a continuation with the lapwork of my mother and grandmothers. They mostly made functional necessities, but our ways of working are quite similar and homebound. Even though they were technically skilled, their hours of labour, care and maintenance of lapworked textiles have affected me more than the technical side has.

I learned textile crafts in primary school but only found interest in them some years ago. Due to negative experiences in craft classes and perceptions from design studies, I saw lapwork as restricted by orthodox practice and tradition. My relation and interest changed during the last two decades. I started to see crafts from new perspectives, because they generally became more popular and due to my previous work with Namibian artisans. I saw my colleagues use old techniques in novel ways. At the same time, the internet filled with educational materials in formats suiting my way of learning through watching and making. I started to do needlework and knitting in my own way.

For studying a new technique, I use audio visual resources through my smartphone. For technical trials or studying theory, technology offers countless channels of data within reach anywhere. In the same work flow, I can do the practical work reflecting on the data. When the work evolves, I leave my smartphone and concentrate on making.

My art is a combination of focused expression and coincidence. To learn, I experiment with materials and techniques in an easy-going way, trying new means of expression. Interesting outcomes arise through trials, improvisation, investment of time, patience and trust in the process. My studies in needle- and knitwork are in an early stage. Lapwork is a comprehensive activity that enables me to process questions and finalize ideas in the making through learning in a bodily and tactile way.

Reflections from Rovaniemi (and Ceduna)

Sarantou's educational background spans postgraduate studies in fashion design, visual arts and business. Lapwork has always been part of her fashion design practices, despite working with machines, including cutting and fitting equipment. Her work rather rotated among her lap, machines and equipment. She understands her lapwork to extend and migrate between equipment and processes, therefore seeing equipment, for example her sewing machine, as an extension of her lap. Her lapwork processes include sewing, needle felting, embroidery,



Figure 3. Sarantou's lapwork titled "Whom wore this?", 2019. Photographs: Melanie Sarantou, 2019.

beading and writing. The usual equipment she relies on during lapwork includes needles, scissors, notebooks, pencils, lap trays, containers, a laptop, mobile phone and high-density felting pillow. She uses beads, threads, carded wool and textiles to create her current work.

Currently, Sarantou works as a researcher, moving between Rovaniemi in Finnish Lapland and Ceduna in South Australia. Her awareness of the role of her lap during extensive travelling with often limited space has intensified in the past few years. Having to rely on getting work done and tasks accomplished, including fulfilling her creative urges, predominantly in the confined space of her lap inspired this participatory research.

I work in weird and restricted places, such as cars, airplane seats and outside in campgrounds but also at home. I have two homes, one in the Arctic in Rovaniemi and one in the west coast of South Australia. I move between contrasting places all the time. That is why I understand my lap as a crucial part of my work, as it is a space in which I dwell a lot. Much time is spent here. Whether I make, write, edit, supervise or read, I seem to be constantly busy in my lap. My lapwork is therefore diverse. This space is important for all my processes. It is intimate and private. Here I can explore and experiment. But I also need breaks from it as it gets too intense at times being in this lap space all the time. I need to remember to relax outside of this space as well. My lap is not limited though, as it often extends to other surfaces, such as my lap tray or felting pillow.

Living in the Arctic at times is quite different. Not being used to the dramatic changes in season, which happen so rapidly, I notice changes easily as it is quite strange and foreign to me. Since my childhood and adult life were spent in Namibia, I did not grow up with these extreme seasonal changes and rhythms that daylight can have in Rovaniemi. It is mind blowing, and I am many times struck by the extremity and beauty of the seasons in the Arctic. I tend to do lapwork in the Arctic

all the time. In the dark, I kind of lose track of time, as I also do in the very light and long evenings of the warmer months. I just never seem to find my personal rhythm as I did in Namibia and do in Australia, so lapwork is ideal for the sleepless nights. I write a lot in the North, and if I stayed here for long times, I would be creating a lot. Somehow the urge to create always overwhelms me when I am here. But I create much of my art in Australia, in and outside of my lap, depending on the project that I am focusing on. There I have outdoor spaces to felt and be in the garden.

My lapwork carries me away. I reflect, ask questions and ponder life. In my lap, I do both my professional work and experiments. My lap is a unique space in which I feel I can explore, test, mess and create to find solutions to the broken links I have in my working processes, like how to continue to embroider a delicate section on a garment if I have materials that I have never used before or that present me with a new challenge. I have the courage to improvise in my lap as I do not have to explain or justify anything. If it does not work, I can go back and forth and find my way of doing it. Of course, a lot of my previous experiences, my knowledge and my body's way of knowing how to do something is how I learn, the redoing, repeating and correcting. My lap would have been a great space to share learning and transfer knowledge to a child.

Discussion and Conclusion

The significance and symbolisms of lapwork remain largely unexplored, thus offering opportunities for ongoing research beyond this chapter. Symbolic connotations of lapwork may be specific to places and cultures, yet these ancient practices have been observed widely in many contexts around the globe (Sarantou, 2017). Illustrated here is the role of laps as flexible and expandable surfaces that extend beyond bodily boundaries to accomplish needed tasks

in private spaces, whether it is for making, child rearing or learning. Sillgren confirmed that for her, crocheting is slow enough and her lap big enough. In these bodily spaces, the role of tools and technological instruments, including scissors and smartphones (Luckman, 2015), are paramount to maintaining the optimal functionality and dynamics of lapwork. Laps are flexible spaces due to changes in bodily positioning, offering solutions to resource limitations. The portrayals of the artist-researchers offer various examples of the flexibility of lapwork, especially in the face of family or work commitments.

Laps are vibrant spaces in which cultural and creative practices are executed, often through self-motivation in the North and Arctic, offering respite from long, cold winter conditions but also from the endless summer nights in the Arctic or when seasonal changes set in. The significance of lapwork may be amplified in geographical locations with extreme climate such as the Arctic when practitioners are homebound, seeking respite from the elements to make, either from necessity or to fight boredom. These traditions have been passed down over centuries, ensuring enjoyable and creative activities in homey spaces, through families who live in extreme climatic conditions. Hence, the boundaries between professional and non-professional work are often blurred. Laps may be considered informal spaces, yet they often host professional processes.

As makers, artists, professionals, educators and parents, the three authors consciously aim to transfer a positive mindset and attitude towards manual work. In making themselves (through active becoming) and their crafts, learning through trial and error, they are motivated to learn in sustainable and holistic ways. In their personal experiences of learn-by-doing, listening and observing in both formal and informal settings, they carry out similar practices within their professional and family life, transferring habits, knowledge and values to their students and their own children. Their motivation for learning and their sense of comfort with their lapwork triggers the interest of their children towards materials, techniques and the actual making, as well as the storytelling that usually go along with making practices. The authors practice lapwork as a solitary or shared activity, enabling observation and tactile experiences for their children, especially while being more homebound during the extreme fall and winter seasons.



Figure 4. Laps, both those of adults and children, offer fertile and instant spaces for learning new skills, often through mimicry. Photograph: Sanna Sillgren, 2019.

Lapwork as part of the everyday and without obligations makes it an approachable practice, enabling a laid-back ambience that supports learning in a sustainable way. With their children exploring their own relationships to lapwork, a startling difference emerges in contrast to the authors' grandparents, who were often forced to do lapwork as part of gender-normed household chores. The children currently have the freedom to observe their mothers (authors) and their mothers' practices, finding personal ways of expression or continuing specific traditions. The makers' (authors) approaches, interactions and place-bound circumstances provoke changing responses amongst their offspring. Often, trials are made by the children, using different techniques and mimicry, which is one of the important cognitive processes at play during social interactions (Effron et al., 2006). The authors and their children are exposed to lapwork that relates to their homeland culture, different cultural backgrounds and generational relationships. Knowledge transfer between the authors and their children is enabled through their professional and personal ties, supported by social media and shared moments of

collaborative parenting. Thus, lapwork might be considered socially engaged art in the way that the authors have been collaborating and in the way that it is a political statement about collaborative mothering and learning with children.

The role of reflection and learning through lapwork has been foregrounded in this chapter. Lapwork not only supports embodied learning through the work of hands (Sennet, 2008) – “hands-on thinking” (Jokela & Coutts, 2015, p. 9) – but it provides space for thinking while doing and making. The narratives of the artist-researchers further express the significance of laps in learning as spaces of reflection and decision making, places where creativity and tranquillity are often transferred to children, inspiring them to experiment and improvise to learn new skills. Sillgren reminisces:

My nine-year-old daughter started to do crocheting after seeing me doing it. When she was small, she used thick woollen yarn and looping with her fingers. As she grew up, she wanted to try using a big hook with yarn. Nowadays, she wants to use a small hook with thin cotton yarn like me. She could not really answer why she wants to do crocheting. She said, “The hands do because the hands do, while making a long chain.” I asked what she would crochet if she were really good with the technique. She said, “I would like to make a caparison for a horse. It would be black. In the middle would be a picture of a horse made with golden yarn. The yarn would be thin but strong and I would use a small hook.”

Laps are fertile spaces for learning due to the free, unrestricted and, as Pokela mentions, ‘easy-going way’ makers engage with materials and tools in their laps. Makers are often more willing to experiment, improvise, make mistakes and redo processes to find best solutions and new means of expression. With craft and improvisatory practices steeped in tradition, laps are the private spaces in which makers, both young and old, explore to find new ways of doing that are based on knowledge and learning from previous making experiences and from motor-sensory memory. Laps are significant spaces for embodied learning

and intergenerational knowledge transfer, which should not be overlooked due to the informal and private connotations of lapwork. Although an informal learning environment, the flexibility and privacy offered by laps as spaces facilitate knowledge and skills transfer.

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