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Care as Entangled Meaningfulness in Craft Occupations: A Co-Created Photo-Elicitation

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Abstract

Crafts have traditionally been central to the fields of human occupation, mostly investigated in the context of rehabilitation and disability, via humanistic perspectives and representational methods. However, recent interest in subjective lived experiences, along with a growing appreciation of posthuman perspectives on craft, occupation, and care, invite us to learn new approaches to the study of human-non-human entanglements and relational care aspects in meaningful craft occupations. Employing sensory ethnography, which embraces reflexivity, embodiment, and emplacement to explore lived experiences, and an apophatic stance of wonder, this article explores the craft occupations of three women in midlife. Introducing a posthuman adaptation of photo-elicitation that invites participants, researchers, and non-human actors to iteratively co-create meanings, the resulting

vignettes reveal that meaningfulness in craft occupations is experienced and expressed through various forms of relational care entanglements: to and from one's own self; to and from others in the social world; and to and from the material world. Whether experiencing pride at learning to solder silver, connection in gifting paper crafts to a friend, or wonder at the sensorial qualities of hay, these human-non-human intra-actions during craft touch on the unsayable aspects of meaningful occupation. Capturing ephemeral moments of entanglement, the vignettes "live the questions" and illuminate verbalized and tacit aspects of relational care during meaningful occupations. Embracing this multiplicity of meanings, it becomes clear that it is through the occupation of craft that humans and materials come together to care for one another, and thus for the shared world itself.

Introduction

Crafts, which are a type of leisure occupation, are often experienced as meaningful and have been found to contribute to participation, health, and wellbeing (Perruzza & Kinsella, 2010). Meaningful craft occupations have traditionally been studied in the fields of occupational therapy and occupational science in the context of rehabilitation and disability through an individualistic, humanistic, and person-centered approach, using representational methods such as interviews. Lately, however, there is a growing understanding of occupation as entangled, with a posthumanist perspective on relational care emerging as a useful theoretical framing to its study. Accordingly, there is a need to develop new research methods to access relational care aspects in meaningful occupation, as they are difficult to verbalize and often remain unsayable and tacit. This points to a need to reflectively unlearn deep-rooted approaches about how to observe and study craft occupations, by creating opportunities that go beyond bio-medical contexts, representational methods, and a person-centered lens, in order to re-learn a new posthumanist approach where humans and materials come together to care.

In this paper, we share three vignettes that present the craft occupations of three women in midlife, exploring how meaningfulness in craft occupations can be understood through a posthumanist prism of relational care. Furthermore, we examine how use of a sensory approach and visual methods, in addition to traditional representational and textual methods, can enhance understanding of relational care aspects in meaningful occupation. This inquiry is part of the first author (TA-S)'s larger doctoral study that combines sensory ethnography with interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore experiences of meaningfulness during craft occupations in midlife. In this article, we highlight how photo-elicitation can uncover both sensed and verbalized aspects of relational care in the practice of meaningful occupations. The photographs were taken during participant observation sessions by the first

author (writing in first person), with the co-authors contributing to the analytical process. Aided by posthumanist visual analysis methods, each vignette helps the participants and researchers co-create an articulation of different aspects of relational care emerging through craft: to and from oneself, to and from others, and to and from the world.

Theoretical Framing

Posthumanist Perspectives

Tronto (1993) and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) define care as "everything that is done to maintain, continue, and repair 'the world' so that all can live in it as well as possible. That world includes … all that we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 161). Building from Tronto's original human-centered conceptualization of care, Puig de la Bellacasa states that care unfolds through "necessary yet mostly dismissed labors of everyday maintenance of life, an ethico-political commitment to neglected things, and the affective remaking of relationships with our objects" (2017, p. 66). Employing a posthumanist lens that connects care, relationality, and the material environment, Puig de la Bellacasa thus brings attention to relational care aspects of the shared human-non-human world.

It is within this shared and relational world that humans go about performing their "occupations" the things that they want, need, or are expected to do in their daily lives (WFOT Council, 2010). The study of human occupation, with the tenet of meaningful occupation at its core, has predominantly been embedded in the human-centered medical model, often favoring a mind-body dualism and employing representational methodologies such as interviews (Bailliard et al., 2022). Recently, however, Bailliard et al. (2022) recognize a paradigm shift in occupational science research towards a perspective of embodiment and emplacement. Early seeds of this posthumanist view can be found in the transactional lens of the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) model (Law et al., 1996), which sees performance of occupation as the overlap between the occupation, the environment (physical and social), and the person. Dickie et al. (2006) further the transactional perspective of occupation and emphasize its emplaced nature. There is a growing quest to better understand subjective lived experiences of meaningful occupation through phenomenological (Reed et al., 2011) and sensory (Bailliard et al., 2022) lenses.

Meaningfulness in Craft Occupations

Craft is one type of meaningful occupation that has historically been central to occupational therapy, mostly in the context of rehabilitation, disability, and health promotion (Timmons & MacDonald, 2008; La Cour et al., 2007). Recent interest, however, turns to focus on craft occupations as they occur in daily life. Von Kürthy et al. (2023) explore embroidery from

posthuman and relational perspectives, considering it an intra-action of the person (mind and body), materials, and tools. They find that embroidery has potential to create meaningful changes in health and wellbeing through relational ties; being engaged in a relationship of intimate companionship with a loved occupation leads to opportunities for "connecting with both yourself and others" (p. 7). Further, the materialities of the occupation are foundational to these entanglements. Although posthuman understandings of care are not explicitly referred to, relational caring aspects between human and non-human actors within the craft occupation are conspicuous and contribute to its meaningfulness.

Posthumanist and relational care perspectives of craft are established in other fields, as well. MacGill (2019) presents a feminist view that ties craft and care together, seeing "craft-making as embodied knowledge [that] is generated within the cycle of ethics of care" (p. 407). Considering craftwork as an embodied disruption of neoliberal patterns that focus solely on what holds financial purpose, the enactment of care through craft requires being in a state of attunement to materials and objects, as "relationships between non-human and human actors enhances the interstitial nature of care" (p. 409) and helps make sense of the world. Mudde (2022) sees crafting as relational, a practice that "locates human beings not only in community with other material (and non-material) things, but as engaged with them in ways that reconfigure action and choice, ways that challenge the mainstream liberal view of the autonomous and independent humanist individual" (p. 69). Mudde links craft to care as conceptualized by Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), positing that to craft is, essentially, to "maintain, continue, and repair 'the world'" (2022, p. 72).

While this literature describes a growing understanding that craft can be seen as relational care, it does not explicitly focus on how craft occupations are experienced as meaningful. In parallel, while studies performed from the perspective of human occupation have long been interested in crafts as meaningful occupations, relational care has not explicitly come to their forefront. We argue that these two concepts may be inherently connected; craft occupations may be meaningful because they enable various aspects of relational care through entangled intra-actions in the human-non-human world in which they are emplaced.

Methodology

Sensory Ethnography

Bailliard et al. (2002) posit that the meanings of occupation can only truly be understood as a mind-body-environment gestalt that is performed in ways that go beyond what can be verbalized, stemming from pre-reflexive habits and experiences. This invites us to unlearn the limiting focus on representational methods traditionally used in the study of meaningful occupations, instead expanding our view by learning new methodologies that attend to

sensory processing and embodied knowledge. We find that sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015) offers such a pathway, making explicit the multi-sensory experiences of an activity and thus giving new insights into the meanings of habitual, tacit, and often unspoken aspects of daily life. Giving attention to the sensorial, both in method and the object of research, sensory ethnography helps capture embodied and emplaced experiences, making explicit the sensory perceptions and entangled meanings of both the participant and the reflexive researcher. Also helpful to our understanding of relational care aspects in meaningful occupation is a stance of apophatic inquiry, which is congruent with sensory ethnography's reflexivity and consideration of both the subjective and the unsayable (Visse et al., 2020). Countering positivistic and constructivist traditions of qualitative research that attempt to grasp directly at a phenomenon "out there," the researcher is seen as entangled within the phenomenon's context—meandering around it, leaning in towards it, engaging in a naturally unfolding relationship with it, and staying receptive to its unsayable essence.

To best express the sensory ethnography's reflexive and entangled nature, hereby the article will adopt a first person narrative voice, as opposed to third person, in order to capture the emplaced experiences of myself, the first author (TA-S), as the one who designed the study, conducted the observations, photographed the craft occupations, and performed the initial analyses. In conducting a sensory ethnography that aims to capture pre-reflexive meanings of craft occupations, I embrace the apophatic "state of non-knowing." Doing so acknowledges that the mystery of existential life phenomenon goes beyond logos and language alone. As such, the sensory ethnography follows the apophatic inquiry and "lives the questions themselves" by encouraging me, as the researcher, to allow the workings of my inner, aesthetic, and wondrous spaces.

Photo-elicitation and Visual Analysis

A visual method commonly employed within sensory ethnography, photo-elicitation uses photographs to generate a collaborative discussion about the research topic, with "the photograph becoming a visual text through which the subjectivities of the research and research participant intersect" (Pink, 2015, p. 88). Photo-elicitation can involve photographs provided by either participant or researcher, each representing a different point of view. Participant-generated photography is associated with the method of photovoice, originally developed for participatory community research to help marginalized groups be heard, think critically, and influence change, by asking them to photograph and thus record and then discuss the health needs and resources available within their own community (Wang & Burris, 1997). By comparison, researcher-generated photo-elicitation is a visual method in which the researcher presents images to the participant as an interview tool to elicit rich responses that go beyond words, tapping into non-verbal emotions and memories (Shaw, 2021). In the field of human occupation there have been several recent uses of participant-generated photo-

elicitation, applied to gain access to lived experiences of disability and participation (for example, McCarthy et al. 2022; Vänskä et al. 2020). In contrast to those studies, where the use of photo-elicitation is close to photovoice and consistent with a traditional human-centered approach, I deliberately choose to use researcher-generated images to de-center and invite multiplicity into the meaning-making process, consistent with a posthumanist approach, thus re-learning new ways to study craft occupations.

Rose (2001) provides a comprehensive guide to analyzing images, offering descriptive compositional interpretations about content, color, spatial organization, light, and expressive content (p. 53) with more critical approaches such as semiological analysis, focusing on signs and social meanings. Hannes and Siegesmund (2022) build on similar compositional principles, referring to the Naval Professional Development and Technology Center training manual (NAVEDTRA, 1993), to which they add a posthuman lens, creating a visual analysis tool named the Analytical Apparatus for Visual Imagery (AAVI). Believing that the meanings of images can be analyzed on multiple levels and that a multitude of meanings can exist simultaneously, AAVI acknowledges the agencies of both creator and viewer, as well as that of the non-human object, the photo itself: "The agency of an image lies in how it makes us feel. The image speaks somatically" (Hannes & Siegesmund, 2022, p. 281). Developed to facilitate access to tacit meanings and emotional layers of experience in photo-elicitation images, AAVI adds helpful insights to our analysis.

Posthuman applications of photo-elicitation include that of Scoles, who uses the method to help participants articulate human-non-human relationships, "making more visible the materiality of their work and the emergent sociomaterial systems within which their knowing is entangled" (Fenwick et al. 2015, p. 130). Relatedly, Michael considers both method and tool as actors in the process, tracing shapes and contours, inferring connections and disconnections by illuminating spaces and masses, and inviting them to contribute their own analysis (Fenwick et al., 2015). Similarly, Höppner (2022) uses silhouettes analysis to decentralize the human figure, disrupting habitual ways of seeing and encouraging viewers to "reject an unquestioning use of the human/nonhuman dualism, emphasizing instead the importance and diversity of the material world, which is constituted in the entanglements of material actors" (p. 579).

Traditional descriptive compositional and semiological interpretations of photo-elicitation images take on new meanings through posthuman applications such as the AAVI and other methods that give attention to the agency of non-human actors. Next, I describe how a posthuman approach can be applied within a sensory ethnography on meaningful craft occupations.

Co-creating Meanings

The following vignettes illustrate the craft occupations of three women living in the Netherlands, introduced here with pseudonyms: Tess (54) creates silver jewelry, Stacey (49) makes paper crafts, and Nicky (47) upholsters chairs. To explore these women's occupations as they unfolded within their environments, I adapted a photo-elicitation process to complement the two strands of my doctoral project's methodological framework: the reflexive and participatory stance of sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015), and the double hermeneutic cycles of interpretative phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009).

As mentioned earlier, most photo-elicitation studies of human occupation use participant-led photography, congruent with a humanist worldview that prioritizes the participant's voice. While recognizing the clear value of this perspective, I propose adding a posthuman lens to expand our understanding of occupation as an entangled event by using researcher-generated images. De-centering the participant and inviting reflexivity as well as a co-production of meaning by the researcher, the participant, and non-human actors, this enables a multi-step and reciprocal co-creation of interpretation, where participants and researchers engage in a series of exchanges that invites "living the questions" (Visse et al., 2020) and which allows for a multiplicity of meanings (Hannes & Siegesmund, 2022).

I began with participatory observation sessions of the craft occupations. The participants demonstrated how they engage in their crafts in their ordinary environments, and I observed, asked questions, touched materials, tried tools, and took photographs. My mere presence and interactive stance undoubtedly impacted the experience of the occupation for the participants, and their explanations and demonstrations were, in essence, a first round of interpretation.

Photography is also a form of interpretation (Harper, 2004). Images are not accurate representations of reality, and the photographer makes interpretative choices, such as how to frame, crop, light, and focus the image. However, as I photographed the occupations in action, I was not making considered decisions about any of these things. Rather, I took the photographs quickly, in the moment. In fact, the act of photography felt like a side affair, as I was meanwhile engaged in conversation with the participants, attending to the unfolding craft, and concurrently collecting sensory ethnographic data. As such, interpretative decisions regarding how to photograph the occupation should be seen as my embodied attempts to capture the essence of the moment, a pre-reflexive making of meaning as it unfolded.

Each observation session yielded several dozen photographs. Drawing on Orr and Phoenix (2015), I selected six to ten images that best represented a maximal variety of situations, aspects of the interaction, body positions, moods, spaces, and objects. On a separate day following the observation session, I handed back the interpretative wand to the participants by

sending them the selected photographs, with the following writing prompt: "What does it feel like to do your craft? In particular, what bodily, sensorial, or 'sensuous' feelings did you experience? How did the materials, tools, spaces, and activity feel?" This prompt was aimed to trigger a wide range of sensations and embodied experiences and was intentionally phrased to help the participants notice not just their own presence but also that of the non-human elements of the occupation.

The written responses were returned to me for one last round of interpretation. I read each response, juxtaposed with viewing the photo again, and tried to see the image in light of their interpretation. Drawing from the above-mentioned photo-elicitation analysis methods and contextualized with posthuman and transactional occupational theory and literature, I analyzed the images myself. Considering that the photographs were my own, I consider this a reflexive step, in line with an emplaced sensory ethnography approach (Pink, 2015). Although they were not deliberate or consciously designed, the editorial choices I made during the photography stage, such as how I cropped the scene or why I focused on a particular detail, became clearer to me only at this later stage. As posited by Hannes and Siegesmund (2022), such choices were made because they supported my tacit understanding of the relationships explored, but it was only through the co-analysis with the participants that I could bring these pre-reflexive interpretations into words. Finally, the findings were discussed and further developed collectively with my co-authors, who enhanced the analyses through the lens of their own disciplines (care ethics and qualitative research, and cultural studies of aging, respectively).

Vignettes of Relational Care

Each of the following vignettes comprises three elements: a photograph of the craft taken by me during a participant observation session, a written reflection by the participant herself, and an analysis of my own, contextualized by theory and secondary sources, then discussed and agreed upon with my co-authors. Each of the three vignettes represents a different aspect of meaningfulness in craft occupations, as experienced and expressed through various forms of relational care: to and from one's own self; to and from others in the social world; and to and from the material world.

"I made this, it was my idea, and it was my skill that put this together"

Tess attends a community jewelry class where she learns how to solder silver. The photo captures a long-awaited moment when her necklace is finally completed, and she dons it for the first time. This is a moment of individual achievement, but it is also entangled with the social and physical environment and with the materialities of the craft itself. This vignette helps articulate a view of the human being as relational, affective, emotional, embodied, and

entangled with materialities and ecology, simultaneously enacting agency and being enacted upon by forces beyond his or her control (Visse & Nistelrooij, forthcoming).

Figure 1: Tess experiencing her finished necklace.

> Yessss! The necklace as well as the matching earrings are done. I am very happy with the end result. I have worked on this set for half a year. I created links that may have been the same initially, but each has a different twist to it. This was a very successful session. It feels like you are in a flow. Everything you do, works. What I made looks good. I am very happy with the result of my own manual labor. *I* made this, it was *my* idea, and it was *my* skill that put this together. I feel a sense of accomplishment. I am also happy with the end result. I have worn the necklace as well as the earrings several times already. I feel pride as I wear them. The necklace is silver and a fair amount of it. That makes it something pleasing to wear because I can feel it resting on my skin. It is not too heavy though, and flexible enough to feel natural. I like the feel and look of the separate links and I remember the joy I felt when I made them. The whole is pleasing. (Tess comments on the photo in a written text sent to the first author on July 11, 2022)

I took this photo quickly, attempting to capture this spontaneous display of joyful emotion as it unfolded before me. The cropped framing—Tess's legs are cut off midway—reflects my urgent attempt to seize this fleeting moment. Further inspection of the unplanned composition,

however, helps me develop my meaning of the moment, as suggested by Hannes and Siegesmund (2022). The dynamic composition depicts a deep space, with a one-point perspective conveyed by the strong diagonal lines of the furniture, walls, and ceiling, as well as the relative size of Tess's arms, all leading the eye to the corner of the room which is a busy craft workshop. Tess stands, front and center, bracketed between two bright red objects on the same frontal plane as her, standing out from the more gray-toned background that is cluttered with materials, tools, furniture, and parts of people that form the social environment. I am reminded of NAVEDTRA's interpretation (1993) that an image's background, both physical and social, is subordinate to the person and story at its center. Echoing the bright red objects on either side, Tess is experiencing one of those bright rare moments in jewelry making, where slow repetitive work finally culminates in a successful finished piece that can be worn and displayed to others.

The photo commemorates the first time that Tess wears her necklace, yet it is barely noticeable, only just peeking out from under her collar. Tess is turned away from the camera, facing people outside the frame. This moment is not meant for me; she is sharing it with her community. There is an intimate, embodied, and entangled relationship playing out between Tess's body, the jewelry, and her environment. This evokes Pagan's posthuman perspective on the jewelry maker–wearer–viewer relationship, which highlights the "sensorial characteristics that are significant to the manner in which the wearable object is made, interpreted, and experienced" (2014, p. 118). Adopting Pagan's view that the full meaning of a crafted piece only becomes apparent after being worn, through the embodied and materialized relationship with the wearer, I reflect that Tess is experiencing a transition of her relationship with the object–from maker to wearer–while simultaneously deepening her relationship with herself, through emotions of satisfaction and pride.

Tess notes that the necklace is not too heavy, and indeed her body seems to be light and free in facial expression and posture. She uses positive words including "happy," "good," "pride," and "joy," all evident in the photo, reflected in her wide smile and body coiled like a spring. With knees bent, arms up, and fists clenched, this frozen moment is about to explode into exuberance. Tess's joy and pride at acquiring the skill of soldering can be understood through a developmental lens, and I connect to Lachman's views on midlife as a period of growth amid life transitions, "both a time of upheaval and a time of mastery" (2004, p. 313). Indeed, Tess's use of first-person language to describe emotions of self-esteem and achievement ("*I* made this, it was *my* idea, and it was *my* skill") point towards a humanistic interpretation. However, I find myself also embracing Warren's posthumanist view (2022), by which "bringing materials into view as producing and being produced alongside humans raises possibilities for considering how care matters and how matter cares" (p. 113). Such a posthumanist reading "moves the focus away from human individuals as sole components of

caring relationships" (Warren 2022, p. 116) and considers the role of all actors, human and non-human, in the assemblage of the craft occupation.

Juxtaposing Tess's written words with a posthumanist visual analysis, we can expand beyond a human-centered interpretation of the meaningfulness of the occupation. In learning to solder, Tess is caring not just for herself, but also for the materials, tools, and environments (physical and social) of the craft, just as–no less importantly—they are caring for her. The meaningfulness of the craft is embedded in mutual human-non-human caring relationships, as they develop through entangled intra-actions of occupation.

"I was making it for you, so I was looking for connection"

Stacey creates paper crafts at home, taking over the family dining table. When this photo was taken, she had just decided that the object she was making would be a gift for me, exemplifying how craft materialities can be meaningful in that they enable relationships with others. Caring is thus seen as a socially mediated practice. This means that people continuously attune to themselves, others, and their environment, in order to "maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Tronto, 1993).

Figure 2: Stacey working on a paper craft.

> Working with paper in this picture is searching. Searching for the right fit. The right feeling or look for what I am making. At this point I knew I was making it for you,

> so I was looking for connection. Connection with an image on the paper or feeling in the color to make it personal. For you. Sometimes it can just be an image I like but other times it may be a symbol that connects. I don't know it till I see it. Sometimes I may look at different options and settle on or select a few and narrow down my choice from those options. By starting broad and narrowing it down I can rule out possible options and it helps me feel knowledgeable. Maybe I feel more in control (just an illusion) because I feel knowledgeable? (Stacey comments on the photo in a written text sent to the first author on April 29, 2020)

Inspired by Höppner's silhouette method (2022), I imagine the outline of Stacey's crafting body in this photo and find it includes a jutting paintbrush firmly clamped in her mouth, the tip of a pencil tucked deep into her hair, the outline of eyeglasses, and a triangle of table surface. Stacey is inseparable from the tools of her craft; they are extensions of her body and, together with the craft itself, form a human-non-human assemblage.

Stacey's unbending gaze is locked on her hands, where the craft is held in a secure embrace under her remarkable concentration. The composition has not one, but two centers of interest—Stacey's eyes in the top third of the composition and hands in the bottom third—dividing the image in a variation of the classic "principle of thirds," as mentioned by NAVEDTRA (1993). The resulting tug and pull between these two areas creates a tension that is reminiscent of Stacey's inner struggle to find the perfect color, symbol, connection, and control. The horizontal line of the paintbrush, firmly gripped in Stacey's mouth, helps form a border of a triangular space together with the table. These lines, like perspective guides, create an intimate space-within-space that holds the craft and Stacey together in this moment in time. A glow of natural white light streams in from behind, forming a halo around Stacey's head and contrasting with the yellow tones before her. This arrangement triggers in me associations to religious symbolism (Rose, 2001), bringing to mind a holy mother figure. Stacey, herself a busy mother, seeks serenity and connection through a creative leisure occupation at the family dining table. Fittingly, the imminent creation of not just a paper craft, but indeed a spiritual connection to another, is optimistically suspended within this frame.

Stacey is making this craft for me, and perhaps she is feeling similar to what is depicted by Arantes (2020), who found that knitting is often made with a particular person in mind: "it happens for the sake of a recipient, which articulates the relational character of knitting (*Liebesarbeit*—labor of love) very clearly [… it] epitomizes the relationality and social boundedness of form (creation)" (p. 201). This brings to mind the findings of Rusiñol-Rodriguez et al. (2022), who believe that the occupation of creating something for another person can be more meaningful and motivating, and bring more happiness, than making it for oneself. The negative side of such increased motivation, however, is pressure and anxiety to

create something that will please the recipient. Stacey expresses similar self-imposed pressure to find the right materialities to represent our connection, linking that to feeling knowledgeable and in control. Meanwhile, the photo displays an embodied version of this highly motivated yet self-critical, anxious mode, with the clenched paintbrush as evidence.

Relational care in this vignette is depicted as a very concentrated effort to attune to another person, not directly but via an object, as materialized through the craft occupation. The assemblage of Stacey's craft—her body, tools, materials, routine processes of "starting broad and narrowing it down," the lighting, even the negotiated use of the communal dining table—all come together as she seeks a caring connection with another person. Attending to the silhouette of this assemblage emphasizes the embodied and emplaced intra-actions that create the conditions and opportunities for such aspects of relational care, to meaningfully engage to and from others in the social world.

"My shed smells like a farm when I'm using it but it's a nice earthy smell"

Nicky is teaching herself how to become an upholsterer by viewing online tutorials, working in a studio she created in her family's old bike shed. This photo captures how care relationships are formed with the material world, as Nicky balances using man-made and natural elements in her craft practice. Care can be seen as relationship with the planet, an intimate interconnectivity of bodies, souls, and the non-human world, "giving, sharing, and releasing" (Weber, 2017, p. 7).

Figure 3: Nicky grabbing a handful of crin material.

> Crin, that's the name for this grass / hay stuffing. I can't tell you exactly what it's made of but it's a good substitute for the more expensive horse / animal hair. I have [a] huge bag of it as it's pretty cheap and I'm learning how to use it. My shed smells like a farm when I'm using it but it's a nice earthy smell, and I feel happy using something natural as opposed to man-made fibres (such as dacron / fibre fill). (Nicky comments on the photo in a written text sent to the first author on April 29, 2020)

This image captures Nicky about to tuck a handful of crin into the perimeter of the chair she is upholstering. She is pleased that she has found an inexpensive natural alternative to the gold standard of animal hair, compared to man-made synthetics. It seems that this authenticity and connection to nature is important to her, even if she does not know "exactly what it's made of." Laid aside is Nicky's mobile phone, on which she is viewing an online tutorial.

The tonality, color, and composition of this image appear to inadvertently depict a duality of nature versus technology. Several central objects have low tonal contrast, sharing uneven textured earthy browns and warm beiges seen in the crin, the unevenly nailed wood frame, the rough cloth seat of the chair, and Nicky's flesh tones. These all differ from the high contrasting tones of sleek and cool blacks, whites, and silvers of the table, wall, mechanically-textured bin, shiny bangle, sweater sleeves, and—almost slipping out of frame yet magnetically drawing our eye—the mobile phone. I gain insights from Hannes and Siegesmund (2022), who associate high contrasts with hardness, power, and strength, and low contrasts with softness and gentleness. These compositional elements support a semiological interpretation as per Rose (2001), that juxtaposes a handful of crin (nature) versus a polished bangle and handheld phone (technology). Both nature and technology are present as vital tools and materials of the craft process, but it is the natural fibers that stand out in how they evoke sensory driven memories of visiting farms, infused with the scents of horses and soil. This olfactory memory is associated with pleasant words and emotions ("good," "nice," "I feel happy"), transforming the mood from the man-made "here and now" to a positively tinged nostalgia of living closer to the earth.

Notably, of the three women photographed, Nicky is the only one that appears to be directly communicating with me (the photographer) and you (the viewer), by turning her body towards us and inviting us both to engage with the natural world with her. Interestingly, the only sense Nicky mentions is smell, yet an even more vivid sense arising from the photograph is that of touch, as the power of the image makes it easy to identify with the hand holding the natural fiber and imagine one's own hand doing the same. The unsayable quality of this invitation to touch recalls Warren's words: "The bodily affective experience of touch … invokes an intimacy of entangling with difference that cannot always be articulated in language, and

which is partially expressed through the new materialist story of care" (2022, p. 122). I am also reminded of how Puig de la Bellacasa brings attention to "touch's unique quality of reversibility, that is, the fact of being touched by what we touch, [which] puts the question of reciprocity at the heart of thinking and living with care" (2017, p. 20). Indeed, I wonder, is Nicky touching the crin, or is the crin touching Nicky?

Nicky's engagement with the crin evokes MacGill's experiences of using natural objects in craft as an "attunement to hearing the spaces we occupy" (2019, p. 408), a "soft state" of deep listening and spacious gratitude. Such embodied and reciprocal care relations between the crafter and the material environment involve a shift from individualistic to collective perspectives, forming an "inter-relationship between the landscape and the human collective" (MacGill, 2019, p. 410) that is dialogic, and which leads to co-constructed experiences of injointness and belonging. I refer back to Von Kürthy et al. (2023) to find that occupational engagement in crafts and its resulting influence on health is influenced by the haptics and aesthetics of its materialities, with crafters developing "a deep and intimate personal relationship with the materials and essentially how they intermingle through the embroidery process in intra-action with the body" (p. 657). This resonates with Stehlíková (2021), who reflects on the disembodied and displaced quality of modern life, often lived in front of screens and removed from nature, countering it through engagement with the tangible presence of grounding materialities. Such a view connects with Weber's idea (2017), that to be truly enlivened is to trust the environment's capacity to sustain and support us, opening ourselves to this relationship.

Through her craft, Nicky makes choices to engage with nature, enjoying the sensations and memories these entanglements bring. She cares about using natural elements, and they in turn give her something intangible in return. It is these aspects of relational care to and from the material world that "interweave a complex, life-sustaining web" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), and bring meaningfulness to the craft.

Discussion

Co-creation of Meaning Through Visual Methods

A study of crafts as meaningful occupation is a fertile area to explore from a sensorial and posthumanist point of departure, given the rich materiality of craft and its situatedness in place. Mudde finds that "craft as a verb resists, foils, and rejects the assumed divisions between the mental and the manual, theoretical and material, knowing and doing, mind and body" (2022, p. 67). Attempting to understand meaningful care aspects of these occupations deserves a similar approach. Sensory ethnography offers that "a rich combination of written and visual representation can create possibilities for engaging them in mutual meaning

making" (Pink, 2015, p. 168). Visse et al. (2020) suggest that embracing an apophatic inquiry approach allows for emergence of an aesthetic space between the participant, the occupation, and the researcher as an entangled witness. In this study, adopting such an aesthetic sensitivity allowed me to suspend judgment on naming meanings, remaining open and resonant, and postponing analysis by "indirectly pointing towards a phenomenon, not forcing its formation" (Visse et al., 2020, p. 6). Engaging with the phenomenon through photography, I captured fleeting moments of my research participants performing their occupations as they unfolded. Photography is already an embodied act of interpretation, where vision and hands operate a camera "to give a spontaneous personal response to the [phenomenon]" (Visse et al., 2020, p. 7), bypassing explicit thought or cognitive language processes and escorting me to a hermeneutic phase of contemplative wonder. This wonderous space of careful listening from the heart is similar to ontological wonder in which one can "see as if for the first time the extraordinary *in* and wonder *of* the ordinary in our daily living … connected to a deep sense of meaningfulness, joy and gratitude" (Visse et al., 2020, p. 7). From that dialogical and action-based silence, insights about the phenomenon emerged.

Using visual methods that lean on posthuman perspectives, such as the AAVI (Hannes & Siegesmund, 2022), allowed me to access these insights and attempt to turn the unsayable into articulations that can be shared with others. This is a departure from more traditional representational methods such as interviews, and required reflective unlearning of long held professional routines of observation of occupation, and a conscious decision to embrace the uncertainty that accompanies such a departure. While observing the occupations as an emplaced and reflexive ethnographer, I was using a sensory ethnography approach to take in the situated experience (Pink, 2015). This relates to noticing, which, according to Rosén et al. (2022), is a sensory-aware process that is situated, embodied, and always directed at something, "a bidirectional experience that is both attending outwards to the more-than-human world and inwards to felt experience" (p. 26). Noticing particularly invites preconceptions and interpretations, but still much of what we notice stays in the realm of the tacit. A posthumanist adaptation of photo-elicitation helps these meanings to later be accessed and verbalized. For example, while observing Tess in her moment of pride and deciding to capture it on camera, I was not consciously aware that she was standing between two bright red objects. Nor was I deliberately trying to draw parallels between Nicky's phone and the crin in the way I framed that photo. However, once I looked at these photos—really looked—coupled by the meanings that the women were verbalizing to me in their written reflections, an entangled meaningfulness of these situated occupations began to emerge, and these elements became more visible and noticeable to me *because* they supported my tacit understandings. The images themselves were "speaking" to me, intra-acting from their own agency (Hannes and Siegesmund 2022), offering their own perspectives as non-human stakeholders in the situated experience (Rosén et al., 2022), and "telling" me something about

the meaningful intra-actions between the women, their crafts, and the materialities of these relationships. It is in that way that the images revealed their agency: how they made me feel about what they depicted.

This co-creation of meaning, as captured on camera and then iteratively analyzed, became an intra-action between multiple partners: the participants as both subjects and observers, me as both photographer and observer, my co-authors as analysis sparring partners, and the images themselves as non-human agents with something to "say." It appears only fitting that the material agency of the craft is mirrored by the material agency of the photos. The method echoes and amplifies the findings, also highlighting an important aspect of care and art: mutuality, "the passage from feeling into shared meaning" (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 204).

Relational Care Through Craft Occupations

The vignettes in this paper exemplify several aspects of relational care in craft occupations, each meaningful in a different way: to and from one's own self, to and from others in the social world, and to and from the material world. I had set out to understand how this relationality intersects meaningfulness; this too can be explained on three levels.

Leonard (2020) states that all matter is always in a continuous process of iterative intra-active "becoming," rejecting any hierarchy between human and material actors. Just as Tess is "becoming" a jeweler, the raw silver is "becoming" a necklace. These two intra-acted events are interwoven and unfolding, existing together "in time, space, and place, in the porous intermingling and flattening of subject, object, and environments" (Blaikie, 2020, p. 335). "Becoming" (along with "doing," "being," and "belonging") is fundamental to meaningfulness in occupation (Hammell, 2004), and it is through occupation that we exhibit our "becomings" to others (Reed et al., 2011, p. 307). Use of a posthuman lens illustrates one meaningful aspect of craft occupations: the potential for a deepening of one's relationship with oneself through entangled and mutual processes of "becoming," through materialized intra-actions with the non-human world.

Mudde (2022) finds craft to be "exploratory and experimental – crafting reveals specific things about ourselves in the world through their relations with one another, very often things that surprise us" (p. 70). Stacey's quest for social connection is fraught with doubt and struggle for control, but also rich in experimentation, symbolism, and hope, embodied and materialized through craft. Piškur et al. find that "the meaning of an individual's occupations is embedded in his/her social context" (2014, p. 68). Attention to the materialities of relational care as part of the social context of life helps us appreciate this aspect of meaningful craft occupations.

Nicky finds meaningfulness in restoring used items and including natural materials in her craft. This intra-action is infused with the aroma of a life lived close to earth, a step back from technology and man-made choices. Pollard et al. (2020) feel this is critical, as "meaningful occupational participation has to take account of sustainability and threats to the environment arising from every aspect of human activity in connection with planetary resources" (p. 2). Meanwhile, Firby and Raine (2023) identify nature and environmental factors as sources of meaningfulness in occupation. Weber (2017) reflects on the relational interconnectivity of bodies, souls, and the non-human world, which manifests as enlivenment and is enacted through the living body within the environment, an intimate interconnectivity of "giving, sharing, and releasing" (p. 7). Enlivenment acknowledges self-actualization of the non-human world, offering a merciful, caring approach that counters greed and emphasizes interdependence. Craft occupations thus present, through their non-human materialities, another meaningful aspect of care through occupation: to and from the material world.

Setting these three complementary vignettes side by side reveals how embodied, emplaced, and materialized aspects of craft occupations provide meaningfulness through various forms of relational care, bringing to question the role of non-human materialities. The posthuman lens through which we examine craft occupations compels us to rethink Tronto's and Puig de la Bellacasa's definitions in terms of who is responsible for care. Can non-human materialities also take responsibility for "giving, sharing, and releasing" (Weber, 2017, p. 7)? Tronto's (1993) phases of care (caring about, taking caring of, care-giving, and care receiving) are based on notions such as attentiveness and responsiveness. The vignettes show that it is through the occupation of craft that humans and materials come together to care for one another, and thus for the shared world itself. It is by the action of making—shared by both human and non-human actors, each with their own agency, attentiveness, and responsiveness—that these care relationships unfold. In this posthuman view of craft occupations, it is not solely the human who is the "maker"; rather it is the occupation itself, with all its entangled actors, that "makes," and therefore, that "cares," and from that caring stance, meaningfulness emerges.

Conclusion

A humanist perspective and traditional representational methods have been the standards when studying meaningfulness of craft occupations. Here, however, the use of a posthuman perspective and introduction of an adapted co-created photo-elicitation method allow the materialities of both the crafts and the research itself to join the conversation, revealing fresh insights. This expansion of how we observe craft occupations exemplifies how "new learning adds to, rather than replaces, old practices" (Rushmer & Davies, 2004, p. ii10). The images and analyses do not provide proof or clear-cut answers about how it feels to experience relational care in the practice of meaningful occupations, but they help us to "live in" the

questions themselves and sense—rather than know—what these moments mean.

Meaningfulness of occupation is situated not just in place but also in time. Tess's exuberant burst of pride, Stacey's contemplative search for connection, and Nicky's sensorial engagement with nature are fleeting, ephemeral experiences of meaningfulness that emerge from their creative occupations. Experiences of meaningfulness are phenomena that cannot be projected into the future or conjured up from the past. They are always right here, right now. Photo-elicitation can "freeze" such moments and allow for slow reflection after the fact, allowing connections to be made between ideas, and giving room for tacit understandings to become articulated in an iterative and collaborative meaning-making process.

Beyond the method, however, it is the posthuman perspective that gives us an opening to the unsayable, acknowledging meanings that reside within the agency of the non-human partners in entanglements of occupation. The materialities of occupation are essential non-human agents that foster enlivenment through the relationships they enable with ourselves, others, and the environment. In studying the craft occupations of the women featured in this paper through a posthuman lens, my co-authors and I arrive at the understanding that meaningfulness, materialities, and care are intertwined, entangled in intra-actions of occupation. We perform occupations because they are meaningful, and that meaningfulness stems from the fact that we care about them; we care about their environments, their tools, and their materialities. We care about the people they enable us to connect with, and about the "becomings" we identify in ourselves through them. Craft occupations are meaningful because they enable us to care about "the world" that we live in, and "the world" in turn cares back for us.

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