

# MATERIALITIES

## CREATIVE INDUSTRIES



**NEW THINKING #3**

**2019/20**

**BCMCR**

Birmingham Centre  
for Media and  
Cultural Research

# MATERIALITIES AT BCMCR

Over the course of the 2019/20 academic year, researchers in the BCMCR have been producing work in response to the research theme of 'Materialities'. With this theme, we were interested in exploring the ways in which our theoretical work and practice interact with and exist within the material world.

Led by Dr Iain Taylor, the theme has produced a breadth and depth of exciting work across each of our research clusters. This pamphlet has been produced as part of a series, which aims to capture a snapshot of the ideas and discussions which have emerged from the theme over the course of the year, and to provide a resource for colleagues and students who are keen to consider notions of materiality from a range of interdisciplinary perspectives.

For more information on Materialities at BCMCR, or on the work of the Centre generally, please visit our website:

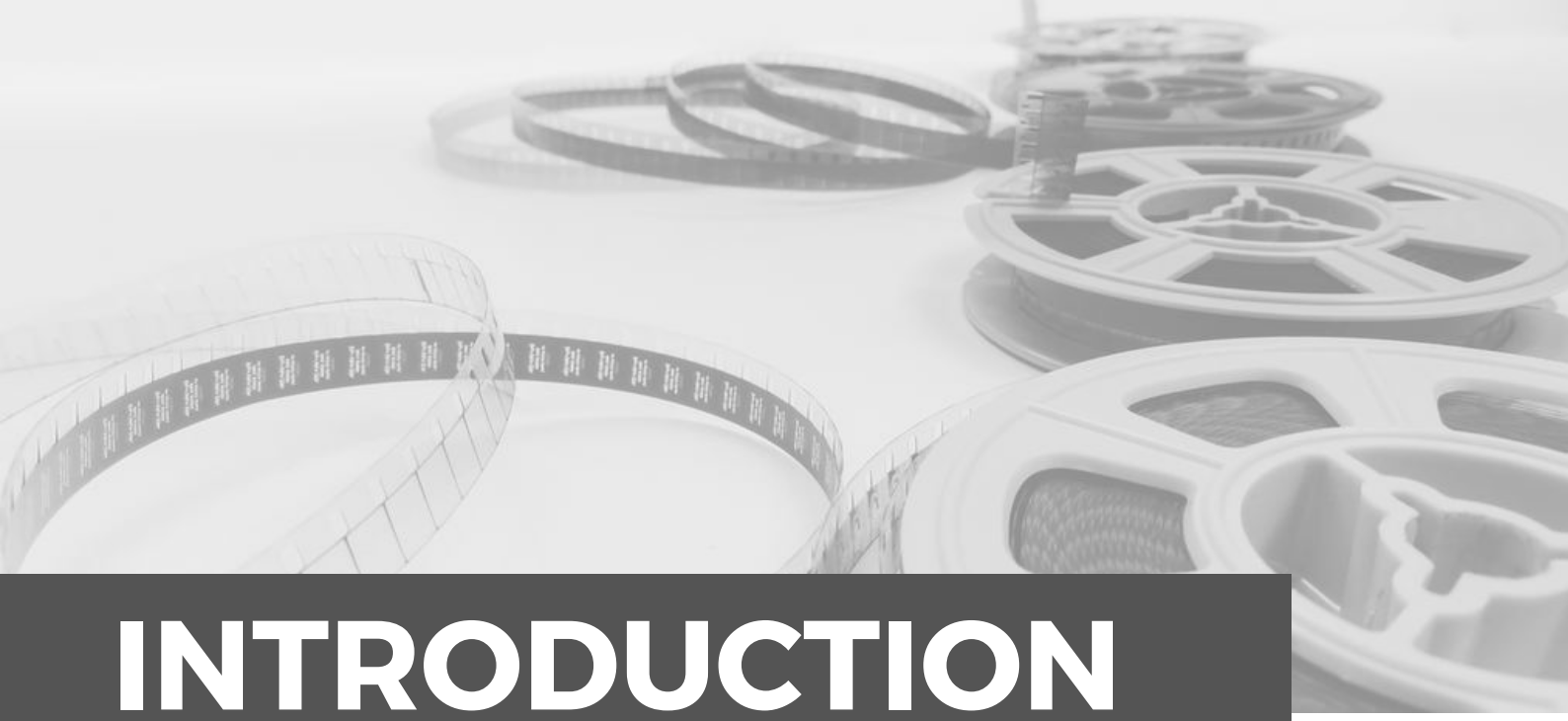
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# INTRODUCTION

As a cluster we have discussed how the concept of materiality applies to our work. We have been particularly interested in how cultural objects are made, focusing our attention on Tim Ingold's (2009) idea of the "textility of making". Ingold's approach helps us to think about the relationship the maker (in our case, the creative worker), material (in its many forms) and how form is created. What follows is four articles written by members of the cluster, which each respond to this prompt, some more explicitly than others, considering the "flows and transformations of materials" (Ingold, 2010) and the significance this might have for researching the creative industries.

Firstly, Oliver Carter reflects on the material traces of a forgotten obscenity trial from 1974, referred to in the press as the Watford Blue Movie Trial, to consider how such materials might provide an insight into how a largely undocumented clandestine trade operated. Martin Cox draws on the ideas of philosopher John Dewey to frame the act of Colston being deposited into the Bristol harbour and what meanings his resurrection in a museum might have. Kirsty Devaney reflects on the traditions of music education and the role materials play in the process of composition. Finally, Karen Patel considers how a materialities approach can help to rethink hierarchies of value in craft, taking into account the skills and expertise of the maker, and the social, cultural and historical contexts which feed into value judgements.



# Creative Industries

## Materialities



July 2020

Photo by Angelina Litvin  
on Unsplash



# OBSCENE MATERIALS



## OLIVER CARTER

Dr. Oliver Carter is a Reader in Creative Economies at Birmingham City University. His research focuses on alternative economies of cultural production; informal forms of industry that are often removed from a formal cultural industries discourse. He is the author of the monograph *Making European Cult Cinema: Fan Enterprise in an Alternative Economy*, and is currently writing his second monograph, which explores the cultural and economic development of the British adult film industry. This research has informed the award winning documentary series *Sexposed* and the feature *Hardcore Guaranteed*. In 2018 he was awarded a British Academy Small Grant to explore the transnational trade in hardcore pornography between Britain, Scandinavia and the Netherlands.



On November 22nd 1972, after a routine stop by local police officers in Harrow, Greater London, an entrepreneur named John Darby was arrested while loading his car with obscene materials. Darby had been involved in Britain's illicit trade in hardcore pornography since 1969 and, in 1970, was charged with the offences of fraudulently evading the prohibition of the importation of indecent or obscene articles from Denmark, where the production and distribution had recently been legalised. At the local police station, it was discovered that the boot of Darby's car was holding 608 scans (the porn trade's name for magazines imported from Scandinavia), 35 8mm 'rollers' (hardcore 8mm films, 200ft in length) and the 16mm negatives for 14 films. When searching Darby, they found he had a number of keys on his person. Noting that the car was parked in close proximity to a number of nearby garages, one of the officers went to see if the keys might fit any of the locks. The hunch proved right. Later, the officers returned to the scene of the arrest and found an 'Aladdin's cave' of pornographic material and had identified the base of Darby's mail order operations. In total, the following pornographic materials were seized by the police:

- 4391 magazines (73 titles)
- 354 novels (21 titles)
- 44 typescripts (5 titles)
- 28 records (1 title)
- 16 packets of photographs
- 601 packets of playing cards
- 379 titled 8mm rollers (51 titles)
- 346 untitled 8mm rollers (subsequently not deemed to be obscene)
- 17,544 empty film cartons for 37 titles
- 8 unprocessed film titles
- A number of 16mm films, including master negatives



Alongside these materials were documents relating to his six mail order operations. Of particular interest to the police was an invoice for 5000 film spools that linked Darby with an Anthony Collingbourne of Watford. The police obtained a search warrant and paid Collingbourne a visit on the 29th November 1972, seizing 779 magazines, one typescript and two rollers. At this time it was not realised that Collingbourne was involved in producing many of the titles that were found in Darby's garage. Further investigation into Collingbourne revealed the extent of his operation, and brought to public attention to the trade, resulting in what would become referred to as the Watford Blue Movie Trial by the popular press.

All of this above information is taken from the records of the Director of Public Prosecutions available at the National Archives in Kew, London. As Gorfinkel (2019) identifies, "the texts and objects that go under the banner of adult film and media are continually inscribed by material processes: historically marked as obscene; subject to censorship, regulation, redistricting, zoning; proscribed by formats and obsolete platforms as well as drivers of new technological modes". Therefore, the physical records that were once used to regulate and control the production and distribution of adult material in the United Kingdom now serve as a window into how an undocumented, clandestine business operated. Yet this history is sketchy, as many records for offences committed under the Obscene Publications Act (1959) have not been kept, being deemed culturally insignificant. I am interested in how such materials might be used by the researcher to help further understand the policy frameworks in which obscene material has been made and circulated, but also how they can reveal forgotten histories of cultural and economic production.

#### Bibliography

Gorfinkel, Elena. 2019. "Editor's Introduction: Sex and the Materiality of Adult Media." *Feminist Media Histories* 5 (2): 1-18.







# THE EDWARD COLSTON EXPERIENCE



## MARTIN COX

Martin has 20 years experience of working in the cultural sector as an artistic director, creative producer, programmer and artist. Over the course of Martin's career, he has built an arts centre (The Brindley), oversaw hundreds of engagement projects with thousands of amazing people, programmed multiple shows, produced and directed many festivals and more.

Over the last 18 years, Martin has led a successful career in the arts, specialising in community arts and socially engaged activism. He has contributed to cultural policy development and many academic/professional publications and his work has received a number of awards. He continues to work internationally as an artist/musician.

There is a school of thought, attributable to philosopher John Dewey, that art is experience. While the ongoing conditions of living are continuously passing, 'an experience' has shape;

*'We have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment. Then, and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences... Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience (Dewey, 1958, p. 35).*

An experience, filtered through perception, always has aesthetic quality. The aesthetic properties of art exist also in 'the sounds and sights of rushing fire-engines' or 'the grace of a baseball player' (Dewey, 1958, p. 5). The art object is not irrelevant. The work of the artist is to embody their material with properties that 'refine' the aesthetic register of experience. Not just ciphering signs and codes but embodying the 'rhythms' and 'energies' of experience (Dewey, 1958).

Perception carries past experience into the present, thus participating in its aesthetic resonance and making every experience unique. For Dewey, an artwork clarifies and purifies the confused meaning of prior experience in the immediate present. The pragmatists turn Dewey brings is that the symbols and codes refined by the artist must be experienced if they are to be of use. The crucial point; experience is always the vessel of aesthetic appreciation and the aesthetic register of experience unifies its emotional, intellectual and symbolic agency - the work of art is in experience.

The recent spectacle of Edward Colston being despatched into Bristol harbour can certainly be seen an experience of the work of art. Colston changed. The once proud, legitimate philanthropic role model, now a toppled autocrat. The same material (a bronze statue) carried through a multifarious universe of unique experience, each transforming it into something new and unique. The open sewer that is my social media left little doubt that the effigy of Colston being jettisoning to the depths was experienced differently the world over: Gammon faced supremacists defending dreadful public art from the furious indignation of BLM protesters. Who'd of thought?

And where does this leave the artist? John Cassidy, who designed the statue, took his subject matter and refined its proud stature, elevated above the citizenry, who, under the terms of the commission, were expected to gaze upon it as inspiration for co-operative living. Those aesthetic properties harvested from his experience and worked into form entered into the experience of people the world over. The proud stance, the lofty positioning, the embodiment of the great and the good experienced now as the continuation of that most unacceptable of experience – the horrors of the slaver. Cassidy presumably didn't suppose that economic, geo-political and technological progress would land his toil in the murky depths 125 years in the future.

As uninteresting as the statue is, it delivered all the stuff of past experience into present, carrying it forward through time, symbolic rearrangement, public indecency, resistance and national shame. The statue is clearly more than public record - a gathering of signs and symbols objectively stating events of the past. Its potency is in experience, bringing forth not only the historical events in which it was forged, but the experiences of those who perceive it now, in new consummate experiences that unify new arrangements emotional, intellectual and aesthetic registers. It would seem that much of what Dewey theorised holds. Colston changed because perception changed, and perception changed through 125 years of experience.

If the work of art exists in experience, it should be no surprise that our feted cultural institutions were not, and never have been the location of art working (in the Dewey sense) in the way Colston just did. Colston worked because he was allowed to exist, decay, offend and transform through experience, unaided by the cultural sector death star. It's not simply that so often our public cultural institutions remove art (in Dewey's vernacular; refined aesthetic experience) from public view, in buildings often so antiseptic that the uninitiated might suppose they have drifted into a GUM clinic. It's that the experience is infused with all the condescending, pseudointellectual piffle of the curator and further laden with the structural inequality of the cultural sector, which attaches itself to the material in experience. The material changes. It now speaks of the institution to the institution through the institution.



Regardless of the artists intent, the affect is that material is neutered, rendered static, stripped of its capacity for transform - curated into oblivion. Its rather like a safari where all the animals have been shot, stuffed and organised along the roadside in a morbid display of symbolic inertia - all life, movement, and energy drained from experience - dead behind the eyes.

So news that the statue is to be resurrected in a museum is depressing. It's not that this will re-legitimise him - no doubt he would be carefully exhibited to reflect his sullied past. It's that all the inertia, vainglorious platitudes, virtue signalling, and hypocrisy of the cultural institution will attach itself in experience and render the repurposed material lifeless. Colston's current status as the vessel of public experience will be symbolically and experientially appropriated by an institution that can make no claim to the burst of energy that landed it in the sink.

Colston is exactly where he should be, in the harbour depths, where all who have experienced his redeployment as object of resistance, dissent and progress can savour what Dewey calls the 'consummator harmony of a complete experience'. The knowledge that he is there, gone but not forgotten (unseen but still perceived), is the continuation of that glorious experience - the meaning of the moment lives on uninterrupted. If a visible record of events is required for future perception, let the plinth, absent of its occupant, remain in public view. What better material for retaining the emotion and energy of the moment uninterrupted into future? The vacant plinth with the knowledge of its former occupant's location is surly the best way to experience Edward Colston.

Photograph: "Former Site of Statue of Slave Trader Edward Colston, Bristol"  
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# MANUSCRIPT, MYTHS, AND MUSICAL MATERIAL



## KIRSTY DEVANEY

Kirsty Devaney is a Birmingham based composer, researcher and educator, passionate about promoting creative music making. Her music has been performed by professional contemporary music ensembles, aired on Radio 3 and shortlisted for a British Composer Award. In 2013 Kirsty founded the '*Young Composers Project*', which has since worked with over 200 students and trained composers to work in educational settings. She completed her PhD at Birmingham City University investigating the assessment of composing in schools and was awarded the prestigious Anna Craft Award for research into '*Creativity in Education*'. She is now working as a research assistant at Birmingham City University, and is continuing to work as a music education researcher and module leader at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.



As an undergraduate composition student bright-eyed and bushy-tailed in 2009, having an A3 manuscript pad was the accessory to have. Clearly you must be good if you were able to write your music with pencil and paper, and if you needed A3 paper then you were probably composing something pretty big and important - this is what you needed to do to become a composer, right? In the 10 years since I started at Birmingham Conservatoire (before it was 'Royal'), the same A3 score sits by my piano with blank pages left inside. Although I found it a useful composing tool, rather than write notes onto the tiny little staves, I found the blank back pages liberating. I used them for mapping out structures, timbres, and imaging sounds...

By working with schools and music students, I discovered that much composing pedagogy is based upon myths about composers and assumptions about their creative practices; perhaps like my initial beliefs regarding the importance of owning an A3 manuscript pad. Burnard (2012) highlights how these misconceptions often emerge from 'archaic traditionalist beliefs' (p.9), which are reinforced by stories about key figures (Thomson, 2008). There seems to be a specific fascination around composers' 'mystical' and 'elusive' (Burnard, 2012: 8) lives. The twitter page 'composers doing normal shit', which post photographs of composers going about their daily lives, can be seen as an example of this ongoing obsession and clearly the popularity of this page (currently at 26.5K followers) is linked in some way to the surprise that 'great' composers have normal lives too.

One of the most prominent pedagogical myths I uncovered through my research into GCSE and A-level composing was the role of musical notation. Although examination boards claim to be open-minded about what constitutes a score, teachers explained how submitting a non-western classically notated score was 'risky', especially at A-level:

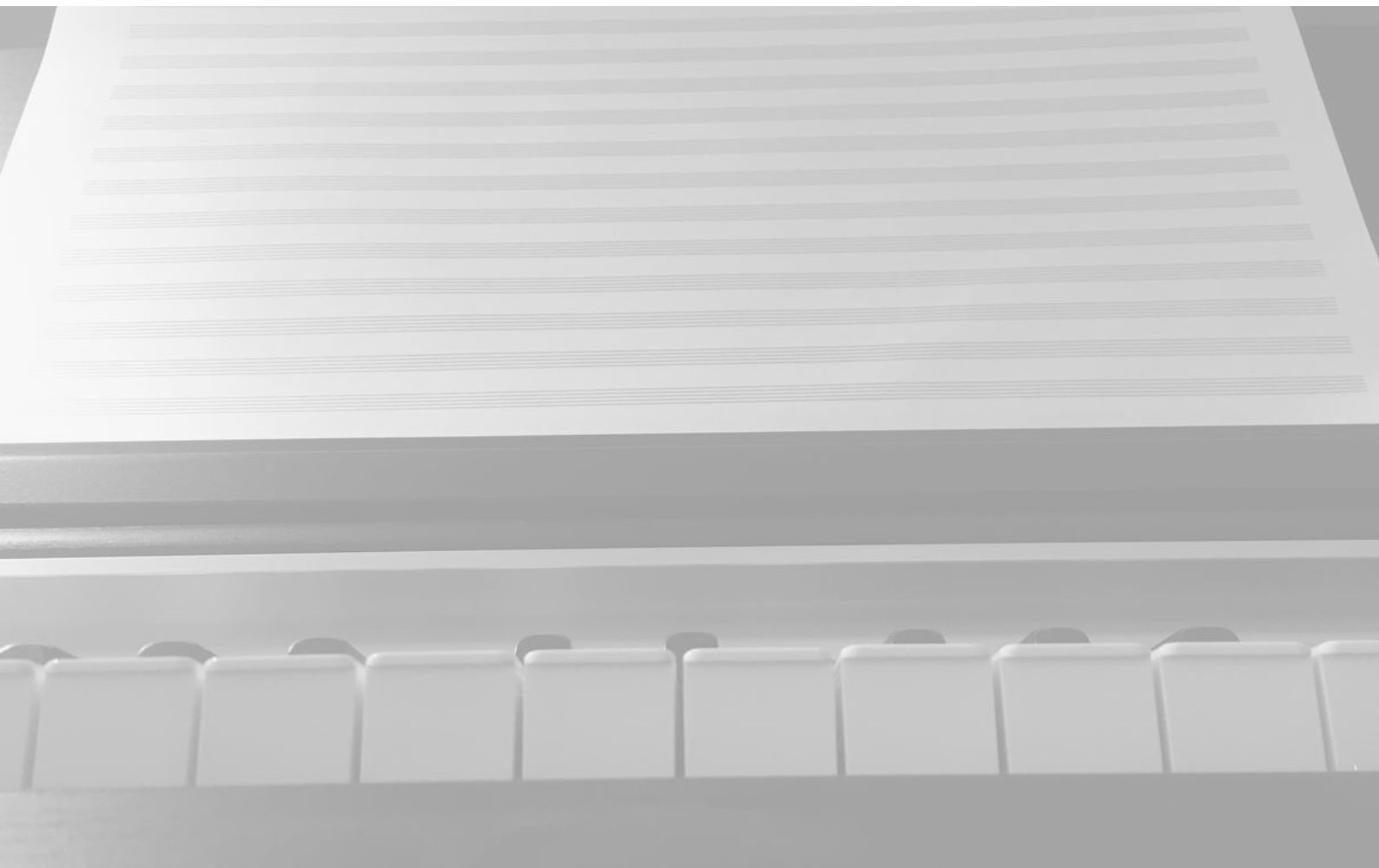
**Teacher:** *It worries me that some examiners will "look down on" other forms of notation*

Teachers have every right worry about potential bias; in 2012, the Education Secretary at the time, Michael Gove, announced 'more rigorous' GCSEs that would fix the 'dumbing down' that had happened in education under Labour. To Schools Minister Nick Gibb, rigour in music meant students having to read and write staff notation and learn about western classical music (Gibb, 2016: online).

A big part of composing is exploratory and working with musical material creatively, as Ingold (2010) stated 'the flows and transformations of materials' (p.92). However, this drive towards score creation has resulted in many teachers directing their students to composing directly onto a score, whether on notation software packages or digital audio workspaces. This has led to a linear approach to composing whereby students often start composing at the first bar and proceeding to input music bar by bar (Devaney, 2019). It is clear that the product (i.e. the score) is valued over the process of composing due in part to the assessment requirements that teachers must abide by for fear of adverse consequences (Mansell, 2007), as well as the the symbolic weighting that musical notation holds in the Western musical tradition:

**Teacher:** *I worry that use of stave notation will become more important than musical development and expression*

Examination boards must consider the diversity of creative approaches, ensuring that ideological beliefs do not disadvantage other forms of music-making and that 'the processes of formation' is valued as much as the 'final products' (Ingold, 2010: 92). The greatest thing I learnt during my undergraduate years was not how to compose, but the ways I composed.



## References

Burnard, P. (2012) *Musical Creativities in Practice*. Oxford: OUP.

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# MATERIALITIES AND CRAFT VALUE




## KAREN PATEL

Karen Patel is a research fellow in the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research at Birmingham City University. Her current project is an AHRC funded Innovation Fellowship in collaboration with Crafts Council UK, looking at inequalities in craft. She is author of the book *The Politics of Expertise in Cultural Labour: Arts, Work, Inequalities* and co-editor of *Craft Entrepreneurship*.

In my research on supporting diversity and expertise development in craft, I've been trying to think through craft value and how it is racialized, gendered and classed. Why the types of craft promoted by my project partner Crafts Council, has so much value placed on it, and why craft work and objects created as part of craft participation programmes and within communities are considered less valuable, and not recognised as aesthetically important. While value judgements do depend on skill and aesthetic expertise, I argue these value judgements are also classed and racialised. There is work on materialities which helps me to think through how value judgements can be reframed for a more equitable and inclusive craft ecology.

For example, Fred Myers (2002) explored the trajectory of indigenous Australian paintings and designs as they move through the Western art-culture system and as different object-ideologies meet. He discussed Aboriginal concerns about copyright and presented three cases of forgery where the designs of Aboriginal artists were copied, culturally appropriated and used out of context. For example, images put on tea towels and souvenirs in Vietnam. He described the production of 'The Dreaming' which is the revelation of ancestral knowledge or events in material form. The rituals which form them are held within people and communities and are not thought to be the work of an individual. To quote Myers: "The Dreaming discursively and practically articulates personhood and ontology, mediating the interpersonal relations between people organized spatially (in territorially dispersed groups) and intergenerationally into a system of identity, of similarity and difference, of autonomy and relatedness." Myers argues that the art market system detaches signs from those who make them, and the esoteric knowledge developed within families and communities needs to be protected, rather than individual creativity.




A maker creating jewellery as part of the Women's Maker Movement project, organised by Craftspace Birmingham and Shelanu, 2019.

Aboriginal painters have drawn on a framework that is not particularly concerned with usual hierarchies of value and categories of what constitutes fine art. Instead “They use an ontology and set of practices which draw from their own world of production”, imagining their circulation in terms of the local economy of exchange. As their work became increasingly situated within the wider art market, Aboriginal artists fought for copyright, to protect their interests and share their story. As a result, a subcategory of Aboriginal fine art has emerged which includes white, non-Aboriginal artists. Myers argues that: “the recognition of Aboriginal objects as art is a material practice – not simply an endorsement of Aboriginal culture, but a recognition of certain forms of its materialisation within a specific institutional form and system of value (involving markets, museums and collectors).” The subcategory of Aboriginal fine art which has emerged should be better understood as the work of the producers and their social and historical contexts, rather than the judgement of the critics who valorised it. This argument can also be made for devalued craft in the UK context. A materialities approach can help me to think about not only the skills and expertise of the makers, but their social, historical and cultural contexts and how they relate to the judgement of craft.

## References

Myers, F. (2002) *Painting Culture: The Making of Aboriginal Fine Art*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.



The Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR) was established in 2009 to develop excellent research as a core activity within the Birmingham School of Media. Currently, BCMCR has over 30 research-active staff and 30 research degree students. The Director of the centre is Nicholas Gebhardt, and the Associate Directors are Kirsten Fokert and Dima Saber.

The BCMCR aims to produce distinctive, collaborative work within the field of media and culture research. In the previous Research Excellence Framework process for assessing the UK HE sector, the majority of BCMCR research environment and activities were judged as of a quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour.

We welcome visiting researchers from across the world and hold regular research seminars which mix presentations from staff, students, and speakers from a range of our collaborative partnerships. Please feel free to contact us if you have a research enquiry.

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Over the course of the 2019/20 academic year, researchers from the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR) have been working in response to the research theme of **Materialities**.

Colleagues from each of the BCMCR's research clusters were asked to create short pieces of writing which capture some of the thoughts, ideas, and discussions which have emerged over the course of the year in relation to the **Materialities** theme.

This work forms the basis of a series of pamphlets which capture the ways in which the theme has shaped / changed thinking within each cluster.