

Bespoke: Past and Future

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Abstract

An invitation to collaborate came through an online lockdown project, *The Spiritual Exercises*. An artist and designer, designer and artist. Our common ground - we are from several generations of tailors from the city of Pau in the South West of France and from the rural island of Orust on the West Coast of Sweden. Through video calls and flipped screens via WhatsApp, simultaneous co-creation, co-learning and immersion into the layers of our technologies - windows into our living spaces, we embarked on a research journey around heritage, tailoring and gender.

Charlotte and 'Alma' Justina shared invisible labour behind the label – Charlotte as maker and Alma as farmer. Like Charlotte, Alma had to settle for invisible labour, her occupation marked on her gravestone as 'Hustrun' (the housewife) whilst her husband was titled 'Skräddaren' (the tailor).

Lockdown gave time and spawned curiosity that increased interest in engaging in family heritage trails through online platforms such as Ancestry and MyHeritage. TV programmes like 'Who do you think you are?', archival and census documents, local museums and private attics, shed light on histories of makers in families. These sources and platforms connect past communities to present. Like a ghostly appearance and re-appearance, our work and collaboration conjured up pasts collapsing into futures.

This paper will share the process of a solely online collaboration whilst sharing our research into the material culture and the role of the tailor in local communities.

Keywords: tailoring; bespoke; heritage; lockdown; collaboration

Introduction

During the second of the COVID-19 lockdowns in the UK in Spring 2021, Cécile Emmanuelle Borra and Caryn Simonson collaborated and connected. We were connected through an invitation to collaborate by artist Mark Dean as part of *The Spiritual Exercises 2*, an online lockdown project that he curated and hosted. (Dean, 2021)

In *On Connection*, Kae Tempest considers human connection:

It could be that connection to another, deeper world is most easily experienced by artists. But really, anyone who's ever meditated, prayed, studied the stars, cooked an important meal for people they love, thrown a punch, received one, built something with their hands, learned a skill because they had no choice, been in service to others, volunteered their time, found themselves at the edge of their sanity or at the edge of their experience, accepted a difficult truth, put themselves second, genuinely gone out of their way for somebody else, has felt it. Connection is not the sole domain of artists, but art is a good way of understanding the fruit of that other place where commonality begins. (Tempest, 2020, p.6)

This paper explores our collaborative process and how personal fashion and textile narratives have informed our work and connected us through this common ground. Whilst the focus is to examine the process of our solely online collaboration, simultaneously we also present our personal research which gives insight into the material culture and the role of the tailor in local communities.

The Connection

The first iteration of *The Spiritual Exercises*, was an online exhibition curated and hosted by Mark Dean, artist, chaplain and inter-faith advisor at University of the Arts London (UAL) which developed during the first lockdown in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020. Dean (2020) described the concept for the exhibition as an opportunity 'mediating memory and longing via the parameters of the past'. Artists and designers could explore this concept and share work during this time on the online platform Arts Chaplaincy Projects. He describes the sense of isolation that emerged during the pandemic:

There was a moment corresponding to but not defined by lockdown. Some artists were locked out of their studios, and others who situate their practice in the outside world were locked in. In this regard they were like many other workers (Dean, 2020)

Over one hundred artists submitted work that was made in isolation but they were able to share it with each other and to a wider audience online. The second iteration, *The Spiritual Exercises 2*, invited collaboration between those who had submitted for the first online exhibition during the period of the second long lockdown.

Curator, Mark Dean described his own 'deep desire to be somewhere else' in lockdowns and that this was perhaps why he was travelling in his mind to past places which inspired the exhibition idea (Dean, 2020). For Caryn the collaboration with Cécile was an opportunity to also travel back in time and imagine a partially invented world where we got to know the characters in our imagery, where real life people and relatives from the near and far past were coming into our lives, being re-awakened, creating a sort of time travel sensation as we dreamed about and talked about our tailoring heritage and the actors at play in our digital collages.

Working from home during lockdown afforded more time to those of us privileged enough not having to commute, in addition to spending more hours indoors without the possibility to go out beyond essential needs. This time spawned curiosity that increased general interest in engaging in family heritage research through online platforms such as Ancestry and MyHeritage. TV programmes in the UK such as 'Who do you think you are?' (BBC), archival and census documents, local museums and private attics, all shed light on the histories of 'makers' in families. These sources and platforms connect past and present communities. Like a ghostly appearance and re-appearance, our work and collaboration conjured up pasts collapsing into futures.

We first became acquainted during a staff group exhibition at Chelsea College of Arts in London. Cécile recalls that Caryn made some complimentary comments about her work in the show to artist and UAL chaplain Mark Dean. He immediately introduced us by exclaiming, 'You two would really get on (actually), you have a lot in common!!' And, indeed, Cécile still remembers sharing a very lively conversation with Caryn about music, fashion and textiles. Likewise, Caryn remembers an animated conversation and hearing about Cécile's background in fashion and styling prior to her studying art and becoming an artist and how this background still plays a strong role in her visual aesthetic and choice of materials.

Cécile was intrigued and moved by Caryn's former contribution to first *The Spiritual Exercises* and discovered yet more personal connections, both coming from a family heritage of tailoring and a connection Cécile has to Sweden. As an artist and designer, designer and artist, both having experienced these fields and approaches, we found our common ground. Cécile is from several generations of tailors from the city of Pau in the South West of France and Caryn is from seven generations of tailors from the rural island of Orust on the West Coast of Sweden.

Through video calls and flipped screens via WhatsApp, simultaneous co-creation, co-learning and immersion into the layers of our technologies – 'windows' into our

living spaces, we embarked on a research journey around heritage, tailoring and gender.

To begin with, we spent weeks which turned into months, sporadically talking about the possibilities of the project; we both remember the initial telephone exchanges during which we considered a somehow excessive hoard of possibilities and directions for the project, yet invariably failing to arrive at any conclusive decision on how to work together. We finally decided to create two separate, individual pieces yet to input collectively into each other's processes. So we shot into action, into an intense period of collaboration involving 'speaking and making' late into the evenings and over long weekends. Cécile recalls:

I can't exactly remember the details of what we talked about throughout our collaboration, thinking about it simply re-ignites very fond and exciting emotions, sort of similarly to recalling a very good film or a very good book yet having completely forgotten the story...(Borra to Simonson, 2022)

Cécile started gathering information and photographs from her cousin in the South of France as she had little material close to hand. Meanwhile, Caryn also gathered visual research which she had come across during a visit to the Hembygds museum, a local community museum on Orust in Mickleby, where her tailoring great grandfather and ancestors originated from. Other materials were also assembled whilst going through her father's family photographs. We set about focusing on digital collage as this would provide us with an immediate way of using the material we had available. The computer was the most accessible tool during lockdown and it allowed us to work visually whilst directly communicating and connecting. Our exchange was often offering advice through a selection process of what to add in and what to eliminate from our images.

In speaking of the process of selection and making as 'discovery' in *Making is Connecting*, Gauntlett writes:

Typically, people mess around with materials, select things, experimentally put parts together, rearrange, play, throw bits away, and generally manipulate the thing in question until it approaches something that seems to communicate meanings in a satisfying manner. This rarely seems to be a matter of 'making what I thought at the start', but rather a process of discovery and having ideas through the process of making.
(Gauntlett, 2011, p.4)

We experienced this in our collaboration where we shifted around the imagery in Photoshop, discarded versions of our compositions, selected and re-selected, changed scale, colour and content. Whilst we were engaged in the aesthetics of the images as artist and designer, we were not necessarily trying to 'communicate

meanings in a satisfying manner' (Gauntlett), rather to create a provocation and political engagement (Cécile) or prompt past and futures into dialogue with each other (Caryn) whilst both uncovering social and personal narratives.

We each contributed to each other's work. Cécile has skills in Photoshop and Caryn learnt new tricks through this exchange. Cécile sometimes stepped in and changed and adapted Caryn's images in a hands-on way digitally, and Caryn helped Cécile make an animated gif to embed in her digital collage. Of course, the exchange centred around conceptual ideas as well as the 'physical' act of digitally making and the process of 'thinking through making'. We sometimes brought in spontaneous two-way conversations spawned 'in the moment' links. At times, these were like a stream of consciousness in our working process. The final works are unlike our typical practices. Cécile's artistic practice predominately ranges from installation, including wallpaper and video works as well as sculptures made with re-configured fashion and homeware paraphernalia. Caryn's work ranges from photography and video, and includes textile and fabric pieces, sometimes with a performative element. In the past, she has also designed headwear for fashion and worked in costume for TV, dance and theatre.

The collaboration enabled a deep connection to form for us and one that we felt continued beyond the finished work for *The Spiritual Exercises 2* where the next 'collaboration' was developing the paper for *Futurescan 5* involving further iterations of the work and again for this expanded paper. All have involved a form of 'making' whether through 'crafting' the digital collages, 'crafting' a presentation or 'crafting' the written paper. Sociologist, David Gauntlett in *Making is Connecting* describes this as,

- *Making is connecting because you have to connect things together (materials, ideas, or both) to make something new;*
- *Making is connecting because acts of creativity usually involve, at some point, a social dimension and connect us with other people;*
- *And making is connecting because through making things and sharing them in the world, we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environments*
(Gauntlett, 2011, p.2)

We will outline our collaborative working process focusing on Cécile's work BESPOKE followed by Caryn's *Les Revenants (Skräddaren)*. This aims to share with you our engagement with the research material we found on our tailoring heritage and our connections to Sweden and France.

BESPOKE



Figure 1: Georges and Charlotte Borra, bespoke tailor/ess, Pau, France. Selection of family photographs.

Cécile's visual material gathered from her cousin, Anora Borra, in the South of France included items shown in figure 1. Anora is an artist (painter) who has been a major influence in Cécile's life from an early age, as he continuously encouraged her to develop her interest in the arts. She vividly remembered him visiting her father's menswear boutique, 'Clovis', which was conveniently located opposite an art shop *Le Prisme*, every time he was in Pau and most particularly on one occasion when he bought Cécile her first photography book 'Le Studio' which still holds a special place on her book shelf. Anora keeps a larger collection of family photographs than Cécile does and he diligently sent her a selection captured with his phone through emails and WhatsApp. Cécile's connection to her cousin is strong and she reflects, 'To this day, Anora is still the person I feel closer to in my family; we share many long art conversations on a regular basis.' (Borra, 2022)



Figure 2: Bespoke tailor/ess memorabilia including Georges Borra's suit labels and Albert Borra's business card.

Figure 2 shows Cécile's early research imagery and artefacts like the George Borra's suit label and the business card from her father's menswear boutique 'Clovis'. Cécile purposely uses the yellow colour from her father's business card as a background for the text in her final collage. She made a version with mustard colour which looked perhaps more visually striking but she was keen to keep the family reference.

Cécile's father, Albert Borra, loved bespoke tailoring and Savile Row; his father Georges (a bespoke tailor) though, wished for him to pursue another professional path as a solicitor. Bespoke tailoring was slowly dying out, mainly due to the development of ready to wear, particularly in a small provincial town in the South of France. Cécile bought him the book on Savile Row for his birthday. The name on the label, 'Georges Borra, Dames et Messieurs' ('Georges Borra, Ladies and Gentlemen') was significant for Cécile. As an artist, she works from a feminist perspective, so it came as no surprise to acknowledge that the word 'tailor' in French *tailleur* is only masculine. French language is gendered, words are divided between male and female. Although English language is not gendered in the same way, it also only has the word 'tailor' which like so many other words for occupations becomes the default for male and female, seemingly gender neutral but in fact conceals the work of women.



PAUL
POIRET



Figure 3: Clockwise top left image: Charlotte Borra, pattern-cutting and seamstress certificate, 1925; Charlotte Borra, ID photograph, 1943; Paul Poiret *Sorbet* dress, 1912, ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Paul Poiret renowned lampshade designs, 1913

Charlotte, Cécile's grandmother, worked alongside Georges, her grandfather, taking care of the 'Dames', yet her name and skills were eclipsed throughout her professional life. This is consistent with Barbara Burman's account of the mid-19th century British and North American tailoring context and the gender divide:

On dressmaking in Mid 19th century British and North American. 'old divide between male tailoring and female dressmaking. For whilst waged and

sweated female hand- or machine workers have made much mass produced clothing for men, they have been invisible to the consumer and there has been little tradition for female tailors in shops. Thus a part of achieving adult masculinity has normally involved relinquishing direct contact with the female maker of clothing.' (Burman, 1999.p.13)

Charlotte Borra, Cécile's grandmother, went to Paris to study sewing and pattern cutting and worked for Paul Poiret, a leading fashion figure of the day. Yet despite the excellence in her work, the distinction between tailor and seamstress was deeply engrained in the history and culture of the tailor and still is. (We will not expand further here due to the scope of this paper but this is part of our ongoing research).

Throughout our collaboration, we also connected to Sweden. Cécile has a longstanding working relationship with Swedish artist and curator Roberto Ekholm. She started visiting Sweden in 2010 following an artist residency in Stockholm and subsequently had the chance to pursue many exhibition opportunities there. A visit to Moderna Museet in Stockholm led her to discover the work of the artist Kjartan Slettemark which has been a key inspiration (figure 4). In her final image 'BESPOKE', she attempts to celebrate his work and critique of the establishment and hierarchies.



Figure 4: Left image: Kjartan Slettemark, *Poodle*, 1975 (suit in synthetic material, painted face mask in plastic, mannequin); Photo: Moderna Museet / Stockholm.
Right image: Kjartan Slettemark at Liljevalchs, 1974; Photo: Brita Olsson

Cécile discovered further connections to Sweden and France. Her grandparents, and later on her father, lived a few doors away from the Bernadotte House (now a national museum). Jean Bernadotte, subsequently known as Jean Baptiste Bernadotte (figure 5), was born in Pau in 1763 and appears in her final work. Formerly a high-ranking officer in the French Army, Bernadotte fought alongside Napoleon Bonaparte in the French Revolutionary Wars and subsequently the Napoleonic Wars before being appointed as heir to the Swedish and Norwegian throne.



Figure 5: From left: The New Generation (Bernard Nogaro, Suzanne and Albert Borra), Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, Iva Pavetti, George Borra

Cécile's grandparents sang opera although they declined the opportunity to pursue it professionally; music and singing played an enormous place in their life and the image of Iva Pavetti (figure 5), included in her final work (figure 6), pays tribute to their love of opera. The choice of the word BESPOKE as a title, beyond the literal connection to Cécile's family as bespoke tailors, represents the idea of bespoke as a claim for individuality. The text 'Bespoke Performance' is also used in the work to invite a recognition of gender and identity as performance.



Featuring and in order of performance:

The King: J-B aka Jean Baptiste Bernadotte as 'Karl XIV Johan' and as 'Karl III Johan'

The Opera Singer: Iva Pacetti as 'Norma'

The Bespoke Tailors and Opera Singers: Charlotte and Georges Borra as 'Georges Borra, Dames et Messieurs'

The New Generation: Albert, Suzanne and Bernard as 'The Influencers'

The Artist: Kjartan Slettemark as 'Poodle'

Figure 6: Cécile Emmanuelle Borra aka CUNTINA COUTURE, *BESPOKE*, animated image (gif) [comprising 2 images here shown separately with full title text bellow], digital collage, 2021

Les Revenants (Skräddaren)

Caryn is from seven generations of tailors from the island of Orust in Sweden. Her grandfather, Gustav Simonson (figure 7), emigrated from Orust to South Wales and was a ship's engineer not a tailor. But his father, Simon Olsson was a tailor (figure 7). (Note in Sweden at that time, children could take the name of the father with the suffix 'son' e.g. Simon's son would be 'Simonsson' and Gustav dropped the double 's' when he emigrated). Caryn's great grandmother, 'Alma' (figure 7) was working at home on the farm where they had eleven children.



Figure 7: Left image: Gustav Simonson, son of Simon Olsson and Caryn's grandfather; right image, from left: Simon Olsson, tailor and 'Alma' Emma Justina Johansdotter, croft farmer and Caryn's great grandparents.

In 2019, Caryn visited West Sweden for a holiday, to visit relatives in Gothenburg and Borås and to explore Orust where she based herself. Although Caryn had been to Orust in 1997 and also in 1967 (when she was 1 year old), this was her first encounter with the local community museum which she came across whilst visiting the Church in Myckleby on the island, doing some ancestry research. The graveyard, where several ancestors are buried, is home to her great-grandfather and great-

grandmother's grave – Simon Olsson and 'Alma' Justina Johansdotter. The gravestones typically at that time were inscribed with the man's profession. So under Simon's name 'skräddaren' (tailor) is engraved, whilst under Alma's is 'hustrun' (wife) despite Alma playing a large part in farming on the croft where they lived. This connected in some ways with Cécile's findings about her grandmother Charlotte Borra in that the woman's occupation was not recognised in the same way as the husband's and was 'invisible labour'. Although Charlotte was a city dweller and employee, not a rural worker (farmer) like Caryn's great grandmother, 'Alma', nevertheless for both of them their labour was less visible.

Material archaeologist, Mary Beaudry, in her book 'Findings' (2006), finds that, 'Seamstresses were women who produced clothing professionally, as did tailors, but tailors were men, and their cultural milieu was very different from the 'feminized' domestic sphere.' (Beaudry, 2006, p.175). She does go on to discuss an image from an 18th century bodice shop, and to depict an illustration plate from Garsault's *Art du Tailleur* (1769) where 'both tailors and seamstresses are engaged in producing women's bodices.' She draws upon Marla Miller's research (2003) identifying that 'although it was perfectly acceptable for women to engage in producing women's clothing, men guarded closely the province of tailoring, which they saw as exclusively their own.' (Miller, 2003 in Beaudry, 2006, p.175)

It is no surprise then that all the family tailors Caryn has discovered from generations past on Orust were men. Caryn's 'material' discoveries from the starting point of the church in Myckleby, led her to the Hembygds museum, located on the same land (figure 8).



Figure 8: Left: Traditional cottage part of Hembygdsmuseum, Orust, Sweden. Right: from top left clockwise: Paris fashion plates, needles, tailor's fabric swatches.

Although not open to the public as museums usually are, she discovered a leaflet in the nearby town at the tiny local tourist office in the library with the details of how to get access. Local villager and saddle-maker, Leif Tideman, holds the key and he unlocked the buildings for Caryn on her first visit. The museum contains artefacts, domestic and agricultural objects, photos and paintings donated by family members. Each object is labelled with the name of who has donated it. The Hembygdsmuseum is made up of a traditional cottage, an original school house and a large barn. Upstairs in the cottage, Caryn found tailors' tools, a sewing machine, wool fabric swatches for suiting, tailor's trade magazines, evidence of possible inspiration in the form of scattered fashion plates from Paris (figure 8) and two framed photographs of tailors with their names, dates and location written underneath (figure 9). These photos and some of the artefacts provided the inspiration for the Caryn's digital collage.



Figure 9: Left image: Peter August Simonsson 1840-1928, tailor at Bogane; right image, Hugo Pettersson 1882-1933, tailor at Bogane. Photos: Myckleby Hembygdsmuseum, Orust, Sweden

Some relatives had been doing extensive research on the family history and by sharing their research and their tree via Ancestry, Caryn discovered that the two men in the photos were in fact father and son and were related to Caryn's great grandfather. This was an exciting find and Caryn felt a growing connection to these unknown people through their artefacts and by piecing together their story through the little knowledge these gave together with the family tree information. Caryn was keen to explore more about this history, also knowing that another relative in Gothenburg had been researching seven generations of tailors in the family going as far back as the 1700s. On a second visit to Orust in 2022, Caryn met with the enthusiastic genealogy group on Orust who have the research files from this late relative. (Karlsson, 2022)

Caryn remembers her father telling her the story his father told him about her great grandfather, Simon Olsson (the tailor). He carried bolts of cloth from the 'old homestead' (the croft farm) to the small town on the island of Orust to measure up bespoke wedding suits for the men. Caryn's fascination with this and her own background in textiles, has brought up many questions around the tailoring on the rural island such as: How was there a market for bespoke suits on such a rural island? How could a tailor sustain themselves and where did they get their cloth? What inspired them in terms of design? Clues could be found in the artefacts Caryn came across and research done at the local library that begin to answer some of

these questions. For example, the island had a greater population in the 1800s than it does currently, and the Paris fashion plates, newspapers and European fashion trade magazines gave an indication of the connectedness to a wider community of tailors and inspiration sources (figures 8 and 9). Figure 10 shows Hugo Pettersson's order book with the names of the islanders alongside garments they were ordering. The book documents a 'story' of the male inhabitants of Orust, told through their bodily measurements and orders.

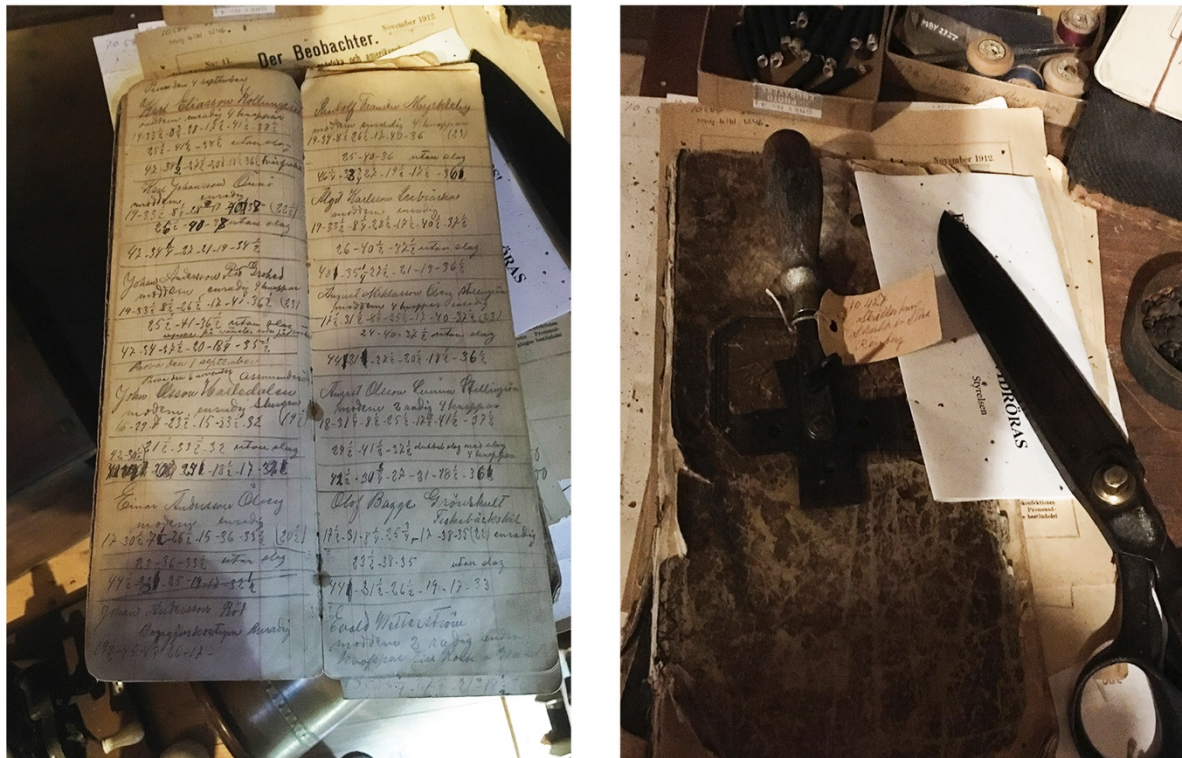


Figure 10: Left image: Hugo Pettersson's order book, Myckleby Hembygdsmuseum, Orust, Sweden; right image, tailor's tools and trade magazines, Myckleby Hembygdsmuseum, Orust, Sweden.



Figure 11: Left image: Remains of tailor's house, Kultehamn culture trail, Orust, Sweden. Right image: the croft and tailor Simon Olsson's family (Caryn's great-grandparents with children) Orust, Sweden, c. 1905.

Figure 11 (left) shows a culture trail through wooded land to the remnants of a tailor's house on Orust. This provided inspiration for the background of Caryn's digital collage work. On the right is pictured the 'old homestead' (as it was known in the Simonson family) – the Olsson/Simonson family home for generations. Caryn found the photograph in the Hembygds museum but had also seen it in a book of her father's about crofts on the island *"För i Tia": Bondelivet i ord och bild från östra Orust* (1996) – *"For Ten": Peasant life in words and images from east Orust* (transl.). It is described as a 'torp' (croft) where 'eleven children were born and raised along with other generations of tailors.' The children pictured include her grandfather Gustav. The photo is taken by Johan A. Svensson who is described as making 'a great cultural contribution when he photographed people living in crofts' (*"För i Tia"*, 1996, transl.). The photo also now appears in Caryn's digital collage.

Working Process

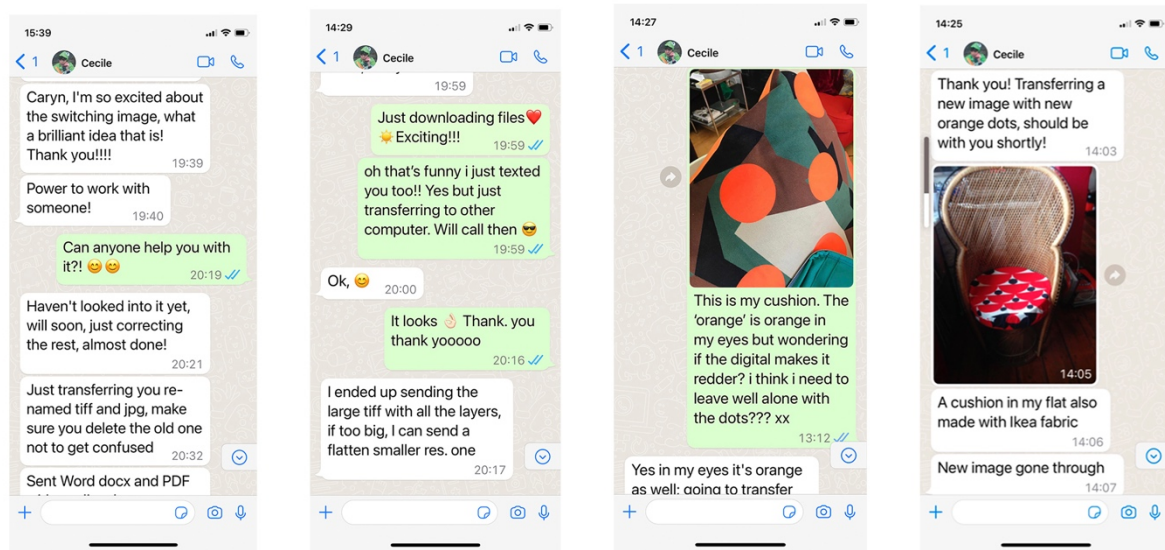


Figure 12: Screenshots of mobile telephone exchanges via WhatsApp.

Figure 12 gives an insight into our working process. Time and space converged through our exchanges via video calls and WhatsApp. Simultaneously working on images on our computers, the layers of the digital screens opened up windows into each of our worlds. Moments of considered distraction caught our eyes, connecting the dots as they appeared in the far layer of our living environments, and bringing backgrounds into the foreground, visual elements intersecting.

Cécile describes our collaboration as a 'visceral' experience. Caryn experiences the merging of our digital worlds into our physical spaces. It reminds her of a fascination with William Gibson's description in *Neuromancer* of jacking into a 'custom cyberspace deck' and leaving the console behind. He describes it as a 'disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix [cyberspace]' (Gibson, 1986, pp.11-12). Thus, we experienced a feeling of immersion despite being in front of a flat screen. This digital spatiality for Caryn connects to Cécile's experience of the visceral in our exchange of ideas and inspirational energy. For Caryn, the hard surface of the screen softens with the textile and the layering of imagery. In figure 12, whilst seeing each other's living rooms in the background of our calls, we noticed similarities through colour and pattern. One of Caryn's cushions, bought on the island of Orust, is printed with large orange dots on a camouflage background (and a print of the island's silhouette on the back); a chair in Cécile's space was upholstered with fabrics printed with large red dots (see screenshot on right in figure 12).



Figure 13: Caryn Lisbeth Simonson, *Les Revenants (Skräddarna)*, digital collage, 2021

Caryn was preoccupied with ideas around the past collapsing into the present and the future, so the tailors come to life again in her work titled 'Les Revenants', their histories uncovered. Like 'Les Revenants', they reappear. 'Les Revenants' was a French supernatural television series (Gobert, 2012) meaning 'The Returned' and based on a French film 'They Came Back' where a group of adults and children who have been dead for many years return to their village and homes unexpectedly. They reappear. Skräddarna, in brackets after 'Les Revenants', means 'the tailors' in Swedish bringing it back to Caryn's tailoring ancestry.

Caryn and Cécile both felt the large orange circles (from the cushion) appearing in the rural landscape amongst the figures and house, appear to have a supernatural quality. The 'sci-fi' effect prompted us to think of television series *The Prisoner* and the round sphere that appears in the streets. For fun, Cécile set about sending Caryn a film clip of this. She then coloured the moving spheres orange to test out how they would look if the flat circles in Caryn's image became three dimensional - another possible iteration of the work that was eventually discarded.

Like the orange dots, sometimes seemingly random connections found their way into our works. For example, Caryn's mother appears in the Chanel bottle bottom right.

She loved fashion and clothes, Chanel perfume and was a French teacher. Since Cécile is French, she and Caryn liked the inclusion of this in Caryn's mainly Swedish tailoring focus. In turn, Cécile's work draws upon connections to her family's proximity to living 'doors away' from the Swedish and Norwegian King Jean Bernadotte's house. We allowed our connections to run riot.

Conclusion

Natalia Kucirkova pre-empted an increase in co-working and connecting emerging at the start of the year 2019. In *Wired* (January 2019), in an article on collaboration in art (including music, poetry, theatre, dance), she speculates that 2019 'will be the year of collectivist pluralisation' and that,

'Independent production of art will move to interdependent practices. Artists will engage with each other within and across arts to enrich and enhance each other's works. They will realise that collaboration amplifies their niche audiences and diversifies their offer.' (Kucirkova, 2019)

Her article preceded the COVID-19 pandemic by almost a year but is pertinent to ways of working that were already in existence and emerging and that increased during the unlikely and challenging context of a pandemic when we were often unable to physically meet through lockdowns.

During this time, many of us in education made a speedy shift into online teaching and working with digital platforms during the start of the pandemic. Whilst online education wasn't new, in fashion and textiles and practice-based subjects it can be a challenge in engaging students and ourselves in ways to enhance the digital experience and minimise the feeling of loss of tactility and physicality, thinking and designing *through* making. Colleagues found opportunities in this challenge which opened up questions about how to build community in new ways, how to 'make' online, and at Chelsea College of Arts, our Graduate Studio Assistants were instrumental in hosting 'Make Alongs' for students both online and latterly on site. Outside the Higher Education sphere, an increased surge of online craft groups offered gatherings and 'making' activities on Zoom and social media platforms in response to the human need to keep connected.

In reflecting on our collaboration, Cécile describes,

One of the unexpected outcomes of our collaboration as being 'the visceral quality of my experience despite being limited to digital and verbal communication. From the very beginning, our online conversations and screen sharing provided me with considerable energy and motivation which turned into quite a creative frenzy when the deadline was nearing. The truth is that Mark was right and beyond our common cultural interests,

we do hold a particular buoyancy which makes us compatible collaborators and stimulates the creative process.

Cécile and Caryn will continue to collaborate. Cécile has created a new work and iteration of BESPOKE (figure 14). Caryn continues to carry out further research into rural tailoring on Orust and visited again in 2022 discovering more objects at the Hembygdsmuseum. Leif, the holder of the key to the museum, connected her to Föreningen Orusts släktforskare (the Association of Orust's Genealogists) opening up new avenues of research.



Figure 14: Cécile Emmanuelle Borra aka CUNTINA COUTURE, Did he really deserve it?, digital collage, 2022-23 (work in progress)

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