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**«- CAN YOU KNIT ME A SWEATER?
- NO, BUT I CAN TEACH YOU HOW
TO MAKE ONE!»**

A reflexion on knitting as a resistance practice

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Introduction

«I wish I had more time...»

«Then maybe you should take it!»

Time is a currency, a reward, and is sought after. We try to optimise our lives, we carefully plan our days, we always try to do more, fit as many activities as possible in our limited hours, always try to be as efficient as possible in every aspect of our lives at the expense of our leisure time. But what happens when we find ourselves completely absorbed by a craft, a hobby, an artistic practice? What happens when we actively decide to be non-active and non-productive? Do we feel guilty? Where does the guilt come from? And on top of that, how do we allow ourselves to make space for being unproductive?

This research project sparked from the realisation that I was becoming more patient and accepting of friction in my day to day life since I started learning how to knit. The endless hours spent pulling loops through other loops using two wooden sticks had dramatically modified my perception of time, productivity, and labour, so much that I felt the need to dig deeper. How could I, a raging feminist, find so much contentment and comfort in such a traditionally feminine hobby? One so inextricably tied to women's reproductive labour history that it almost felt like a personal regression to find interest in it? Did anyone else feel weird considering themselves activist and still loving trad-wife hobbies? According to a series of interviews I conducted while researching this essay, this is not a foreign feeling and a lot of other fellow knitters had similar experiences.

The mental load involved in reproductive labour maintains that time is gendered and a different unit for men and women. (Federici, 2010). It seems crazy to write that in 2026, but the mental load of house work is still labour, is still not recognised to its true value, and remains a load mainly carried by women. As theorised by Silvia Federici (197??), housework is not productive labour¹, but reproductive labour². This work doesn't produce new monetary value, but produces and cares for the people who do. And, most importantly, it is work that is not valued and recognised because it is seen as «unskilled», as in, it doesn't require formal education to be performed in the domestic sphere. The concept of unskilled labour doesn't only apply to the domestic sphere, but also extends to the job market. Women having a harder time being granted any kind of higher education made for cheap «unskilled» workers in numerous fields outside the house,

¹ Productive labour: work performed by a skilled and/or paid taskforce. Creates financial value.

² Reproductive labour: unskilled or unpaid work that caters to the needs of the taskforce.

making them easily replaceable within the hierarchy if they were to become pregnant, ill, old, or simply unable to work anymore. Yet, they were still in fact highly trained through a hands-on approach or through patterns of social reproduction. Think of «natural dexterity due to small hands», perfectly fitted for detailed work in factories, actually coming from having been trained since birth to be careful, mend socks, sew buttons and tidy after themselves (Plant, 1998).

But surely, technology and progress are becoming more prevalent, and these archaic ways of thinking will slowly but surely regress down to nothingness, right? Well, while progress, is of course not inherently bad (though this can be argued, but we will not cover that in this essay), it has been making invisible the work of women, especially in scientific fields, and even more especially in new technologies. Just as women were quite literally the first computers (as in being calculators, data readers and renderers, (Plant, 1998) but were then replaced by machines and men once computing became economically and culturally significant, it's common practice to see women's labour gets automated in every field of work and house work. And if it can be made quicker and by a machine, does the work hold any value in society's eye? (Plant, 1998). Invisibilisation of women's labour can take many shapes, ranging from literal refusal to see it happen (cleaners working night shifts, housewife taking care of the home when everybody else is at school or at work, emotional labour in a relationship,) to an insidious and silent acknowledgment that still doesn't get properly recognised (women in the work field still being withheld promotions, lower salaries for the same job position, going part-time after marrying).

Automatisation and progress, while having always been the promise of time to proletariat workers, have only increased the amount of work expected from women, especially in domestic settings. Introducing a dishwasher meant having more time to mend socks, and a washing machine meant more time for dusting the bookshelves. The introduction of automatisation AI tools to tackle organisation matters such as groceries lists means having more time to cook this amazing loaf of sourdough bread seen on Instagram and having a Roomba vacuum cleaner finally clears space for you to organise your garage/pantry/laundry space. You'll also notice that AI automatisation tools are mainly providing so-called services usually performed by women (yes, that old cliché of the woman secretary – also why do so many AI assistant bear women's names? Food for thought, but let's not digress that early). In short, the expectations of housework and women's labour has only been increasing with progress and techno-

logies, leaving behind any notion of leisure, free time and un-productivity (Schwarz Cowan, 1983).

It is with this background in mind that I approached the topic of knitting as a hobby but also as a tool of resistance. Taking a look back at the history of fiber arts and their ties to patriarchal family models, redefining them as arts OR craft, granting them value despite being unfairly classified as women's craft/art/hobby/occupation, and then go deeper into the resistance aspect of knitting, in terms of trend, time, design and creativity vessel. I intend to open a conversation in the text structurally, but also by bringing in real life conversations that happened between me and other knitters from the Rotterdam area. The first chapter will focus on the history of knitting in a domestic and artistic setting, redefining its value within the art world. The second chapter will cover a more recent resurgence of knitting in online spaces and how it can be tied to a form of resistance against capitalist practice of overwhelming efficiency and over consumption.

While there is archeological proofs that knitting has been around since «*at least as early as the middle of the third century A.D*» (Grass, 1955, p.185) and the practice of knitting probably predates that point in time, we will here focus on a time period that ranges from the late 1800s to 2020s.

Chapter 1: Knitting as Labour, as Craft, as Art *Domestic Labour*

- *Can you knit me a sweater?*

-*No, but I can teach you how to make one!*

Many people when told to imagine a knitter would first think of an old woman on her couch with a cup of tea and a cat by her side, making socks or a sweater for her grandchildren. While it is curious that this image is the first to come to mind, it's also not entirely wrong. For too long, knitting have been understood as a grandma

hobby, where grandmothers and mothers would indeed produce clothes for their children, grandchildren and husbands. Now, in a time where clothing is (mostly) easily accessible to anyone (regardless of its quality), hand knit items are becoming a luxury. While I'm personally adamant that the time spent on knitting a sweater is time well spent, it does raise a question: Why do women knit? And why do people feel entitled to their time for free, no or low compensation?

Obviously, women don't inherently all knit, but they have been historically and culturally (at least in a prevalently Western and European culture over the last 150 years) pushed towards fiber arts³ since any textile related labour – such as sewing, mending, knitting or any other kind of needle work– would be part of the household chores that came with being a stay at home wife –which, once again, is a full time unpaid job in itself. Qualities such as patience, being neat, meticulous were marketed as natural traits or the feminine nature – and to some extent, still are today (Plant, 1998). This so-called natural attribution of women to tend to the house as a natural act of care reinforced the social contract of the unwaged labour of housework. (Federici, 1974). As per the social contracts under capitalism, women were inherently excluded from existing in the world as anything else than obedient, silent and happy beings, taking care of home a their sole purpose (Federici, 1974). On the other hand, men have mostly been socialised and taught to see anything remotely associated with femininity as undignified and negative, which under the Western lens of homophobia and Christian culture, should've been avoided at all costs, which justifies the major detachment from any kind of fiber and textile art practice, especially in utilitarian textiles.

In short, women engage in fiber arts because it's one of the only fields not colonised by the presence of men as it is so tied to the notions of housework labour, while men avoid that specific field because it is too closely associated with femininity (Emery, 2019).

Arts or Crafts?

- Ok, so knitting is a form of labour... But you also said it was part of the fiber arts. What is it then?

³ Fiber Arts: artistic practices related to fibers, thread and yarn. Usually includes crochet, knitting, weaving, spinning, cross-stitching, embroidery. Usually don't include sewing and/or quilting, but sources differ and sometimes allow some stretch in the definition.

Often we find knitting being referred to as a craft, but also as being part of the fiber arts family. This confusion is actually a great foundation to discuss the cultural value of knitting as both a form of art

and a form of craft. They are respectively defined in the Cambridge English Dictionary as:

Art: the making of objects, images, music, etc. that are beautiful or that express feelings.

Craft: skill and experience, especially in relation to making objects; a job or activity that needs skills and experience; something produced using skill and experience

A striking difference is that art introduces the concept of feelings in its definition, while crafts adds in notions of experience and skill. The debate for defining arts versus craft in fiber arts has always been about gender roles, classism and reinforcing power dynamics. The same can be said for how Western history has been referring to Black, Indigenous and people from the Global South's work, thus diminishing the importance of their art by denying them the title or classification as art pieces (Smith, 2016). While the reality is obviously more nuanced and less gendered than that, the distinction between arts and craft remains a subject of fluid power dynamics to the extent that capitalism and patriarchy allow it. Crafts still carry more of the cultural knowledge of their time on a societal and ethnographical level. They are also often seen as a collective pursuit, while art still maintains the idea of the singular genius author (but more on that later). However, this distinction wasn't always so pronounced.

In Morris' views and during the Arts and Crafts (A&C) movement⁴, both would go hand in hand in a symbiotic relationship: the crafts-person and the artist working together, most of the time even merging into one person, blending the limits between the two positions (Crawford, 1997). The joy of thinking and conceptualising a project only equaling the joy of making it, the separation of the intellectual act of design from the manual labour of physical production would've been considered ethically and morally wrong. (Crawford, 1997). Through this romanticised lens, one could believe that in a simpler time in the past, a craftsman (notice the absence of craftswomen from the conversation) would find contentment in the idea of carrying a project to an end, thinking every details from the concept to the production process, happily bringing beauty into this world. Noticeably, fiber arts – and more generally fashion skills – were never considered crafts during the height of the movement. While Morris himself famously took a great interest in textile design, building most of his career on this specific practice, this attentiveness only went so far as to work home decor textiles (weaving and printing ta-

⁴Arts and Crafts: design movement from ca.1880-1920 popularised by William Morris with a philosophy promoting craftsmanship and short production circuit rather than industrialisation.

pestries, wall papers, upholstery fabrics, curtains, etc). As such, fiber arts (as we know and define them in 2026) were notoriously still excluded from the Arts and Crafts loop of recognition. The movement took its source in a refusal of automatisisation and industrialisation of progress, emphasising the importance of manual labour as a way to add value, importance and beauty to the product (Crawford, 1997), which are values that hand knitting still promotes today.



fig.1

150 years after the popularisation of the Arts and Crafts movement and its «*failure to remain relevant*»⁵ post World War 1 (Winter, 1975, p.36), two things remain unchanged: knitting is still seen as a women's hobby and a feminine craft, and we still know more men artists than women artists (Nochlin, 1971). In the general public's mind (backed by public institutions' recognitions), women craft and men do art. Art is untouchable, sacred, admirable, beautiful, while craft is desacralised, has a materiality, sometimes is useful, and most importantly today, is a hobby. While Crafts during the 19th century still englobed skills like woodwork, stone masonry, metal work, or carpentry, the definition slowly shifted with time. When talking about crafts today, a quick Google search will confirm that

none of the previously mentioned crafts are part of the landscape anymore, since «craft» now has become synonymous with «hobby», something to pass the time, but not actually useful (Markowitz, 1994).

So yes, knitting today is widely considered a craft, but is referred to as part of the fiber arts family, and falls in line with the Arts and Craft philosophy. Some knitter also actively embrace this duality and the tension it creates.

Reclaiming knitting as art

⁵ The failure lays in the economical aspect of the Arts and Craft philosophy, as the relentless speeding up of capitalism and productivism ideology ended up crushing all efforts to downscale production lines or promoting craftsmanship, to the benefit of the ever growing scales of production. It is still a popular philosophy among scholars and is still being taught in design schools as a way to conceptualise projects, but it is sadly not a the most viable way to go.

When it comes to the self-definition of knitters, opinions range from «*I am not an artist, I am merely following a pre-made pattern*» (Versteeg, 2026), to «*I have built the skills and experience to make a handmade piece*

of clothing that brings me joy and peace, grounded me while I was making it and still makes me proud today» (Iris, 2026). While there is no definitive answer from knitters as to whether or not knitting is or isn't art, the consensus is «it depends». Many admitted that a visually bold and impactful piece had a better chance of being considered an art piece by them than a neutral everyday sweater. The question of patterns versus free handing also played a big part in the feeling of legitimacy, as following a pattern felt like following somebody else's recipe, and free handing allowed for more creativity and freedom with shapes, colours, and fit. Free handing also implies experience and knowledge of the fibers and the textile they will create (so a *crafts* approach) and the possibility of a more fluid and interpretative piece, one that isn't necessarily a garment or a piece of clothing, but can exist on its own (so an *arts* approach).

When looking back at fiber arts in an artistic and exhibition context though, the tension becomes apparent. Emery describes the particular case of fiber arts in Australia in the late 1970s as a movement that challenged the established culture of the male dominated fields of painting or sculpting by reclaiming forgotten or invisible practices. Confined to the private and domestic sphere, fiber arts practices became a way to reclaim a spot in the segregated sphere of male-only spaces by exhibiting peripheral practices (Emery, 2019). Notably, the Women's Domestic Needlework Group (WDNG) was a pioneer in re-contextualising fiber arts object such as doilies from domestic objects to a newfound status of art pieces. Through thorough research and community effort (which in itself, is already detaching the group from the modernist idea of the male artist as an individual creative genius), the WDNG set up an exhibition that presented doilies hand-crocheted by women for a domestic usage, but also some made especially for the exhibition.

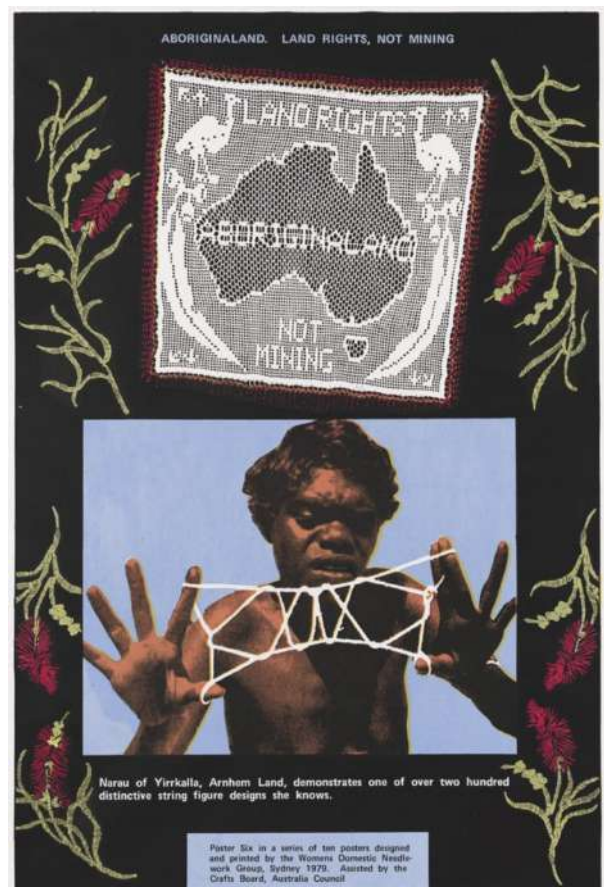


fig.2

With the change of setting, so changed the nature of the doilies. They weren't a doily to put a pot on, or to protect a table, that might be ruined by a stain of red wine sliding down the side of a glass. But on a wall, behind a glass protection, under precise lighting and ac-

accompanied by other doilies, they became actual works of art (and part of a body of work) in the eyes of the public, worthy of its attention, scrutinisation, to be studied and evaluated. Did the status of the object change only because of its context? Or was it always the intention of the fiber artist? What dictates its status? Its usage or the intention put in during the production?



fig.3



fig.4

According to Kendall Ross and her work, that's the exact tension fiber arts pulls on (pun intended): craft tradition versus creating art. Making pieces that she calls *Wearables*, which can be purchased and worn, her pieces are first exhibited as untouchables art pieces. By reclaiming the time needed to produce a knit piece, and for this piece to then not be used by an undefined amount of people, but to be born only by and for its creator, doesn't its status change from a commodified good to a piece of art to be admired? (Kirtz, 2025) Ross also works on bigger and even monumental scale projects, explaining that she started knitting because «*the women in my family, who shared similar experiences growing up in Oklahoma, taught me craft traditions that I now use to create art.*» (Ross, in @readartdesk, 2025).

Through this statement, she introduces two new notions: the caring aspect and the transmission aspect, and the way her work transmutes craft tradition into artistic practice. Playfully using actual statement made by men in her own solo shows, she pushes against the so-called tradition of women's craft to reclaim the right to call herself an artist, all while still acknowledging the pro-

found impact that same tradition of transmission had on her practice.

In summary, while not all knitters self-define as artists, those who do still acknowledge the impact of craft traditions on their practice, especially when exhibited within a feminist mindset and context.

Skills and knowledge transmission

- *Ok so who taught you how to knit? Was it also your mom? Are you partaking in this transmission tradition?*

- *Actually, it was a friend of mine! But it also could've been my mom. Never my dad though.*

«*I knit because my [insert female relative] taught me!*» has been a statement I've heard countless times while researching this essay and during interviews with knitters from the Rotterdam area. And it's great! Transmission has always been a crucial way to preserve traditions, skills, knowledge, recipes, languages... But why didn't our brothers learn from mothers? Or our fathers from their mothers? What happens when the female line ceases to exist in a family? Do we lose that knowledge? Do we try to salvage it? Do we recognise its value enough to try and preserve it? As we already established multiple times in this essay, women's labour (in the domestic sphere) is invisible to the broader public, but also in the official tales of the homemaker. Their work, habits, usages, are almost never accounted for when writing history (Schwartz Cowan, 1983). Books will hardly ever talk about housework labour, and women's knowledge, because it was mostly practically and orally transmitted (or taught in women's school only). So what is practical knowledge transmission if not a parallel unwritten history?

«*Women's work that is performed in the home in a domestic setting, like the one that we're in, although a grand one for that matter, all that gets diminished and marginalized*» (Zar for Salie, 2022). This is also one of the reasons why crafts should be considered as important (if not more) than art in cultural studies: I strongly believe that we, as a society, would benefit so much from learning about people on an ethnographical level through what they do/did rather than what a few selected people showed through their academic artistic practice. Only studying Art creates bias. For instance, in the field of archeology, we mostly know about privileged individual's funerary rituals, because only they had the means and power to have a ceremonial burial (i.e: ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia), making the most common rituals unknown to the general public and rendering them invisible (Markowitz, 1994).

Such shortcuts are still happening in our contemporary culture: by only studying Arts, we forget about Crafts, which hold a broader and

sometimes richer cultural value, usually transmitting traditions, habits, and needs specific to a certain place and certain time for certain people. (Emery, 2019 ; Kirtz, 2025).

Preservation of social narratives



fig.5



fig.6

For instance, while supposedly catering to the same target population – fishermen – the traditional Gansey sweater (also known as Guernsey, used interchangeably) is constructed completely differently from a Fair Isle sweater, because they answer to different needs. The first one was made to be worn, unravelled and repaired indefinitely, saving and reusing yarn in the process, made water proof by the fish oil and with a diamond-shaped panel under the arm to allow the biggest range of motion while at sea working with fishing nets (Miller, 2026). The second used multi-colour patterns first as an aesthetic choice, often featuring stars, crosses and diamonds motives, probably inherited from Scandinavian culture (V&A Museum, 2025). Furthermore, the floats⁶ created by the strands of yarn behind the fabric made for a denser and warmer material, which was necessary in most fishermen's working conditions.

While this knowledge has been passed down for generations, it is worth recognising that it was mainly from mothers to daughters, and mainly orally and through peer to peer training, and it now requires a conscious and constant effort for this knowledge to not become lost (Miller, 2026). Knitting becomes data storage for both raw data (structural integrity of the knitted object) and historical knowledge (cultural use and context of the knitted object), and as such, becomes a testimony and an act of rebellion against the capitalist machine and social obscurantism.

In short, regardless of their status of art piece or craft piece, the value of knitted object is worthy of recognition. They carry history, culture and traditions, but also a reflection of the state of the world. Heir-

⁶ Floats: strands of yarn on the back of the fabric when working with multiple colours, create a double layer of insulation in knitted fabrics. See fig.6 for example in the neckline area.

looms sweaters are becoming a form of physical medium through which we are now able to keep track of historical and social narratives, and this knowledge needs to be protected.

Chapter 2: Resistance and refusal of productivism

Cost of production

- *You must save up so much money by knitting your own clothes.*
- *Well, not exactly. At least not on the way you think I do!*
- *And what if I buy the yarn? Would you knit me a sweater?*

Time and money are, as we know, completely tied to the way we perceive value. The more time something takes to make or get, the more value we give it. On the opposite side, getting something with no effort or friction makes our relationship with the object less valuable to us. Let's transpose that to a hand knit sweater: it can take weeks, sometimes even months to make – especially when knitting is a hobby done outside of paid work hours, trying to sneak in a few rows in during your lunch break or while you're commuting. So what is it really worth solely in material and time then?

Breaking down the cost of a basic raglan⁷ sweater in a size M looks like this: 60-80€ for decent quality yarn and about 50h of active knitting work (this still depends on many factors such as the weight and thickness of the yarn, diameter of needles, ease in the fit, construction, etc). Since knitting is mainly costly in time, let's calculate! At a dutch freelance rate of 50€/h, we are looking at (2500€ + 60€ =) a 2560€ sweater. And that's without taking into account the time to research the design, trial and error, possible frogging⁸ and remaking of some sections, material cost for additional tools, pattern tailoring, blocking⁹ time and weaving ends in¹⁰. Seeing that as part of the fiber art family, knitting has been depicted and understood by non-knitters as a selfless act of production perpetrated by women for generations, it is no surprise that people still feel entitled to knitters' production.

⁷ Raglan: a type of garment construction (mainly sweaters, tops and cardigan) in knitting that allows for a seamless design knitted in the round using circular needles. Considered beginner friendly

⁸ Frogging: unravelling of a knit section to correct a mistake or reclaim the yarn for another project.

⁹ Blocking: process of soaking a knit or crochet object and then lay it flat and pin in it place to dry in a certain shape. It often helps evening out stitches and stretching the fabric and can even make it softer.

¹⁰ Weaving ends in: process of finishing a knitted object by hiding all the yarn ends by weaving them on the inside/wrong side of the fabric. It helps with the longevity of the object as it secures the ends in and stop them from unravelling

In the collective mind, knitting is still part of the household labour of women.

It is common practice to ask both artists and crafters to produce for no or very low compensation, or for visibility (looking at you, social media). The access we get to fast fashion today has completely shifted our perception of handmade goods and their actual value, meaning that virtually nobody realises how much handmade clothes are worth, especially knitting. Who would want to pay for a 2500+ € sweater when they can get à 30-50€ one from Zara?

Individual productivity under late stage capitalism

- I admire that you're spending so much time on your project, I would never have the time for this.

- Maybe you would if you were actively trying to make that time for yourself!

Have you heard of Catholic Guilt¹¹? Well now get ready for Capitalistic Guilt, where not being an active member of the productive task force is seen as being a social – and political – outcast, and where being actively financially unproductive is seen as an act of rebellion against the established system. This isn't an official academic concept as far as I'm aware of, but it does put us in a position of reflecting on the late stage capitalist society that we live in as indeed a system, and not a consequence of individual practices. Capitalism justifies itself through shifting the blame onto the victims rather than corporations, lobbies and policies. Many people would admit they feel a sense of guilt after having an «unproductive day». But what is unproductivity? Not making money? Not participating in the productive labour of the task force?

Knitting has become an anti-consumerist and anti-productive practice for me. I am a proud advocate for the selfish act of knitting and reclaiming time for myself in this over-productive society, rather than spend it participating in over-consumption culture. Most people nowadays knit because they enjoy the process (almost) regardless of the final outcome. It doesn't always look like what was expected, but a majority of knitters are then either fine with the outcome, or have

¹¹ Catholic Guilt: refers to an intense, often disproportionate sense of remorse, sinfulness, or responsibility commonly associated with – but not limited to – Catholic upbringings.

the skills to go back in their project and correct, tailor, modify it. By making the garment and understanding its construction, they are able to create a fully personalised piece that will fit their own specific needs, and thus could potentially make them avoid buying multiple pieces to fulfil all the different (imaginary) needs that marketing and/or social media are pushing onto them. They might also embrace the imperfections that come with being a human, making something by hand. (Myzelev, 2009). In this scenario, the process overtakes the outcome, as satisfaction is found in the craft, and not in the final object. A cable-knit sweater that took me months to finish will of course hold personal value as a finished object, but nothing will bring more satisfaction than watching it get knitted and growing one row at a time (except maybe random compliments from strangers in a café bathroom). Some might argue that a hobby or artistic practice that consists of making something is a productivist practice, since the process aims to a finished object or goal. To that I would answer that the time spent on making the objet outweighs the thrill of having the finished piece itself, as it will most likely exist in a «added value» category of clothes objects, and thus will be used more and better taken care of than most store-bought products, increasing its lifespan and longevity (we'll come back to that further down).

As it stands, making a sweater is a rebellious act, as being busy not consuming already goes against the late stage capitalist philosophy of eternal consumption. The interesting aspect of the «making» – whether that's knitting or something else – lays in the slowness and acceptance that things take time and friction to get done. This is the resistance side of knitting. But now, how can such resistance be protected against commodification and appropriation?

Knitting as a trend

- *Ok, knitting is a resisting act. But isn't it also a trend right now? I see people knitting on Tiktok and Instagram all the time!»*
- *Oh it definitely is!*

It is a typical capitalist practice to eat up all forms of resistance and making a profit out of it. Recently, the *Analogue Bag* trend on social media (especially TikTok and youtube) has been a blatant example of how a movement that started as advices on how to distance yourself from your phone and screens became a money grab scheme, with influencers presenting a bag full of crafty hobbies and linking all of

this in an Amazon.com storefront. What started as a de-influencing or slow life movement became a consumption-heavy form of content. And one of the hobbies often portrayed in this kind of content was knitting, the perfect example of a slow craft, often disastrously misrepresented.



fig.7



fig.8

Knitting is becoming so trendy in fact, that it propelled the show *Game of Wool: Britain's Best Knitters* (GoW) (Channel 4, 2025) into existence. This competition show puts 12 contestants under the light, making them compete on two different timed tasks each week: an individual project, and a group project (similar to the structure of *The Great British Bake Off*). When it started airing on November 2nd 2025, the first few episodes immediately sparked controversy in online spaces such as Youtube and TikTok, with many fellow knitters and creators calling the show out for its inadequate portraying of the knitting culture.

The main complaints targeted the judges for their lack of objectivity and clarity in the judging process, the inclusion of crochet challenges¹² – which is a completely different craft from what the title of the show called for – and the time-based structure of the competition. It appeared to the public that the main talking points were the aesthetic of the finished objects, and more specifically, whether or not they'd been completed in the allotted time, with almost no mentions of the technique used, the construction of the objects, or the choice of yarns. For a show that prides itself in looking for *»the best knitter of Britain«*, little was actually done to look for technical skills or interesting design perspectives

(which is an additional aspect of knitting). In retrospect, the only question that remains after airing is not «who is the best knitter», but rather why make a show out of a craft that takes time and patience, and make it a time-based competition?

The short answer is that the whole show was sponsored by the yarn brands *Rowan* and *Wool and the Gang*. Very quickly after the first few

¹² A shift also happened mid-season, probably when the production team probably realised that most of the knitting challenges were not working up quickly enough to be made interesting to watch. More crochet challenges were then added, most likely because it's visually more engaging and helps viewer retention.

episodes aired, knitting bundles showed up on both brands' websites landing pages, selling the pattern and yarn to recreate contestants' designs at home, making the show more of an advertising vessel than an actual honest competition. As far as we currently know, the contestants are not being compensated for the sale of their designs, which sparked another controversy online about authorship of the designers.

The longer answer is that we are witnessing a typical capitalist practice of reversing the intent of a resisting practice. There's a thin line between showcasing a skill, a craft or a practice for entertainment, and using an art or craft form as a money grab scheme. There, time was used as an advertising tool, showing the viewers that buying a DIY bundle meant buying the experience of a quick knitting projects, completely occulting the steep learning curve of getting into a new craft.

As the show kept emphasising the aesthetics rather than the techniques, little was done on the producers' part to actually show the community building aspect of knitting, which remains a key element to the practice, and is another aspect that knitters quickly called out. It seems that the pandemic must have wiped the understanding of craft communities from the GoW producers' minds, as they took the executive decision to hardly show any of the actual bonding that happened between candidates on screen. Preferring to build artificial tension by giving contestants speed challenges, they never got to actually evaluate their skill level, focusing solely on timing and visual efficiency. This led participants to develop a more individualistic approach to knitting, fearing competitors, hiding their designs and gatekeeping techniques.



PULL GAME OF WOOL
Kit tricot intermédiaire
à partir de US\$193,00

fig.9



CARDIGAN GAME OF WOOL
Kit tricot intermédiaire
à partir de \$211,00 **US\$147,70**

fig.10

There is an everlasting joke of old women and their knit clubs, and these have historically been places of emancipation for women, being some of the only spaces in which they could meet and spend time outside of the household for an undefined amount of time, ready to exchange ideas, gossip, and even organise resistance (Emery 2019). But as the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, much like any other social activities, knitters got pushed back inside homes. Following social distancing guidelines, one of the only way to connect was through online spaces, making *#knittok* and *#knitstagram* two very active community hashtags on social medias. Platforms such as Ravelry¹³ also saw a new wave of users, with many new pattern designers and knitters joining in to find this sense of community that people were missing, and is still perpetrated to this day.

As introduced in the beginning of this chapter, capitalism justifies itself by shifting the blame from the system to the individual, and the change of attitude in the participants of GoW is a perfect illustration of that mechanism: a degradation of social relationships and skills in order to cater to the greed of the production

Productivity and efficiency over community

- So what is the show trying to promote? That knitting faster is better than building your skills?

- So far, that's what's being pushed on to the public...

The show is by far not the only one bearing that responsibility. Knitting as a business is becoming ultra competitive, and as such, speed is still a key element of productivity for pattern designers or knitting content creator.

¹³ Ravelry: online platform currently hosting the biggest collection of knitting and crochet patterns. Designers often sell their patterns through their own website and a Ravelry storefront. Knitters and crocheters can upload their progress, picture of their finished projects, along with precise infos about the yarn used, modifications made, sizing etc. It is not a social media platform, but a resource used by many for organisation and project tracking

Without going as far as calling knitting content creators bad people per se, I— and many others — strongly believe they are participating and promoting a toxic performance culture where speed is becoming the default skill to master to be considered a good knitter. By putting aside all the technical knowledge that goes into thinking and making a piece of clothing, they are participating in an overconsumption dis-

course that values mass producing (yes, even for handmade items, because who can knit 20 sweaters per year?) and keeping a stash of quantities of yarn that would last the more casual knitter a lifetime.

For purpose of scope, I will not go further down the road of pattern making and knitting as a business model. However, knitting and crafting have never been so present on the internet, and while some content creators tend to accompany their content with critical discourse around yarn and pattern overconsumption, many of them keep advertising patterns, sometimes even their own, as *»amazing because it's made on 6mm needles so it's super quick»*. Here, the content creator's community is only a pool of potential clients, putting the capitalist mindset of extreme efficiency, competitiveness and outcome over the creative process.

Individual resistance and caring

- Ok so if corporations and companies and capitalism are making people drift apart from one another, what steps can be taken to fight that? Is it even that bad actually?

- Well, in my opinion it is bad, and it is something we have to actively try to resist, since fixing it is not an immediate option.

I personally started learning how to knit out of spite because my mom told me that I would never be patient enough to go through the whole learning process. To some extent, she wasn't completely wrong. I wanted to finish my projects as soon as possible, falling victim to that same mechanism of productivity over process. Now that I've been able to take a step back, I realise that I don't really care about how much time it takes to make something anymore. However, the process, the construction, the attention to details, the materials and materiality make the piece gain value for me, sentimental first, and pride second. This makes me and so many other fellow knitters much more likely to rewear the pieces. I've come to realise that I now wear almost exclusively my own knitted pieces, and I think considerably more about fibers, sustainability and fabric than previously (and that's coming from someone who already bought a majority of her clothes second hand). My personal clothes consumption has drastically dropped, because why would I spend 50€ or more on a 100% acrylic sweater at Zara, when for roughly the same price (ex-

cluding time) I could make one in 100% wool, completely made for my taste and my measurements, that will most likely last me years (admitting I take proper care of it)? While still not completely immune to the thrill of consuming, it's clear that this practice has had a lasting impact on my approach, and this was one of the first way I approach knitting as a form of protest: to fight fast fashion and the ecocide it's committing.

It is commonly agreed upon by the knitting community that by building a relationship with your creation, you also overthrow trend cycles, for the simple reason that knitting takes time, and it's almost impossible to participate in ultra fast-fashion trends. And while there are trends within the knitting community, they tend to last longer than in more mainstream fashion spheres.

Additionally, by creating an object, you also create a relationship with it¹⁴ form emotional attachment to it (Pym, 2022). By making something, you offer it a defined place in your personal world, making it way more precious and valuable than something store bought. How maternal to birth a project, right? By creating, people also start to care. The maintenance, the life of the object, are all aspects that become crucial when we're actively involved in the creation and production process (something already established by Morris during the Arts and Crafts movement).

Having a knitting practice will, to some extent, make people refuse to bend to overconsumption expectations. The timely cost of an item makes it more special and more likely to be reworn and cared for, thus making it more sustainable. That sustainability can be practiced in different ways, and one of them is the freedom of choice when it comes to consumption. Choosing to knit is way to slow down the trend cycle.

Aesthetics and politics

- Ok but then, do you knit more basic pieces to make sure they never go out of style and can keep wearing them over and over?»

- Why couldn't I wear funky and colourful pieces over and over?»

Without immediately classifying them as good or bad, choosing to knit more neutral or colourful pieces carry a political and social weight. Dating back from 1908 with the essay **Ornament and Crime** by Alfred Loos – who considered all forms of ornament to be

¹⁴ Other visible care practices such as mending and upcycling are also re-gaining popularity, pushing even further caring for clothes and objects (Pym, 2022) as a visible sustainable practice.

degenerate – and then backed by the Bauhaus philosophy of extreme minimalism, we are slowly seeing the world getting drained of its colours, grit and cultural heritage (Pekala, 2024). The original intention behind minimalism (as defined by Loos) being to remove all forms of cultural heritage or belonging in order to establish white supremacist ideologies inherited from the so-called moral superiority of Western European aristocrats (Eckardt, 2024), there is no denying the direct connexion to fascism and the rise of far right and conservative narratives. As of today, minimalist spaces only tell a story of absence, a clean slate on which we can build new narratives, leaving being cultural, traditions and meaning. Embracing a minimalist style as an individual is also becoming a status symbol, often accompanied by a feeling of moral superiority (Eckardt, 2024). Adding to that the resurgence of *Old Money* and *Trad Wives* aesthetics on social medias (which are both rooted in the nostalgia we feel when confronted to an uncertain and unstable future), any bold choice in terms of colour or design when choosing an outfit, a hairstyle or a knitting pattern can be interpreted as an act of resistance. If it fits with everything in your wardrobe, it's not creating friction, thus not making itself a visible act of resistance. (Matthews, M., Bancroft, E. 2025).

In short, resistance can be acted on at an individual level to create friction within the capitalist system. But as already stated, capitalism thrives on individualistic behaviours. What steps can be taken on a community level to become more visible and have a stronger impact?

Resistance as a community

As stated earlier, while local knitting clubs struggled to survive as community spaces during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the younger demographic moved to social media and the internet to try and find this sense of community. While online communities are obviously different from AFK¹⁵ ones, they do offer the immense advantage of allowing quick communications and reactions to current world. This triggers reactive responses, which sometimes translate into a craftivist practice. But what is craftivism?

Defined first by Betsy Greer in 2003, it is «*the practice of engaged creativity, especially regarding political or social causes.*» While it first focused on individual practices, the rise of social medias and Ravelry soon

¹⁵ Away From the Keyboard: an alternative definition of real life outside the internet in a world still shaped by it, as defined by Legacy Russel in *Glitch Feminism*, 2020



fig.11



fig.12

made the term gain popularity, and is now a commonly used tag on the latest. While it can take many forms, craftivism is often associated with feminism and anti-war discourses, and politically left-leaning (Greer, 2007).

Recent examples of craftivism include the «*Melt the ICE Hat*» pattern. Available on Ravelry for 5\$, all proceeds go to the St. Louis Park Emergency Program, which supports people directly affected by ICE raids in Minnesota (Wong, 2026). Developed after the tragic executions of Alex Pretti and Renee Good by ICE agents in January of 2026, yarn store owner Gilah Mashaal and her employees got inspired by the red hats worn by the Norwegian resistance against Nazi occupation to signify protest. Similarly, searching for keywords such as «Palestine» on Ravelry brings out a myriad of Palestinian inspired patterns, most of them available for free, but asking instead for a donation to a humanitarian organisation or a fundraiser.

Ravelry as a platform itself has had an impact shaping the fiber art community. In June of 2019, a statement was posted on the landing page of the website, banning all accounts and removing patterns that openly supported the Trump administration and its white supremacist ideologies, which makes sense when you realise that the platform is owned by a queer lesbian couple, directly impacted by Trump's hate speeches (Jessica and Cassidy, 2019).

Some would argue that resistance online is not the same as real life action. To that I'd answer that as of today, our online lives are completely connected to our physical ones, and both keep influencing each other (Russel, 2020). As such, a resistance movement that starts online will most likely result in real life impacts, and these can take multiple form. As stated earlier, it can be by becoming visible, whether that's by wearing a knitted Palestine flag sweater or by refusing to conform to the fashion norms. But it can also be by engaging in conversations and actively feeding a real life community. Physical knitting

clubs are starting to appear again everywhere, and from my own experience, seem to be more multi-generational than ever. Conversations around fibers and sustainability occurs, but also about politics and social movements, which is, in my opinion, a great way to start a resistance movement.

Time and privilege

- I wish I had the time to do all of that... It's hard to imagine myself just knitting and doing nothing else when I already feel overwhelmed by my to-do list.

- I understand, really. But maybe it could also be a way to ground yourself.

It goes without saying that, while there is ways to make it cheap through thrifting wool, recycling older knitted pieces, unravelling sweaters, buying dead stock, or even yarn swaps¹⁶, knitting has become a hobby of privilege, as ethically and locally sourced yarn is expensive and hard to come by. As explained earlier, the raw material cost of a sweater can go from 50€ to way over 200€ depending on the fibers you want to work with. The patterns, the needles and other accessories also all add up to the overall cost of production of a knitted garment.

But the most costly aspect of knitting remains time. Afonso Matos establishes the dilemma in the title of his book *»Who can afford to be critical?«* (2022). While its content mostly relates to graphic design, labour and teaching environment, the same question can be applied to many other resistance-oriented practices, such as knitting. Who can afford a critical practice of knitting? Constraints are everywhere: fast fashion clothes have never been so accessible and their quality never been so bad. We are being groomed into lazier individuals everyday with the popularisation of so-called «AI-tools», and we are still expected to always actively try to become the better version of ourselves. There is little to no space left in our lives for softness, experimentation and failure. In a world that feels like it's always speeding up, and in which if we didn't *make it* before turning 30 we might consider ourselves late, we are not allowing ourselves to simply exist and do things because we simply want to, because we feel like we don't have the time. Time, as stated in the introduction of this essay, is a currency. But it is also a privilege, and it is a privilege we have to fight for.

¹⁶ Yarn Swaps: exchanging yarns of similar value or weight during a knitting club meeting.

The world today relies on the economy of attention: Advertisements use catchy songs in order to lure us into buying more products, TV shows are built to retain an audience rather than to tell a story, social medias use the strongest algorithms to keep their users on their platforms to push more ads down their throats. A first step in regaining agency over our own time is to choose to actively engage in activities we find fulfilling on their own. For me, it's knitting.

Conclusion

- I'm guessing you won't knit me a sweater then?
- No but I can teach you how to make one!

What originally started as a research to better understand the impact that knitting had had on me quickly became a reason for me to keep knitting within a community. My grandma hobby is rooted in years of craft traditions, often devaluated by the ones not participating in its culture. The domestic history of knitting still sticks today, and the practice is still often associated with house-wife activities and reproductive labour. And while some people don't see it as art, it has a rich artistic history and heritage, especially in the craftivist scene.

Knitting introduces notions of care and slowness; caring about your craft, your mental health, taking a break from endless doomscrolling; caring for objects, making them to last, repairing them, repurposing yarn in different projects, putting us in a position that allows us to refuse over consumption, caring for others by showing appreciation through a hand knit gift, teaching a friend a new technique or exchanging advices. Caring about history, feminist narratives, and transmission.

Knitting is about embracing slowness and friction. It's about refusing the isolation capitalism pushes us into, refusing an individualistic approach to making, closer to the Arts and Craft movement's philosophy. It should never be a contest, not even a game show, as we've seen it on *Game of Wool.* Because who cares that a pattern is quick to be knitted cause it requires bigger size needles, or think of knitting a sofa cover under 10 hours? No one except those who profit from it.

For too long, we have been victims of the corporate greeds that feeds on capitalist practices, making us blind to the agency we actually

have over our own lives. We can, however, actively refuse the over-consumption culture that is being fed to us disguised under entertainment.

I am not saying that in order to be a good person we have to go live in a cabin in the woods completely secluded from society (though I am technically not against the idea for myself). I am however saying that resistance has to come from within, and while no individual practice will ever be enough to break the capitalist system, we can collectively create more friction in its machinery until it slows down and ultimately, collapses. Knitting is by far not the only way to create such friction, and I hope each and every one of us finds fulfilment in a practice that has a similar impact. In the meantime, I'll keep knitting.

Images credits

fig.1

Detail from the *Buxtehude Madonna* by Master Bertram of Minden, circa 1390

fig.2

Aboriginaland. Land rights, not mining, from The D'Oyley Show, 1979, © Marie McMahon and Frances (Budden) Phoenix with the Women's Domestic Needlework Group

fig.3

MY FAVORITE ARTIST NEVER CALLED HERSELF AN ARTIST, © Kendall Ross, 2026, via instagram @id.knit.that

fig.4

IT'S JUST A CRAFT UNTIL A MAN SAYS IT'S ART, ©Kendall Ross, 2025, via instagram @id.knit.that

fig.5

Fishermen's Gansy Jumper, knitted by Mrs McIver in Cupar Muir, Scotland, Scottish Fisheries Museum

fig.6

Faire Isles sweater, 1930s, knitter's name know by the insitution, on display at the Knitting & Crochet Guild Collection, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield, UK

fig.7

Screenshot from Holger's Fair Isles vest from *Game of Wool*, Ep.1, ©ABC Chanel, 2nd November 2025

fig.8

The same design as sold in a knitting bundle by the brand Rowan on their website, ©Rowan

fig.9

Knitting bundle sold on *Wool and the Gang's* website recreating a group project of an 80s inspired graphic sweater

fig.10

Knitting bundle sold on *Wool and the Gang's* website recreating a group project of a txtured cardigan

fig.11

Melt the ICA hat, ©Paul S. Neary, via Ravelry

fig.12

Children of Gaza Sweater © Zanete Knits via Ravelry

Interviews

Eva Versteeg, Kniterview 1, 20th January 2026

Gerdientje Schouten, Kniterview 2, 28th January 2026

Iris, Kniterview 3, 3rd February 2026

Martine Van Dijk, Kniterview 5, 16th February 2026

Natasja Bökkerink, Kniterview 6, 20th February 2026

Hannah, Kniterview 7, 20th February 2026

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