

*queering
classed
materials*

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you approach an object, an arrangement, a body,

you enter a space,
feel a facet shift,
a limb droop,
a core straighten,
a tongue morph,

you recognize it, this, them,

you are acutely aware of your coverings and markers,

you realize it is not that, there, them,

you are disoriented,

you disintegrate and appear elsewhere as something new.

i. introduction

I enter my work with a deep curiosity about materiality, research, and craft. The core of my interests come from my upbringing. I grew up in a working class family, suppressing my queerness for most of my life, struggling to position and orient myself in relation to those around me. My dad's practice as an electrician and my mom's practice as an artist were both very present in my home, and the tension in their relationship and what they represented to me enforced a stark division between utility and art from an early age. This lived experience, however, weaves into larger historical relationships between labor, art, craft, and class. I'm interested in the assumptions of utility, function, and beauty within each of these categories, and how the expectations we place on objects directly reflect the expectations we place on ourselves and others. My work incorporates handwoven cloth, tarp, paracord, plywood, hand-knit squares, and other materials associated with craft, art, and industry. They allow me to work in the space between the provisional and the durational; that which is found and assembled out of necessity, and that which is labor intensive and craft-oriented, thus giving validity to many types of making and labor. With my work, I hope to reveal new relationships between objects and histories and recontextualize our assumptions around labor, class, gender, and utility.



ii. shame, tension, and the in-between

To be intersex¹ is to live in-between. I remember my brother and his friends calling me ‘man voice,’ I remember my best friend pointing out the black hairs on my chin, I remember wearing a red bra the first time

I had sex with a boy to cover my flat chest. To live in-between is to live with shame. Shame for a body that you feel works against you, shame from the absence of bodies like yours. I mistook my attraction to other girls as jealousy of their bodies that looked so different from mine, I had no frame of reference for my experience and so I felt worthless. I am, in the literal sense, in-between the binaries of gender.

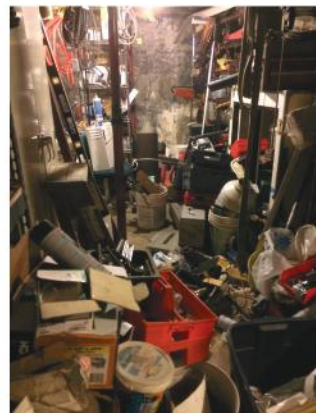
But I do not feel this binary is what dictates my intersexuality contributing to my state of in-between; it is the evolving relationship I have to gender and the tools I have developed to either mask or embrace my difference that position me there.

¹As defined by the Intersex Society of North America, intersex is “a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male” (“What is Intersex?”). There are a variety of conditions that result in being intersex, none of which are life-threatening except for my diagnosis - Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. CAH affects a body’s ability to produce Cortisol, and compensates for a lack of Cortisol production by over-producing Testosterone. My CAH symptoms did not show until I was 11, but came in the form of muscle development, face and body hair growth, and a deepened voice. I was not diagnosed until I was 17, and only once I began taking medication did I have breast growth and my first period. Intersex variations are extremely common, and the main effort in intersex justice right now is to end non-consensual surgery on intersex infants born with ‘ambiguous’ genitalia.

To be working class is to live in-between. My father is a self-employed electrician who simultaneously believes in class mobility and has class resentment. My mother was raised by artists and is an artist herself, and while my dad would watch Glenn Beck loudly in the kitchen, I would paint with my mom in her studio. The facade of my childhood home was relatively nice, despite needing a new coat of paint and a paved driveway.

My mom furnished our home with an eclectic mix of modernist reproductions and colonial antiques that she found on Craigslist. My father's domains were the driveway and the basement, where he stacked boxes of rusty nails, scraps of electrical cladding, empty joint compound buckets, plywood cutoffs, and a multitude of other salvaged job site materials.

I equate the relationship I have with each of my parents with the contents of their respective spaces, and I equate the contents of these spaces to my experience with class. None of my friends' houses looked like mine, and none of my friends had the same strained and detached relationship to their fathers that I did, therefore I learned to suppress those unsavory parts of my life. My mom taught me how to present as more than what I came from; she had an aptitude for finding cashmere sweaters at Goodwill and buying Pottery Barn sheets on eBay. I acquired a skill set for heightening my privilege from an early age and have mastered the craft of morphing and performing.



For those who live in hybrid states, we understand what it means to adjust the levels of our hybridity depending on the spaces we enter. We are always gauging others' understanding of a modular existence, and in turn give only to them what we believe they can digest. Perhaps this imposes a similar mode of assumption and judgment we are always afraid of being subject to, however the nature of being in-between calls for these strategies. My work, both materially and physically, meditates on these strategies of morphing and adapting, and many of the materials I use, both found and made, reference my childhood environment. In this way, I am working to unlearn my shame and articulate the multiplicity of identity.



figure 1. mama, 2017

Each object in this work serves as a component in a diagram. In simple terms, the granite block is my father, the orange knit is intangible tension, the wood scrap is my mother, the pink sewn form is my siblings and me. With this diagrammatic structure, I was concerned in articulating the relationship between my parents and the tension I felt throughout my childhood- not just between them, but between what they represented for me. My father, a conservative electrician, clashed with my mother, a warm and open-minded artist, enforcing in me a stark division between utility and art from an early age. This piece involves both durational processes (knitting, sewing) and improvisational arrangements with material cast-offs (wood, granite), and its precarious arrangement both enhances the qualities inherent in each material while subverting intended material uses.

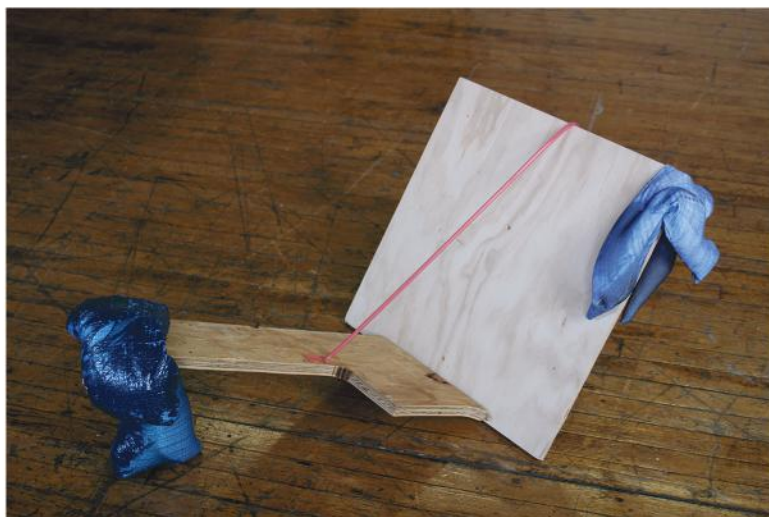


figure 2. facsimile, 2017

Like *mama*, this work explores diagrammatic sculpture and physical tensions as they relate to emotional ones, however an element of mimicry is important as well. Both pieces of plywood are found cast-offs, remnants of another person's labor and intention. The structure is entirely reliant on the balance provided by the weighted forms on either side and the tension of the pink plastic tubing. The form on the right began as a distorted digital scan of a piece of tarp. I printed the scan onto Lycra and sewed the form according to the shape of the image of the scanned tarp. The object on the left is actual tarp, sewn into a form but distorted in other more physical ways with spray paint and metallic tape. I remember the role of the tarp in my home growing up - covering firewood in the driveway, always dirty and weighed down by bricks; covering the exposed siding on my home while it was under construction, flapping and cracking on windy days.

To me, tarp is a classed material, and does not functionally expand outside the realm of protecting things in their most vulnerable, incomplete states. The scan of the tarp acts as a facsimile to the actual tarp, however the facsimile or 'synthetic' will never be the real thing. In turn, the facsimile/imitation/synthetic becomes its own 'real thing.'



iii. categories and value

I question our tendency to create material hierarchies and definitively categorize objects, and propose instead a reality in which objects and bodies occupy multiple identities, never appearing or behaving as one specific thing. The historical distinctions between art and craft residually dictate our desire to categorize the made object- is it a sculpture or a chair? A painting or a weaving? This desire to name objects as a single thing is potentially harmful when applying the same principle to bodies and identities. I'm interested in working across categories, examining materials and processes that have transcended these categories throughout history, and using the basic historical framework of craft versus fine art to examine other supposed dichotomies of identity. Is it possible to be one thing and not the other?



figure 2. slouched, perched, 2018

The woven cloth in this work came from my interest in Dorothy Liebes' work with DuPont and promoting synthetic fibers.² I marvel at the collaboration between Dorothy Liebes and DuPont to create 'hybrid' textiles for uses across homes, automobiles, and corporate offices. A handweaver and a major producer of synthetics brought weaving to the forefront and spun it to exemplify ideals of modernity. I'm fascinated by this collaboration for reasons I'm still unable to articulate. Was it the fact that DuPont also produces Tyvek, which covered the side of my home while it was under construction? The fact that the idea of morphing a material to align with middle-class modern ideals applies even to weaving? I view this specific incident as indicative of the role that weaving plays in both embracing hybridity and flattening the omnipresent implications of class, gender, and labor across design, craft, and art.

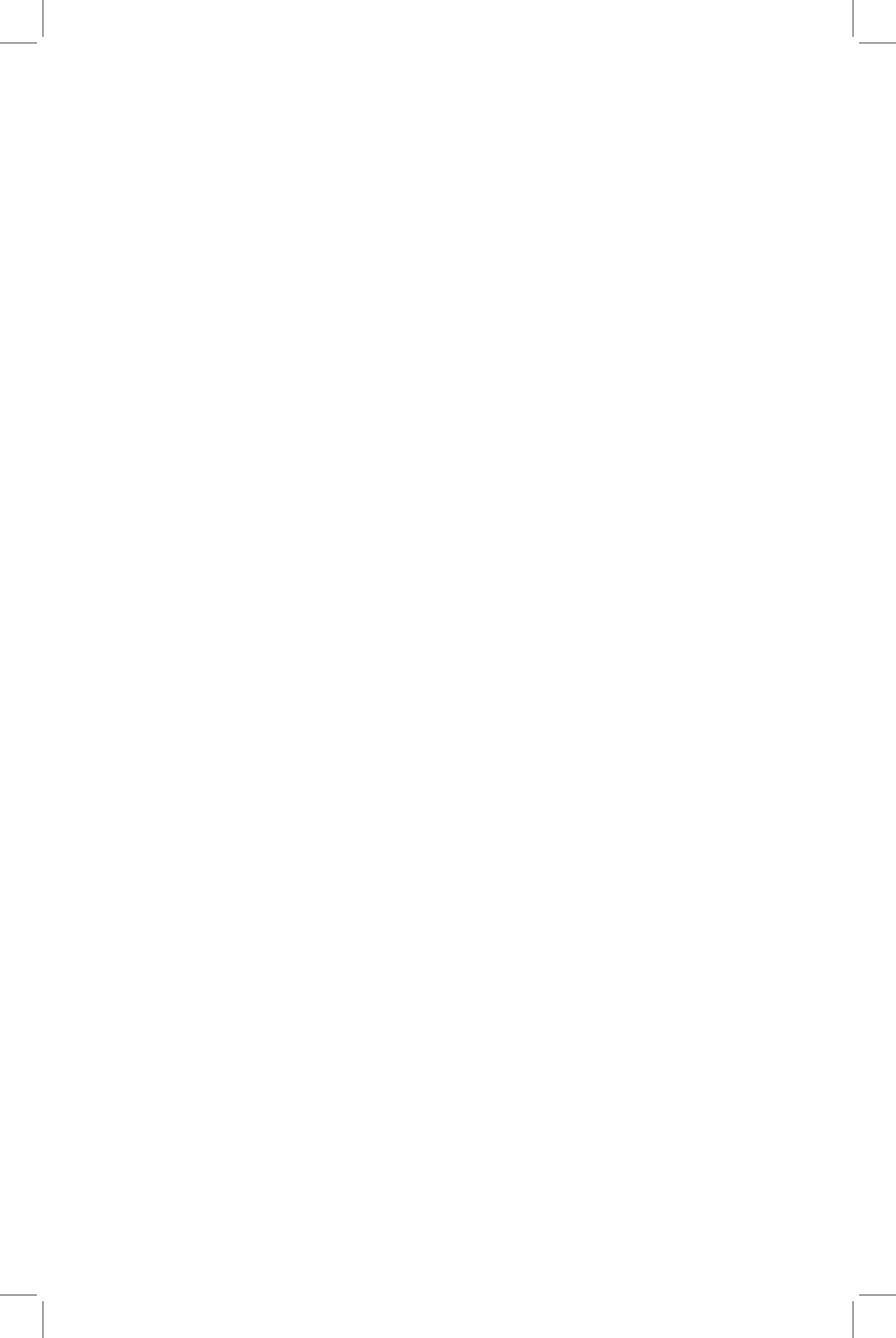
The vertical sculpture began as a sort of self-portrait, meditating on the action of threading wool through foam, securing a knot in the back, snipping extra length, repeat. A combination of labor-intensive process (threading, weaving) and improvisational structure (nailing foam to wood cast-off), like many of my works, draws attention to the spectrum of types of labor and grants importance to all of them. This piece also reflects on attempts at orientation and positioning, both in relation to the space around and the space within.

²Liebes began as a handweaver and was known for her work with 'alternative' materials such as silk, chenille, metallic thread, beads, and wooden reed. She was quickly recruited by multiple corporations, including DuPont, to design wall hangings, wallpaper, and commercially-woven fabrics using new synthetic technology (Blaszczyk). Following World War II, the GI Bill allowed for thousands of returning veterans to pursue a college education, leading to the creation of the middle class as we know it. Liebes' work appealed to this emerging demographic, as it existed at the junction of modernism, innovation, industry, and accessibility. In 1956, MoMA exhibited Liebes' work in "Textile USA: A Selection of Contemporary American Textiles," which included both handmade and machine-manufactured textiles. In the exhibition catalog, the museum emphasized that "when he is not designing for machine production the craftsman is free to explore what now might properly be called 'pure' textile design" (Daniel). One of the most influential cultural institutions promoted the idea that the primary purpose of the hand weaver was to be designing for industry, and Dorothy Liebes exemplified this ideal. In 1970, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts held Dorothy Liebes' Retrospective. It was only the second single-person show in the Museum's history, and was sponsored by E.I. Du Pont Nemours & Company's Textile Fibers Department (Smith).



figure 4. hold my own, 2018

The challenge of this work was knitting paracord, an unwieldy and surprisingly stiff fiber. In my older works such as this, my process often involved creating materials or parts without a clear vision of its final form. Ultimately, my decision to combine the labor-intensive square of knit paracord with a simple found pole highlights my interest in the tension between duration and improvisation. From a distance, the piece reads as a mop left against a wall, the knit structure blurring and becoming a solid color. As the viewer moves closer, however, the physical qualities of the paracord and its construction begin to reveal themselves. I'm interested in this 'slow-burn' experience, when a piece proposes itself as something from a distance but reveals itself as something else upon further inspection.



*iv. merging, morphing,
and performing*

What happens when plywood becomes woven, when cloth becomes wood, when neither material behaves how it should? In order to discuss the decision to work exclusively in handwoven cloth and wood, I must first contextualize the importance of these materials within my own life and broader American history.



plywood



Plywood is a culturally malleable material, fluctuating in value and visibility throughout history with uses ranging from aircraft bodies to home construction to mid century modern furniture. Prior to World War I, plywood was largely viewed as a cheap lumber substitute, and only once industrial technology advanced its production was plywood harnessed for the ‘democratic designs’ of Alvar Aalto, Charles Eames, and other prominent designers (Kirkham).

I'm interested in using plywood as a material anchor for examining the cultural and economic shifts that happened in post-World War II America and contextualizing these shifts within a contemporary experience of class, gender, and domesticity. Plywood holds a place in my own lineage for its omnipresence in my childhood home- it was bare floors in my house, the backboard on the basketball hoop my dad built for my siblings and me. It was never clean, glossy, or steam bent. It was often in the form of dirty scraps with chipped edges that gave me splinters. I understand plywood in relation to provision and scarcity, however its external historical placement indicates a different type of cultural importance. I use plywood as an access point.





handweaving

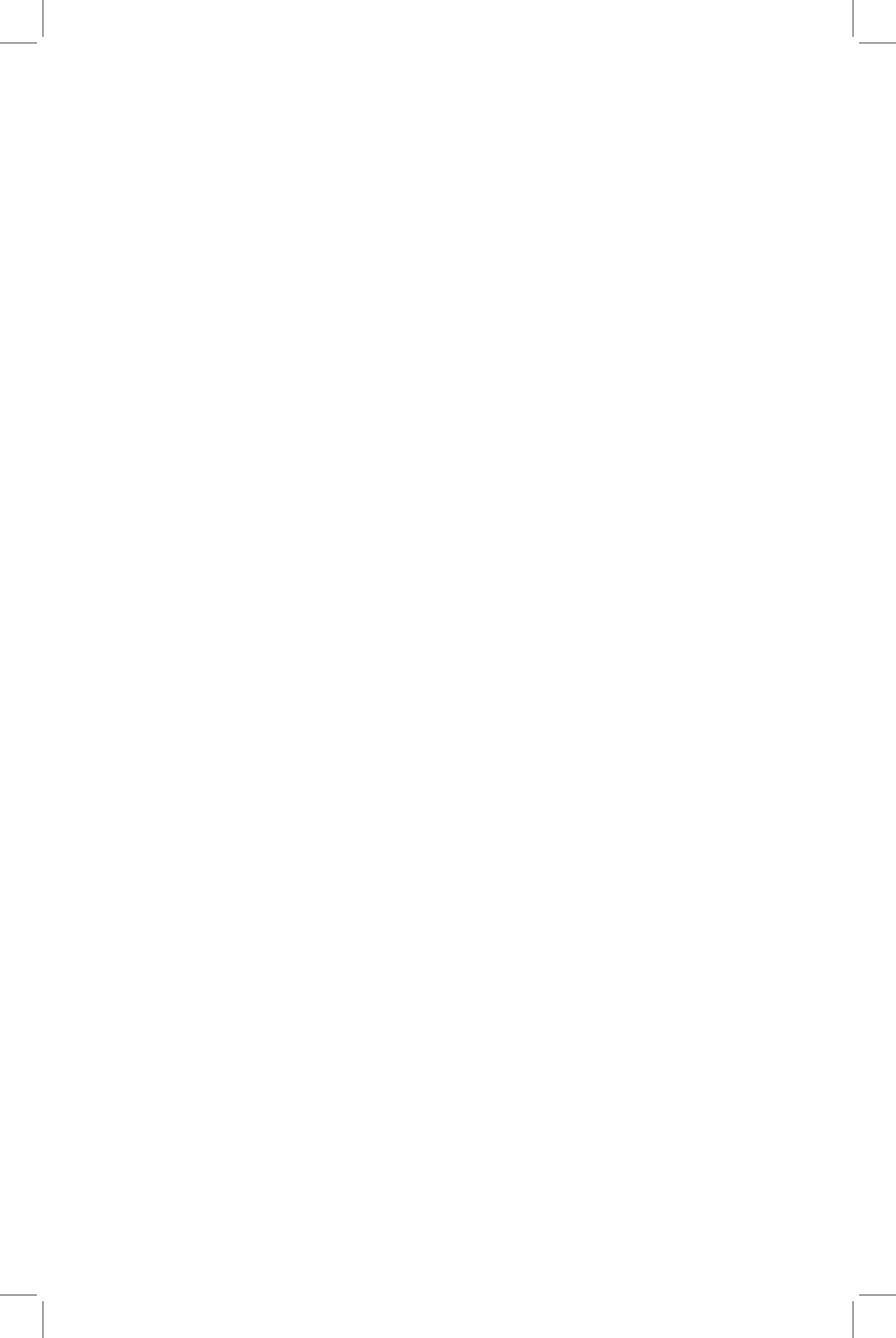
I investigate weaving in a 20th century Western context. Similar to plywood, handweaving's cultural placement shifted dramatically following industrialization and the introduction of modernist design in the United States. Pre-industrialization, almost all colonial households grew, processed, spun, wove, and sewed their own cloth goods. Though handweaving persisted in the Appalachian regions, the necessity and lucrateness of weaving in the home diminished with the introduction of industrial textile mills, simultaneously making cheap cloth more accessible while creating an entirely new class of exploited workers (Ulrich).

Beginning in the 1940s, handweaving underwent a revitalization due to the efforts of four prominent women: Mary Meigs Atwater, Dorothy Liebes, Anni Albers, and Marianne Strengell. Each weaver practiced their own beliefs around the role of weaving in society, ranging from Atwater's belief in preserving traditional patterns (Atwater) to Albers' belief that handweaving works best as prototypes for industry (Albers). This divide in weaving ethos is arguably still felt today, and the range between 'hobby' weavers, 'art' weavers, and 'design' weavers begs the question: why do we weave? The woven cloth historically has a function, and is born from necessity. The mid century cloth is tethered to industry, and the contemporary cloth does not know what it is. I use the evolving role of the woven cloth throughout history, with an emphasis on pre-industrialization and post-World War II eras, as anchors to examine how we, culturally, adhere assumptions of function, tradition, authenticity, and innovation to objects and processes that are, at their cores, the same throughout history. The efforts made in the United States throughout the 20th century in the name of weaving are undeniably tied to gender, labor, and class.





What does plywood have to do with handweaving? What are the implications of forcing these two things to behave similarly? In finding intersections where there may not otherwise be any? Working tirelessly from multiple angles to find the ways in which two things are alike is vital to the way we continue to live. The two things will always be different, they can never be stripped of their inherent qualities. The cloth will never be not-cloth, or not-woven. The plywood will never be not-plywood. But working between the two, a new thing is created, and it is entirely cloth but with elements of something else. It's the careful act of looking closely at the qualities of one single thing, considering how it is actually that, using the systems and rules and codes of handweaving to imitate the best I can the half-natural phenomena of plywood. And of course, the cloth will always fall short. But in the space between where it falls and where it wants to be, there is a new thing, a hybrid, a visual mix with the two parts still distinctly their own. One could use this same process to find commonalities between any two materials. And yet, there is undeniably a connection between handweaving and plywood. The two have moved up and down the hierarchy of value and visibility throughout American history, and have deep connections to industry and hand labor. The handwoven cloth and the sheet of plywood both straddle spaces of completion and projected function, between raw materials and finished product. And yet, between them, we find something new.



*v. building materials,
building materials*

I'd like to end on a thought that has been guiding most of my work these past few years, and that is the distinction between building materials in its noun form, and building materials as a verb. The former is the raw material, the things we mine, process, press, mold, and distribute to be used for something else. The bricks and wood and concrete that create spaces and break ground, the physical and symbolic collection of objects for envisioning and creating a future.

The latter signifies a step even further back in the production line, and requires an acceptance of the hand into interpreting, or re-interpreting, the components of our realities. A careful consideration of the act of building materials works across a hierarchy, not within it, and disrupts the production line. It allows space for considering how we fulfill our needs and construct, connect, build between each other. When we build our own materials, we imagine what is possible.



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