

The State of Repair,
Chatter Marks Journal Issue 3:
Guest Editing for the Anchorage Museum

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An Introduction to *The State of Repair*

Researching the craft of repair within the harsh and shifting environment of the Circumpolar North, where supplies are often scarce and repair skills passed through generations, reveals a practice that tends a present need while honoring past use and anticipating a future. This is an old set of processes. What *is* new, is the growing awareness of the environmental and cultural impacts of losing these skills. In this way, the craft of repair is directly connected to place and the decisions people have made and continue to make while there. My role as a guest editor for the Anchorage Museum’s journal, *Chatter Marks*,¹ provided a visual and literary platform to reveal alternative histories of the Circumpolar North using the craft of repair as the lens. This allows for what Linda Tuhiwai Smith refers to as “alternative knowledges” derived from coming to know the past through multiple or alternative histories, which can then become

¹ I wish to acknowledge I live and work on *Dena’ina Ełnena*, homeland of the Dena’ina Peoples. I have come here as an uninvited guest and am immensely grateful to these hosts. I’m honored to raise children where families have cared for one other for millennia, and in turn, my intention is to raise respectful guests of my own. This project was concurrent with research completed during my MA in Critical Craft Studies at Warren Wilson College and conducted between March 2020 – February 2021 from Anchorage, Alaska. I’m so grateful to the many people who provided direction, time and insight during this practicum project. Thank you to the MACR faculty: Director, Namita Wiggers, Core Faculty and Advisors Ben Lignel and Tom Martin, Linda Sandino, Yasmeen Siddiqui, and Shannon Stratton; mentors Melissa Potter and Savneet Talwar. Thank you to the Anchorage Museum for the ongoing opportunities, especially to Julie Decker, Director and CEO, for her mentorship throughout the curatorial and editing phases of this project and for facilitating a year-long Northern Research Lab Fellowship, which made this work important, relevant and possible. I’m grateful for additional guidance from others at the museum: Curators, Francesca DuBrock and Bodil Kjelstrup; Archivist, Arabeth Balasko; Deputy Director of Conservation and Collections, Monica Shah; Conservator, Sarah Owens; Curatorial Practices Specialist, Heather McClain, and *Chatter Marks* Designer, Karen Larsen. Similar guidance from other Alaskan institutions include: Amy Steffian, Chief Curator, Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak; Ellen Carrlee, Conservator and Steve Henrikson, Curator of Collections, both at the Alaska State Museum, Juneau. My gratitude for related conversations and guidance from Charis Gullickson, Curator at the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, Tromsø, Norway; Scott Marsden, Curator, Museum Collections Culture and Heritage, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Center, Yellowknife, NWT, Canada; Stine Lundberg Hansen, Curator, Nuuk Art Museum, Greenland; Mette Muhli and Tomas Asplund Gustafson, Curators at the Skövke Kunstmuseet, Sweden. My gratitude to Kerri Hamos, Director of The Folk School in Fairbanks, Alaska for sharing her craft network and to the *many* artists, writers and craftspeople I either interviewed or spoke with informally via phone, Zoom, text, Instagram direct message, on a boat, in a doorway, on socially distant walks, or by breaking social distance rules in a living room. Lastly, most importantly, I so appreciate my family who kept it all in perspective by really needing a mother and a partner during a global pandemic.

the basis for an alternative way of doing things.² I am writing from within this place, and for those of us experiencing how a warming climate displaces communities, animals and land, alternative knowledges provide a way of envisioning an alternative future. The historic and contemporary acts of repair here reveal adaptation, prolonging, circular methods of production and ongoing maintenance. They reveal the collapsing of time through generational learning, craft's connection between people, objects and methods across great distance, ways of belonging to a place, and an ability to foster an ethical response to the broken—whether an everyday object or a climate in crisis. To engage in this craft is to consider repair, rather than replacement or discard as a first response. An act of repair expresses care, *of some kind*, whether this lasts momentarily or is felt deeply for years.³

What emerged from the essays, archival images, objects from collections and artists featured in this journal is a mapping of the craft of repair as it is oriented in the North: place-based, generational, overlapping, experiential, migratory, tenacious and ongoing. It tells histories of the people who live here and reveals what they care about enough to repair. To *not* look at communities of repair (both Indigenous and settler) and the objects they repair, or to *not* hear these stories is to maintain entrenched histories or biased, limited ways of thinking that continue a current trajectory of consumption, extraction, replacement and waste. Serious conversations about climate change, sustainability and sustainable communities are ongoing in the North.⁴ The

² Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 36.

³ The theme of this journal fits with a larger conversation as the Alaska's Anchorage Museum has been engaged in discussions on climate change for years, working across disciplines with artists, designers and scientists through exhibitions and special projects to develop and foster ongoing dialog that envisions alternative futures for the North. Indigenous voices are a powerful component to this, with a recent convening "Landscapes of Change" focusing on the connection between climate justice and social justice, and the role museums have in this movement towards equity (<https://www.anchoragemuseum.org/major-projects/projects/landscapes-of-change-conference-2021/>).

⁴ All of the writers and artists featured in this journal have a connection to communities in the Circumpolar North, either currently reside here, or formerly, or have traveled throughout multiple times.

craft of repair, reuse and reconfiguration is an actionable way of applying an ethics of care towards objects, practices and people based on relationships, interdependency and one's relationship to a shifting landscape.

For this project, I leaned heavily on my background in the literary arts and a social practice teaching mending, both of which attuned me to ways the craft of repair is conveyed and encouraged through personal stories about objects and how visual traces of repair reveal histories of mending – where, how, why, or by whom. These are all forms of alternative knowledge I felt intuitively before but see revealed tangibly in this project. I have also lived in Alaska for 20 years. During the last seven summers, my family and I have taken on the unpaid, unrelenting task of cleaning remote beaches and hauling trash every season in Prince William Sound. For some people this activity starts as curious beachcombing, but for us it began with repeated trips to visit an exhibition at the Anchorage Museum called *Gyre: The Plastic Ocean*.⁵ Our summer boating outings changed forever once my young children saw an exhibition featuring landscapes they recognized, overlaid with images of suffering wildlife and garbage-strewn beaches. From that point on, no remote beach was truly empty. We climbed above eroded hightide lines, deeper into forests, to discover hundreds of pounds of storm-tossed ghost net, exploding Styrofoam and endless plastic bottles embedded in moss, grass or trapped beneath driftwood logs. We have since stumbled across hundreds of dead birds and the occasional seal, sea lion, or sea otter carcass, leading to discussions which follow us home, shaping what we regularly consume and discard. These varied experiences, observations and ongoing physical and emotional relationship to this geographical environment informs our attachment to these beaches, tundras, mountains

⁵ *Gyre: The Plastic Ocean* (February 7- September 6, 2014) exhibited at the Anchorage Museum featured film, interactive displays and interpretive panels along with artwork and documentation revealing the predicament of global plastic consumption and its effects on the marine environment.
<https://www.anchoragemuseum.org/exhibits/gyre-the-plastic-ocean/exhibit-overview/>

and sea—what Yi-Fu Tuan refers to as “topophilia,”⁶ a meaning making that arises from an affective bond or love for a place. It has also created for me what Glenn Albrecht calls “solastalgia,”⁷ a yearning and a sorrow for a climate that once was; this emerges from personal experience and observation of the steady transformation of place, over which I have no control. This is why it has always been difficult for me to read or see accounts of the North portrayed as cold, white and empty,⁸ a place ready for extraction, seemingly so immense that any activity will simply be absorbed and forgotten over time. The craft of repair tells an alternative story of this place, one I feel positioned to help tell.

Parameters, Constraints, Influences and Opportunities

During this project, it often seemed easier to locate writers willing to talk about experiences with repair than actual repair practitioners. Some of this was due to the constraints and lockdown during COVID-19⁹ but it also reveals the following: 1.) The population engaged in the craft of repair in the North is small, despite a long history of repair in both Indigenous and settler populations; 2.) Skilled repair is reliant on understanding a full making process and the performance of multiple materials, and many of these practitioners who learned

⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 4.

⁷ Glenn Albrecht, “‘Solastalgia’ A New Concept in Health and Identity,” *PAN* no. 3 (2005): 41-55.

⁸ Daniel Chartier, *What is the “Imagined North?”: Ethical Principles*, Imaginaire Nord and Arctic Arts Summit, 2018, 15.

⁹ This publication is not an exhaustive account of repair in the North. There are places in my town I’d hoped to spend time interviewing and shadowing repair practitioners in person had the situation been different: the mountain gear repair shop in Girdwood (closed until further notice), the shoe repair on Fireweed Lane (permanently closed), the workroom with fur finisher Pauline Tulik and head furrier Herman Lucero in downtown Anchorage (closure status unknown), for example. While important and interesting to me, I did not include vocationally trained professional repair people in this project, such as plumbers or electricians, due to space and time constraints.

intergenerationally or through solitary tinkering and experimentation do not have an online presence showcasing their craft;¹⁰ 3.) The aesthetic value of repair is often hinged on not being able to detect a repair at all. This invisibility may mean a repair isn't noticeable at first unless it is described textually or in person; 4.) Related to this invisibility is repair's shift to the margins, from what used to be activity regularly centered in the home or workplace. Repair practitioners and repaired objects are not always central to the craft conversation here. These realizations helped me shape the contents of the journal with the goal of finding the side conversations, quiet practitioners, and dismissed or broken objects, in order to re-center the craft of repair within this publication. This moves alternative knowledge into the realm of future thinking.

Julie Decker, my mentor and Director/CEO of the AM, explained early in the process that there would be no pre-design on my end, only gathering. I saw this as seeking, a research role with an opportunity to build a network of contemporary repair practitioners, hoping to develop peer relationships as someone who also practices and teaches repair. While the journal's designer, Karen Larsen, would bring vision to the project, it was up to me to present my intentions clearly.¹¹ This shaped the way I organized the hand-off of information and communicated my ideas: each contributor was assigned a text document including my selected images and captions plus any images of objects from collections that should accompany. Among notes that ranked image suggestions, I specifically requested that Siku Allooloo's large wall installation, *Akia*, land in the centerfold of the journal so the readability of the sealskin text

¹⁰ I relied on word of mouth for many contacts and spent weeks phoning and emailing dead ends. One of my main sources of information was through the Folk School in Fairbanks, which I knew offered community courses on various crafts. Kerri Hamos, the Director, introduced me via email to a number of craftspeople, few of whom have any online presence describing their work with repair.

¹¹ The format of the *Chatter Marks* journal, originally designed by Larson, features narrow and wide signature pages, a mixture of colored paper stock printed with black ink, and full color printed pages. My analysis of the first issue's layout (which I had in hand from the beginning) indicated that narrow pages provided separation between essays and the centerfold provided an important opportunity for a large visual component.

wouldn't be disrupted by a gutter. I also provided a handful of cover image suggestions, two of which worked well together with Larsen's design: 1.) a detail of a driftwood bowl, drilled and lashed with whale baleen and one of the first objects I researched in the AM collections; and 2.) a detail of Alloo'loo's contemporary moose hide thimble against the thread-repaired reverse of her textile wall hanging. Juxtaposing familiar thread stitching with baleen "stitches" expands the understanding of repair across time and distance, reveals how repair materials define a place, and emphasizes the endurance of such mends. The resulting journal cover also indicates immediately how important Indigenous voices are to the craft of repair in the North.

I chose repaired objects and repair tools from the AM collection from both online images and two in-person visits prior to the COVID-related March 2020 museum closure.¹² Discussions with Monica Shah, Deputy Director of Conservation and Collections, and Conservator, Sara Owens, during these visits helped me understand how to look closely at an object in order to connect known and unknown histories. For example, the intended use for the repaired driftwood bowl mentioned earlier (along with another in the journal) is unknown, but it originated in the northern part of Alaska where tundra prevails. The lack of trees in this landscape points to the value of the material itself. Knowing it may take time before another suitable piece of wood landed on a beach or floated up-river, this would motivate a repairer to lash together the cracks before the bowl split further. Another similarly repaired object, a pair of ivory snow goggles, would have been mended out of necessity but also for survival, with the threat of snow blindness impacting not only an individual hunter, but the larger community relying on one's safe return. Reading

¹²The two in-person visits to the AM collections focused on repaired Indigenous objects of Yup'ik and Inupiaq origin. The intention was to return several times to look at other repaired items (both settler and Indigenous) from different time periods and locations, but due to early stages of COVID-19 lockdown, the museum closed just as we were getting started. Because of the many unknowns and a set practicum timeline, my research pivoted to include objects chosen from online images from collections throughout the state. For example, one ivory sewing kit and ivory thimble holder in the journal are located in the collections of the University of Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks and were chosen from online images.

Indigenous writing about the vitality and circularity inherent in a place, such as Mishuana Goeman's thoughts on land as the "concept that weaves people together around common understandings and experiences,"¹³ further informed my own understanding of the way the craft of repair extends across distances and between communities. These repairs reveal value of material and use through the intent to prolong, therefore holding important cultural histories of belonging to a place.

I chose archival images from institutions across the state featuring descriptions directly related to repair or reuse, with an emphasis on showing people engaged in repair. These explain how objects were historically repaired, but also reveal the crossover of techniques. An example of this is the silver gelatin photograph of a First Nations man repairing a *qamutiik* sled with a bow drill in Canada grouped with the previously mentioned bowl and snow goggles, which had been repaired with a similar technique by Yup'ik or Inupiaq Peoples here in Alaska.¹⁴ Sewing tools such as bone needles, cloth and ivory sewing kits, and a packet of Western sewing supplies from an interior Alaska trading post are placed together in another collage spread, indicating the settler influence of cloth sewing kits versus the ivory and hide versions, both highlighting the portability and potential for repair in either form.¹⁵ These are juxtaposed with archival photos of Inupiaq women mending clothing outdoors and Army nurses repairing stockings inside their barracks on Adak Island during WWII, scenes that show very different everyday environments, yet are connected by the need to care for tools and cloth. This reveals the embeddedness of repair and reuse in the culture and environment of the North, where historically it was difficult to

¹³ Mishuana Goeman, "Land as Life: Unsettling the Logics of Containment," in *Native Studies Keywords*, Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith and Michelle H. Raheja, eds. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 72.

¹⁴ I also included a longer caption in the publication to explain the construction of a *qamutiik*, a sled still built specifically for an environment where repair is inevitable, resulting in a design that envisions and accommodates future repair (page 22).

¹⁵ These kits are also customized and embellished, indicating a particular care from the original maker and intention for long-term use.

justify discarding anything in case it was needed later. In addition, when it is *literally* difficult to discard things, this opens opportunities for new use.¹⁶

Representing the Craft of Repair in the North

There is no “one way” repair is conducted in the North, and interest in the craft varies by place. I often wish local conversations about all types of repair were as robust and engaging as the ones I overhear while teaching textile mending, where students realize a few basic skills can be applied to other materials and types of repair. In reality, it is now as easy to receive the luxury of online replacement goods here in Alaska as anywhere else, it just might take a little longer and cost more, so the motivation to repair isn’t as urgent as it once was, nor are the skills as prevalent. Knowing this, I sought journal contributors who weren’t so much *doing* repair (although this was always a starting point) as they were thinking *with* repair in terms of why or how it could or should be done. Through email, phone or Zoom conversation, I listened for the way potential writers or artists conveyed their experiences and practices with the craft of repair. My questions to them included: *How would you describe your repair process? How do you see repair done in the North and why is this important? How long have you lived in a place, any place, and what was at stake for you there? The question What is a first memory of repair?* forms an exciting constellation throughout everyone’s biographies. This opportunity to remember triggered examples of early familial or experiential learning, objects of personal value,

¹⁶ Cargo and shipping materials (from containers to packaging) arriving in the North have always been difficult to manage. Even recycling is challenging here, with very little processing infrastructure located in state. Some recyclables are baled and barged 1700 miles to Seattle, a 7-day journey from the Port of Anchorage, while others are treated as waste. Whether urban-centered or remote, these are expensive place-based ecological challenges that will benefit from repair or reuse mindsets, focusing on adaptation and innovation rather than replacement and discarding.

and tapped childhood hopes for prolonging use. Reading these descriptions alone reveals how the craft of repair is not only housed in memory, but how early experience with repair, not just doing it but watching it being done, shaped each of the contributors and continues to connect them across overlapping histories, practices and geographies.¹⁷ What emerges here is a collection of writers and artists who all in some way ask about the *why* of repair, whether or not this can be fully answered. This journal provides a space for this question to exist in complicated layers via the experiences of multiple ethnicities, backgrounds, genders and ages, providing an open door for future conversations around this topic.

The first essay in the journal, “Why Stories About Broken-Down Snowmobiles Can Teach You A Lot About Life in the Artic Tundra,” by Aimar Ventsel, is a reprint from an anthology within the field of repair studies¹⁸ and works within *The State of Repair* to dispel romantic notions of repair. Ventsel does not live full time in the North, but his ethnographic research is rooted here. His essay provides an outsider’s perspective to a specific day-to-day cycle of repair, which is costly, inefficient and time consuming (as explained through the dilemma Evenki subsistence hunters face in Northern Russia where, unlike in other parts of the Arctic, they are able to sell game meat). Their heavy use of snowmobiles for distance travel year-round ensures much of their hunting income is poured into equipment repair and acquisition of older machines for parts, rather than put back into the community. This is a tail-chasing aspect of the craft of repair as it relates to economic survival.

I originally didn’t envision this essay as the lead, thinking it would work towards the end as a punctuation mark. Placing it here was the designer’s choice. However, leading the collection

¹⁷ Fishing-related repair, in particular, was a craft several contributors were exposed to early in life.

¹⁸ See Francisco Martínez and Patrick Laviolette, eds., *Repair, Brokenness, Breakthrough: Ethnographic Responses* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 245-248.

with a broad lens of political decision-making and what the consequences are for an Indigenous community faced with ongoing repair as a means for economic survival creates a counterpoint to later articles in the journal that reveal more intimate or emotional writing about the craft of repair. In reality, repair *is* controversial, even when personal. It's expensive, often costing more than replacement, it's labor intensive and time consuming.¹⁹ Also, not a lot of people know how to do it efficiently.²⁰

What engaging in the craft of repair does do, however, is provide a way of operating alongside a future that will continue to produce the promise of the “new” we are drawn to either via corporate marketing promises or the legitimate need for better living conditions. Ventsel's personal experience with a broken-down snowmobile²¹ provides insight into the importance of such a skill and how the community relies on repair abilities to not only hunt, but to travel safely without the luxury of quickly acquiring new machines or parts. The craft of repair, as it is taught, understood and practiced in this essay and throughout the journal is not based on a utopian ideal, but it *is* based on hope and optimism, what Tuhiwai Smith refers to as the imagining and reimagining, creating and recreating of a world.²² Repair as a craft is messy, inconsistent,

¹⁹ Globally, there is a host of reasons why consumers choose not to repair: increasing costs of repair versus the declining costs of replacement, low consumer confidence in repair providers, and an increasingly mobile lifestyle in which items are discarded before repairs are even needed. See John McCollough, “Factors Impacting the Demand for Repair Services of Household Products: The Disappearing Repair Trades and the Throwaway Society,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33, no. 6 (November 2009): 621.

²⁰ This last point has led to the rise of Repair Cafés and pop-up repair shops where people who attend, either as learners or folks dropping off broken things, feel strongly about the value of repair, but are not only forced to reckon with the time and expense required to do the work, but more personal reasons as to why they are motivated in the first place. See Sandra Goldmark, *Fixation: How to have Stuff Without Breaking the Planet* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2020), 79; and Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 17; and Adam Drazin, “Brokenness and Normality in Design Culture,” in *Repair, Brokenness, Breakthrough: Ethnographic Responses*, Francisco Martínez and Patrick Laviolette, eds. (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 301.

²¹ I refer to the instance revealed in his biography, not in the essay.

²² Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 203.

sometimes resulting in *re-repair*, but reflects a tenacity of materials and will that is required in an extreme and constantly changing environment.

Placing the *Indigenuity Project* immediately after Ventsel's essay provides a continuation of a conversation from a different point of view. While Ventsel discusses repair in terms of the economics of a place, architect Joar Nango and artist Silje Figenschou Thoresen approach repair, reuse and reconfiguration as a skill inherent to living in the North and a vital component to what Thoresen refers to as the "material logic"²³ of Sámi design culture—an improvisational way of working based on materials at hand, the seasonality of place, and an individual's knowledge buoyed by the community's collective knowledge and skills. Nango and Thoresen traveled through Northern Sámi communities seeking evidence of Indigenous ingenuity—*Indigenuity*—as it relates to available materials and long-held skills of adapting design to better suit the needs of the user. I chose this project because similar adaptation, reuse and problem solving is inherent and recognizable in other communities in the Circumpolar North as well.²⁴ Their work also expands the definition of repair in this journal to encompass acts of re-purposing and re-configuration, all reliant on skills of making and knowledge of materials. These actions lend a visual quality to remote and/or Indigenous places that outsiders may dismiss as scrap- or junk-filled, not understanding that the choices are about long-term keeping rather than discarding. Repair, in this way, is integral to the visual culture of the North. This project was chosen for its portrayal of beauty and innovation within the visuals of use, the value placed on scarce materials, and a place-based understanding of the link between longevity, survival and identity.

²³ "Structures," Silje Figenschou Thoresen website, 2021, <https://siljefig.com/structures/>.

²⁴ An example of this appears on page 21 of the journal: an archival image featuring a barrel sidewalk in Wainwright, Alaska, combined with another image of two men using a barrel as a temporary jack to repair an airplane tailwheel.

The Indigenuity Project also speaks to the temporal quality of the craft of repair. This includes not just the hours it takes to do the work, or literally travel to and from it, but also as it relates to the longevity of objects, narrative, generations, cultures and the environment. Sociologist Lara Houston refers to the concept of “livings” rather than “lifetimes” within the lifecycles of objects.²⁵ By considering what materials might become in the future, there is the propensity to preserve that which is currently in use or might become useful later. A position like this considers how moments of living and engagement between objects and people can become quiet for long stretches of time. We may need to wait for technical insight, or the right materials, or the right practitioner, or the right place for a transition to take place. Alternatively, this kind of “living” might begin immediately, as soon as something breaks and disrupts the everyday. While some repairs in the North are long-term in intention, they have a temporary quality or outcome when exposed to extreme weather conditions, heavy use, or when completed with repurposed materials. This creates the need for *re-repair* or more durable repair when better materials or more time becomes available. Some repair tasks are left unfinished until the next season’s call for use, while others will require attention from future generations, a quality explored in the essay that follows.

My own essay contribution, *Repair as Accompaniment*, uses the personal narrative of family loss, memory and generational obligation within a broken rug to approach repair via a feminist ethics of care.²⁶ After two contributions focusing on repair practices influenced by the external environment, this essay centers the craft of repair within the domestic space: the rug was used in my home, will be repaired there and returned to use there again. It was also woven in my

²⁵ Lara Houston, “The Timeliness of Repair,” *R3PAIR VOLUME, 'continent* 6, no. 1 (2017): 53.

²⁶ I worked with the writings of Joan Tronto for this essay and expanded on her five aspects of care by adding one of my own: an “ethics of accompaniment,” defined as caring for an object, person or environment through to transition.

great aunt's home elsewhere in the Circumpolar North decades ago, but an adjacent interior space I explore is hers and the choice to use her deceased children's clothing along with her own grief as the material for making. Imagining clothing from a small mending pile growing to an enormous discard pile after someone's death creates an emotional response to materials and dispels the idea that anything can be fixed. It cannot. My great aunt's ability to channel this grief into a craft process and generate objects of use reveals the searching for emotional repair that many who work with textiles once worn close to the body can relate to.²⁷

My essay explores potential repair—or repair in waiting—as a strategy of approaching a mend through an ethics of care, formulating an approach for *how* to repair and why I would repair for a reason other than putting an object back into service in my home. The rug was made for reasons other than to merely be of use, so it felt necessary to explore my role as a caregiver and how I might accompany this object as it transitions to its next phase of life. It's possible to apply an ethics of accompaniment to all the repaired objects in this journal, *a caring through to transition*, whether achieved by dismantling and reconfiguring, repairing temporarily, visibly or invisibly. Considering how the broken object accompanies a repairer reveals the benefit of personal, interior healing via the autonomic nervous system by caring for and repairing something broken outside of the self.²⁸

The commissioned prose poetry about net mending that follows was written by Anna Hoover, a fisherwoman, filmmaker and writer of Norwegian and Unangax heritage. I approached her with this writing opportunity because I felt the clarity and brevity of the prose poem form

²⁷ Contributor, Eline Medbøe, echoes this in her statement about clothing at the end of the journal: “When we take them off our smell lingers, and we are still present in these garments.” See also Peter Stallybrass, “Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning and the Life of Things,” in *The Textile Reader*, Jessica Hemmings ed. (London and New York: Berg, 2012), 69.

²⁸ Lisa Raye Garlock, “Alone in the Desert,” in *Craft in Art Therapy: Diverse Approaches to the Transformative Power of Craft Materials and Methods*, Lauren Leone, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 199.

would provide a perspective on the craft of net mending as written by a woman and mother of a young child working in the male-dominated world of commercial fishing. Hoover's use of visual language reads like scenes from a small film while the repetitive form echoes the craft of net mending, the same set of movements repeated seasonally. Hoover's descriptions reveal the craft of mending as a form of care, rather than as solely a means to complete a job. Teaching a junior net mender how to care for equipment signals how a crew, a vessel, a catch, a community and the sea will also be potentially cared for in the future. Of all examples in this journal, net mending *relies* on repair as a first response. Its success is an integral part of the profession.

The archival images I chose to accompany this piece reveal the way net mending is taught, either peer-to-peer or generationally as a craft act that is central to fishing as a subsistence lifestyle. This does more than illustrate "how" nets are mended, it reveals the way the craft of repair relies on familial and professional relationships to teach these skills. As Sven Haakanson revealed in conversation with me,²⁹ even though he is right-handed, he learned to mend left-handed because his teacher was left-handed. In the image, Haakanson passes on the same technique. Similarly, Hoover learned from the boat captain she fished with early in her career and recalls the great care he took with gear and crew.³⁰ Her father's advice to "take care" of something as soon as you think of it illustrates the way repair is folded into the rhythm of the fishing season and the risk inherent to *not* caring properly for equipment. Any downtime is spent quietly repairing nets, an introspective counterpoint to the frenetic pace of a short harvest period on an unpredictable sea. This becomes another temporal quality of repair defined by a place: understanding the rhythm and seasonal nature of certain kinds of repair as it is linked to harvest,

²⁹ Sven Haakanson is featured in an archival photo as a teenager, teaching another young man how to mend net. Our conversation took place on October 1, 2020 in Homer, Alaska.

³⁰ This is shared in the journal via Anna Hoover's biography.

seasonal production, or being driven indoors during the coldest parts of the year begins to reveal histories about when repair is attempted, accomplished and why.

At the journal's center, is writer and artist Siku Allooloo's installation, *Akia*, work that explores emotional, spiritual, cultural, ancestral and intergenerational repair through the poetic form and personal and cultural materials of sealskin and tent canvas. When we spoke about her work via Zoom, she was in the process of literal repair: all 2,700 sealskin letters applied initially with leather glue weren't holding.³¹ This fix required hours of hand sewing through cured adhesive, thick sealskin and wall tent canvas, protecting her fingers with custom made moose hide thimbles. She described an even deeper physical connection to the work while re-stitching the letters months after the initial making, a tenacity of process and self-reflection she felt was inherent to repair, both emotional and literal.

Allooloo's connection to the cultural narrative of Sedna, the sealskin pelt she had been saving, as well as the wall tent fabric of a childhood in seasonal fish camp are materials working with memory, female Indigenous identity and land. She created *Akia* as a way of seeking place within an Inuit and Taíno heritage while repairing familial relationships through a dual craft exploration of language and making. Through this process, she reveals the ongoingness of finding her place in the Circumpolar North. Because the words mounted on canvas are difficult to read, I initially suggested printing the text as accompaniment, however she preferred the reader put in the necessary work and time of deciphering the poetry in sealskin. To Allooloo, this alluded to the protective power held within materials and memory. This barrier to her inner self is not impenetrable but invokes physical strain to even arrive at the first layer. This is a reminder

³¹ Siku Allooloo, in a Zoom conversation with the author, November 20, 2020.

that repair does not come easy, that it is slow and tedious, a craft of intention with the most intense work often invisible, and in this case physically painful for the artist to achieve.

While Allooloo's moose hide thimble was presented earlier in the journal, an Inupiaq hide thimble from the collections at the University of Alaska Museum of the North made from bearded seal sits adjacent to her artist's statement. A woodblock from the AM collections, *Seasons of the Arctic I*, by Bernard Katexac (1977), is above. The print depicts Northern village life in the Fall: hunting, fishing and repairing a sled in time for winter. These two objects from collections placed beside *Akia* do the work of collapsing distance and time, even allowing myth to flow across narratives. The marine animals in the Katexac print — fish, seal, walrus, whale — echo Allooloo's reference to Sedna, nourishing the Inuit people in reality but also through myth as they cared for Sedna at the bottom of the sea. It is also a connection to the learning Hoover described in her poetry: generations of seals teaching pups to tear fish from nets, generations of fishermen mending them.

This grouping is contrasted with the following double page spread featuring interrupted timber processing—workers hunched over a saw, engaged in problem solving, waiting and the annoyance of stalled-out work. The dark 35 mm slide was discovered in a box of Alaskan images of gold mines, roadhouses and rivers. No date or location accompanied this image, only the description “FIXING SAW” scrawled on the cardboard mount, which initially drew me to it since I'd located very few images labeled specifically with repair. It wasn't until the designer enlarged and lightened the slide that I was able to see specifics of this remote job site: a clothesline, discarded shipping materials in the background, and four men³² clearly pooling their knowledge. I feel tense and desperate when I look at this image, proof of a breakdown important

³² Because the group is of mixed ethnicity (not clearly Alaska Native), it's likely they have arrived in the North from elsewhere. Two of the men in caps may be military as there were other images of uniformed men in the slide box.

enough for someone to document and label. Placed here, after Alloodoo's emotional and time-based approach, this scene is a reminder that the craft of repair is linked to industry, natural resource extraction and speed. Repairs get a job done, whether this has long- or short-term effects on a community or individual, or wastes time and materials. This is also a history of this place: the arrival of repair knowledge from elsewhere accompanying the importation of non-local materials and equipment. This provides deeper understanding of the way repair migrates in and out of a place, with new knowledge of the craft entering, then adapting to location over time. The scarcity of this kind of photographic history reveals how the mundane quality of ongoing maintenance is rarely highlighted when the end product is more important. The essay following expands on this by challenging the Western perception of waste and disposal.

Writer Jennifer Nu examines the use of offal and traditional harvest practice in her essay, "A Journey of Nourishment in the North." Her interest in these ingredients and methods reflect a suburban upbringing as a child of immigrants who faced difficulty sourcing ingredients from their homeland. Nu is just beginning to explore this sense of cultural loss in her personal writing, and after speaking with her about this³³ and her commitment to Alaskan food culture, we both agreed a commissioned essay could become a map of her journey as an adult settler in Alaska, a place she specifically chose to live, using the repair of and reconnection to traditional food systems as a theme. Her in-state travel as a food writer brought her close to Indigenous food culture—a subsistence and harvest system ruptured by colonial extraction and generational separation, and while traditional foodways *have* endured, Nu wished to explore its ongoing adaptation and strengthening through relationship to the land and between generations.

³³ Jennifer Nu, in a Zoom conversation with the author, November 11, 2020.

We worked for several months on this essay together, because what felt important to me was Nu's orientation within this place as a settler, and how a *personal* journey of seeking repair through nourishment and cultural foodways was at the root of her questions. As a journalist, she expressed difficulty placing herself in the narrative, but completing vulnerable, self-reflective work while reaching out to Indigenous communities felt vital to this project as a whole, just as it was for her own searching within the essay. Tuhiwai Smith states, "Research begins as a social, intellectual and imaginative activity [...] it begins with human curiosity and a desire to solve problems. It is at its core an activity of hope."³⁴ I knew intuitively that food as a craft material was important to place and generational learning, and believed Nu was the right person to convey the sensitivity required to write about a culture not her own. The essay reiterates the theme of how ensuring future generational and environmental health requires passing on skills and techniques for care, tending and understanding possibilities for materials at hand. Outside knowledge and practices will always enter an environment to either disrupt or enhance (as seen with the previous photograph), and Nu, herself was an outsider. At the core of this essay are the values of Indigenous subsistence and appropriate preparation of not only food, but of younger generations. Indigenous subsistence involves the total use of an animal. This is a sign of respect, but also insight into the way sustainability will never be achieved through waste. This mindset extends beyond the animal or individual, revealing care for a community and ecosystem. Values of place, belonging, deep understanding of distance, materials and appropriate timing, all can be applied to other systems of maintenance or repair that would benefit from circular and interconnected systems versus linear thinking. Nu achieves this by emphasizing the language of

³⁴ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 202.

harvesting, sharing and prolonging, as the antithesis to historical and contemporary extraction and inappropriate disposal.

To further understand breakage, repair and its influence, writer Christine Byl also analyzes language in her essay, “Notes on Repair,” pulling apart words associated with repair and examining them etymologically to discover the way they range between body, memory, politics and the environment.³⁵ I initially approached Byl wondering if her background as a professional trail builder would bring insight into repairing wash-outs or rethinking improperly built trail systems with land and ecosystem preservation in mind (I admit being thrilled to learn she’d mended a chainsaw with foam earplugs). As a woman in a male-dominated industry *and* accomplished fiction and non-fiction writer, I knew she could hook a reader with a mixture of humor and description of place, drawing someone buddy-close before delivering a gut punch message.³⁶ Her word-by-word examination of repair generates a mosaic of maintenance narratives, layering memories of past traumas and fixes while anticipating those still yet to come. This past-present-future quality of the craft of repair is important: investigating existing repair provides insight into the decision-making process of the repairer, their skill level, their intention for a temporary versus a permanent fix, their exposure to old knowledge or new technologies and how either is wielded. As Byl reveals, relentlessness of failure can be a catalyst for innovation, or the disappointment that returns a repairer to older craft techniques while providing the ability to assess which will last longer or hold more successfully. The wide exploration of repair acts in this essay is juxtaposed with the more specific topic of the one that follows: boat repair in Fairbanks.

³⁵ This repair terminology was expanded further and used graphically throughout the journal.

³⁶ The act of commissioning writing or artwork is never certain. Byl’s initial essay idea focused on healing from an injury, which does appear in the final work, but as part of a broader set of narrative connections to repair.

Of the three boatbuilders I interviewed, Andy Reynolds was the most sensitive to the craft of repair as an act of ongoing mentorship and being mentored, having learned independently through the process of repair, re-repair and working with various materials, as well as from fellow craftspeople and students over a 50-year career working with wood. I chose to include our conversation because of this dedication to preserving craft skills, but also because of his environmental attunement. Living in Interior Alaska for decades and experiencing climate change first-hand has shaped his urgency to consider opportunities for rebuilding and repurposing materials. While originally intended as an interview, our recorded phone call took a conversational turn right away and I wanted to preserve this curious tone between makers and a developing relationship around mutual thoughts on repair.³⁷ I felt this provided a way to share the way a mentorship might come about, and what it might sound like: as much about teaching the skills of repair to each other as it would be about respecting our roles within the environment.

Reynolds' commitment to teaching others and a continued willingness to *be* taught reveals how the craft of repair is a constant learning process. No two repairs will be exactly the same, and additionally, takes on heightened risk when exposed to Northern elements—even the small river vessels used in Interior Alaska are paddled in glacier-fed water. This requires an accumulation of knowledge, notably revealed in Reynolds' biography, which describes an early age of tinkering and observing, along with being mentored upon arrival in Alaska in the 1970s.

Reynolds provided a few images of boat repair in process, some of which the designer used. However, when searching through the Alaska State Archives months after our conversation, I discovered an image of an over-wintering canoe, hull-side up, in the village of Bethel, which perfectly illustrated Reynolds' description of typical outdoor boat storage. Seeing this, it was

³⁷ Andy Reynolds, in a phone conversation with the author, July 8, 2020.

easy for me to understand the way snow melt will flow to the gunwales and stems, encouraging rot in this climate. Finding an image from 1950 and placing it adjacent to a contemporary conversation reveals how the craft of repair is situated firmly across generations of use and learning. Some of this learning comes from skilled practitioners, or through trial and error. The rest of it is handed over by an unyielding environment.

The last contributor featured is textile artist Eline Medbøe who also takes on a mentor role within a social practice focused on teaching clothing repair and sewing skills to children and families from low-income neighborhoods in urban Oslo. For many of her students, Norwegian is their second language, but under her guidance they gather under the common language of stitch.³⁸ Medbøe sees first-hand how repairing clothing becomes an accessible entry into the craft of repair, especially if the emphasis is on process rather than perfection or invisibility. In our conversation, she shared how young people new to repair sometimes feel intimidated by learning sewing skills, but when approaching the craft as an expression of their personality become excited by the prospect of reconfiguring clothing into “something new.”³⁹ Medbøe’s own textile work with layered, mended clothing as well as use of repair techniques in her installations pushes the simple cloth patch, darn and repeated stitch into commentary on global consumption, textile waste and overproduction by focusing on alternative processes of textile reuse and repair. I included her in this collection because of this studio approach to repair and social practice, which is not unlike mine. I, too, feel caring for clothing is an accessible entry to the craft of repair; the tools are inexpensive, and a few simple stitches and techniques can be taught efficiently, learned quickly, then just as quickly passed from that learner to the next.

³⁸ Eline Medbøe founded the non-profit, *RELOVE*, a grant-funded organization that ensures these classes remain free of charge.

³⁹ Eline Medbøe, in a Zoom conversation with the author, November 11, 2020.

Medbøe's work draws from personal history with repair, both emotional and literal, and the feelings that emerge from watching facets of this craft practice fall away over time. Even the word "*stopping*" ("darning" in Norwegian), is becoming a lost word, not merely a lost practice.⁴⁰ Images I chose from her body of work, *The Act of Mending*,⁴¹ feature the craft of repair in conversation with either a literal landscape (such as a repaired shirt made from linen grown in the area where the image was taken) or a conceptual one, such as the horizontal installation of large scale *stopping* featuring white *stopped* stockings and shadowy textile scraps placed beside a vertical, curtain-like landscape of domestic interior spaces. Providing a detail of heavily stitched denim jeans references this craft's relation to the body, and the labor-intensive quality of this craft process. This final image bookends the journal, an accompaniment to Allooloo's thimble and stitching on the cover. Ending with a more common type of mending provides a familiarity of process, but one that still resonates with Medbøe's concern for the environment as an underlying motivation.

Conclusion: Alternative Futures

In 2014, the local exhibition, *Gyre: The Plastic Ocean*, changed the behavior of my young family, and in part informed my own thoughts on repair and fostering a local repair culture through social practice.⁴² Working with the AM on this journal project was, for me, a continuation of a conversation started seven years ago. While this circularity wasn't obvious to

⁴⁰ Eline Medbøe, in a Zoom conversation with the author, November 11, 2020.

⁴¹ This work was part of her solo exhibition, *The Act of Mending*, at Soft Galleri in Oslo, Norway in October 2020.

⁴² I also spent 12 years in the clothing industry (1988-2000), which provided skills to teach sewing and repair, but also exposed me to immense waste in the ultimate throwaway culture of fast fashion.

me in the beginning, it is clear now writing about it at the end. This orientation to place informed the methodology for why I chose specific content for the *Chatter Marks* journal.⁴³ I looked for contributors with a sensitivity to their place within the North; chose objects with a connection to the land and lesser-told histories connected to the environment and materials within and with which they were repaired; located archival photographs of people engaged in the everyday place-based act of repair; sought artists seeking their own answers to the “why” as well as “how” of repair; included examples of generational exchange and learning through the way objects had been repaired or re-repaired; found connections between memory and the migratory nature of repair techniques that began to collapse distances and time in different parts of the Circumpolar North; looked for undercurrents of climate change and loss, but also actions based on tenacity, risk and hopeful futures of use. Over the course of this project, early intuition about the craft of repair where I live emerged as solid research themes and valid connections—“alternative knowledges” which can become the basis for “alternative ways of doing things.”⁴⁴

The application of personal narrative was also a driving factor for me when I chose these contributors. I wanted to see evidence of *their* everyday or personal histories in their writing or images, whether revealed through materials, description or memory. The craft of repair was once a central component of the everyday for many people, a set of tasks that were either mundane or disruptive, but vital to survival and prolonging use. Some of this is most vividly passed on

⁴³ Other exhibitions productive to shaping my methodological approach and influencing how to portray literal, emotional and cultural aspects to the craft of repair include *Fix Fix Fix*, curated by Glenn Adamson (2011) Gallery SO, London. <https://www.glennadamson.com/work/2017/7/20/fix-fix-fix>; *Mendable*, juried by Margrethe Loe Elde, Barbro Hernes, Svein Ove Kirkhorn and Ann Kristin Aas (August 29-October 11, 2020) House of Foundation, Moss, Norway. <https://norskekunsthåndverkere.no/aktuelt/nks-temautstilling-2020-her-er-utstillerne?fbclid=IwAR0G5kiFjoIWe6H1OHgLHMrkP7G3IY6DYV991weuOacRAxBn7txP1qsOIz4>; *What Do I Need to Do to Make it OK?* curated by Liz Cooper (2015) Pumphouse Gallery, London. <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/liz-cooper-video-interview-what-do-i-need-to-do-to-make-it-ok>; *I Craft, I Travel Light* (October 2016 - April 2017) Nord Norsk Kunst Museum, Tromsø, Norway, with programming in Russia and Norway. <http://icraftitravel.com>

⁴⁴ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 36.

through story. When considering craft futures, one strategy is to look to environments where climate change is experienced most drastically. The North is only one of these places. Globally, we face over-production, over-consumption and waste at all levels of industry, including craft. A first step towards altering this particular story means assessing the place our feet are planted and beginning to envision alternatives where we live. Craft practitioners, with their connection to materials, wide-ranging abilities and familiarity with generational mentorship roles of the past and present are well-suited to apply these repair skills to an uncertain future.

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⁴⁵ Chicago Style used is Turabian, 9th ed.

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