Reviewing American Quilts:
A Record of Women’s Political Engagement

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Abstract:

Scholarship and museum exhibitions value quilts as women’s craft that is separated from the public sphere of political activity. My paper argues that such treatment erroneously diminishes the significance of quilts as evidence of their makers’ participation in political and social movements of the day. To advance this argument, I use Robin Hodgkin’s linguistic theories to clarify how the representation of quilts in scholarship and in the exhibition “Partisan Pieces,” held at the Dallas Women’s Museum during 2008, distorts both the significance of quilts when they were made and their subsequent historical importance. I redress the exhibition’s interpretations with additional research on a quilt made by the abolitionist, Deborah Coates. I conclude that the treating quilts in ways that underscore their status as craft obscures their validity as historical artifacts attesting to their makers’ participation in American socio-political developments.
Introduction

The installation of quilts in the “Partisan Pieces” exhibition held at the Women’s Museum in Dallas, November 6, 2008 to March 29, 2009, did not provide viewers with information about the quilt makers’ participation in political history. Mostly, this occurred because the exhibition did not identify evidence in or relating to the actual quilts that would link them to political events or developments. Instead, “Partisan Pieces” exemplified how scholarship on quilts in educational and cultural contexts, such as museum exhibitions, generally treats quilts as works of craft lacking importance as artifacts representing a historical era and particular-political developments.

In this paper, I identify and clarify the situation by using the linguistic and educational methodology of the British education scholar, Robin Hodgkin. Hodgkin’s methodology combines educational philosophies with linguistic formulas in order to reveal how topics of dialogue on the subject matter of technology can be confused due to the use of imprecise language between the speaker or writer and their audience. In his essay, “Techne, Technology and Inventiveness” (Hodgkin 1990), Hodgkin uses dialogue to explore “technology” and recover a range of meanings belonging to it, which in recent years popular culture had diminished. In this case, Hodgkin explains dialogue by classifying the topic of a discussion that is misunderstood as techne, the understood context of the topic as technology, and the confused account as technism. I refer to Hodgkin’s analysis in order to underscore what I consider erroneous in the scholarly treatment of quilts. The treatment of quilts is not only problematic on its own but also as it equates quilts with craft and craft with women’s activity in the home. Historically, the life of women in the home occurred in a private sphere in distinction from the life of politics and society occurring in a public sphere. In this paper, I identify the prevailing treatment of quilts as
teche because I hold that the evaluation of the quilt as craft is a misunderstood account that prevails in scholarship and was pervasive in the “Partisan Pieces” exhibition, which serves as the technism. The exhibition’s presentation of the quilts does not illuminate their relationships to historical developments concurrent to the year or years when they were produced. Instead, it presents quilts as a craft by focusing on their manual construction and the makers’ gender. The longstanding pattern of this treatment in published scholarship about quilts omits energetic inquiry into the relationship of the maker to the quilt, and instead, regards quilts as if they were created by women due to a cultural reflex or as a byproduct of what women do. Treating the quilt like a craft, therefore, has a methodological effect of suppressing the significance of the quilt’s original context.

Then, I recuperate this context by analyzing the iconography of a particular quilt in regard to the history of one of its images. In this research and analysis of the abolitionist Deborah Coates’s quilt I reinterpret the status of quilt as techne. My interpretation of the quilt as a techne, an object that bears a sense of control for the maker, encourages the proposition that, in general, we can understand quilts as historical evidence of women’s political activity in the United States.

Methodology

Hodgkin’s education-based methodology helps me interpret the patterns of the quilt as they relate to political developments in American history. By “patterns,” I mean the arrangement of patches into a prescribed organized form to create a comprehensive collective composition. I correlate Hodgkin’s ideas with quilts by analyzing the treatment and consideration of quilts as craft in scholarship and in museum exhibitions. In other words, methodologically, I innovate by applying Hodgkin's treatment of “techne” and “technism” to content he did not consider, but
In my study, Hodgkin’s term “techne” corresponds to the quilt interpreted by its maker’s original function for it. According to Hodgkin, “technology” is the study of techne in relation to its original function in society, while “technism” is the modern presentation of techne (Hodgkin 1990, 290). Hodgkin analyzes the technism as the cause of a negative perspective towards the techne and its reception as the effect of this perspective to devalue the techne, by omitting the techne’s historical context. In Hodgkin’s argument, the technism is a manipulated portrayal from the object’s historical context. The reception of the technism is a reflection of this manipulated portrayal revealing that the technism does not mirror the object’s context or its makers’ original intention. In Hodgkin’s scenario, the devaluation of the techne occurs literally with the language of technology and its taboo perspective through a name change of an English public school program (Hodgkin 1990). The National Curriculum for England and Wales proposed to change the name for the technological education program from Craft Design Technology (CDT) to Design Technology (DT). The name changed was proposed because the craft term did not represent the entire curriculum encompassed by the program. In the article, Hodgkin analyzes the term technology and its root techne suggesting that technology alone is expansive as the craft object, its maker and the process the item came from a concept into a cultural product. Hodgkin examines the expansive qualities of the term in relation to its placement in early educational discourse as well as in comparison to the scientism field that overshadows its meaning by removing all connections to mechanical processes from technology. In my research, I similarly encountered the term craft and found its placement imprecise and suffocating since it alluded to all quilts as compositions of great stitchery and pattern omitting how the quilts represent their makers’ lives, cultures and histories.
References I make to Hodgkin’s concepts do not replicate the uses he makes of them. For one thing, I apply Hodgkin’s concept to quilts, which he does not study. Also, from Hodgkin’s paper, I specifically take up the distorted relationship between techne and technism. In my research, “techne” encompasses physical and visual aspects of the quilts – their compositions, patterns, colors, textures, patches, stitchery, images, and their iconography, including their associations with politics, while technism is the presentation of the quilts in the “Partisan Pieces” exhibition. I hold that the techne-technism relationship between the “artifactualness” of the quilts and their presentation demonstrates imprecise communication. It misunderstands their historical significance and what the significance may reveal about the lives of quilts’ makers.

Published scholarship, museum exhibitions and the craft status of quilts serve to educate the public about quilts’ validity in a historical context. This information is available in the museum’s spaces, and often it is provided, perhaps in abbreviated form, on the Internet. Hodgkin’s quotes Manfred Stanley stating that technism is the “perversion of technology” (Stanley 1978, 14), which implies that contemporary presentations of historical artifacts, as occurred in the “Partisan Pieces” exhibition, can present the historical artifact differently from its original context. This distorts the artifact’s actual purpose in light of its treatment in the representation and thus alters the viewer’s perception of the artifact’s place in history. In redress, I propose drawing upon art history, education, and linguistics to salvage the historical context in which the quilts were made and were meaningful. I introduce education into this argument because scholarship and museum exhibitions and museum’s uses of the Internet distribute prevailing ideas about quilts to the large audiences.

In what follows, my borrowing of Hodgkin’s terminology enables me to clarify inadequacies in the treatment of quilts as craft and their presentation as examples of craft in the
exhibition space. My analysis of the treatment of quilts in the “Partisan Pieces” exhibition at the Dallas Women’s Museum supports my usage of Hodgkin’s method and conclusion that the quilts are presented as a misconstrued entity that is not similar to its original techne and does not carry the same significances. In my analysis of quilts in the exhibition and in my research of Deborah Coates’s quilt I address the quilt’s iconography. In particular, I identify a particular feature as a discrete image having a storied context. Then, based on the iconography, I return to the quilt and propose that the quilt and its maker are linked to concurrent historical events. Thus, importantly, my research revisits a pattern in the scholarly treatment of a material artifact ultimately to contribute to appreciating women as participants in American history. Throughout American history, women have participated in the major political and social movements of their time, and an examination of artifacts of daily life in the home can support this.

Techne and Technism in Quilt Scholarship

The existing scholarship on quilts contextualizes them as part of the popular craft movement associated with women’s domestic life in the United States during the nineteenth century. The scholarship does not reveal or emphasize relationships between the maker and the world of political developments involving discrete or ongoing events. Instead, it takes the quilt from its techne-origin and assimilates it to belong to a different context. This occurs as conceptually, quilts are stripped of their historical and social context, and their significance is reduced to material, construction, and appearance.

An example is The American Quilt: A History of Cloth and Comfort 1750-1950. Kiracofe and Johnson(1993) survey the history of quilt production in the United States, which they do without going into the complex ways quilts contributed to their makers’ participation in historical events. In a review of The American Quilt, Patricia T. O’Conner describes it as “a
profusely illustrated survey that ingeniously weaves the threads of America’s social, political, economic and industrial history into the evolution of the quilt-making arts” (New York Times 1993, para. 4). In fact, the authors emphatically describe the quilt makers in reference to their female gender and domestic experience, separated from public activity (Kiracofe and Johnson 1993). The authors elaborate on the quilt as an object of women’s experience and, throughout the text, consistently place most emphasis on quilts’ formal features and construction. “In fascinating detail, ‘The American Quilt’ explains how the technological advances of the 19th century stimulated artistic innovation” (O’Conner 1993, para. 7) The bulk of The American Quilt is focused on the history of the quilt’s construction amplified by detailed information on the availability of textiles and the production and evolution of technologies related to quilt construction, such as sewing machines and mills (Kiracofe and Johnson 1993).

The book’s emphasis on formal aesthetics highlights quilt makers’ capabilities in stitchery while suppressing their quilt’s relevance to historical developments. As a result, materials, construction, and imagery constitute the key features and significance of the quilt, while its social and historical status is outlined as the relationship of the quilt to women as part of women’s culture. In Hodgkin’s method, the reduction of the significance of the quilt, would be considered technism. The maker and the quilt are disconnected from the social and political discourses of their time. Furthermore, the approach does not inquire into the importance of the quilt in relation to its maker and its purpose in regard to a potential social agenda; thus this approach suppresses the possible existence of the makers’ political engagement in the here and now and its connection with the future.

The scholarship on quilts omits perspectives that enable them to be viewed as anything but women’s craft. The status of quilts as craft is based on a scholarly focus on methods of
constructing a quilt that were common among women, as opposed to inquiring into the conceptual methods and ideological moorings of a quilt’s creation. This is not to suggest that the conceptual creation does not involve or relate to making aesthetic choices in regard to stitchery, patches and pattern. Rather, in question is how those choices related to social and political developments and historical events within the home and as home life related to social and political life. Putting those questions aside encourages the kind of exhibition treatment of quilts evident in the “Partisan Pieces” exhibition at the Women’s Museum in Dallas.

My argument that a focus on the formal features of a quilt as a method of presentation is a distortion from their historical context and erroneously diminishes their significance builds upon the quilt scholarship of Patricia Mainardi (1982), especially her article, “Quilts: The Great American Art”. In this article Mainardi introduces the issues of quilts’ significance to women, the relevance of quilts to the society of their time, and their treatment in the contemporary art world of the 1970’s. My work builds upon Mainardi’s argument against quilts’ treatment in the contemporary art world of the 1970’s. Mainardi argues that the contemporary art world dismisses the historical context in which the quilt was made and also dismisses women’s artistic merit from what counts as important art. The contemporary art world criticizes and compares the quilts of the past to a male-dominated genre of today. She specifically addresses this issue with her criticism of Jonathan Holstein’s catalogue essays for the American Pieced Quilts exhibition in the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971 and the Smithsonian in 1972. In her criticism of Holstein’s catalogue essay, Mainardi argues that Holstein’s focus on comparing the formal qualities of the quilt to modern formalism is irrelevant to the quilt’s context (Mainardi 1982). The “realized geometry of the pieced quilt, coupled with this sophisticated sense for the possibilities of color and form, produced such works which mirror in startling ways
contemporary painting trends (Holstein 1972, p. 13). Mainardi argues that emphasizing the formal qualities of quilts transposes them into something the male-dominated art world of the early 1970s can recognize; however, this conceptual maneuver does not tell us much about the makers or enlighten the public as to the quilt’s history and involvement in American society. She further criticizes Holstein’s essay: “he has turned the innovators into the followers and used the quilts to legitimize contemporary formalist painting, while managing to dismiss these women as artists at the same time” (Mainardi 1982, p. 344).

My criticism – that for too long, scholars have treated the domestic sphere as divorced from political and external events of the day – builds upon Marilyn Ferris Motz’s (1988) argument in “Introduction: Making the American Home,” which was published in Making the American Home: Middle Class Women and Domestic Material Culture. Motz argues that:

Decades of scholarship, following prevailing attitudes in our society, have placed a higher value on customary male activities. The creative domestic products and processes for which women traditionally have been responsible have been most commonly relegated to the devalued category of the merely decorative or functional. (Motz, 1988, p.2)

Motz mentions many scholars whose work contributes to a new perspective on domestic products and processes, such as Patricia Mainardi. Motz agrees with Mainardi’s conclusion that cultural processes and products historically associated with women have been discredited in regard to their artistic merit because they were evaluated and criticized according to a male standard of artistry that the women could not attain (Motz 1988). Both scholars’ work proposes the idea of a female aesthetic in which the works created by women of the past can be criticized and evaluated on a scale that takes into account the nature of women’s history and the context of
their lives. Mainardi and Motz introduce the critical issue that it is important to research and apply historical context in the evaluation and criticism of products and processes of women prior to the twenty-first century. Be that as it may, my argument builds upon these issues and I further the discussion by focusing on the importance of the historical context in the presentation of these products and processes in the museum space.

“Partisan Pieces”

In Dallas, the “Partisan Pieces” exhibition displayed 15 quilts. It was curated by the International Quilt Study Center and Museum, University of Nebraska in Lincoln. The 15 quilts cover about 200 years of women’s political expression, which includes expressing support for specific politicians and even presidents of the United States, from George Washington to Ronald Reagan.

The disharmonized relationship between techne and technism is relevant in this exhibition. During my visit to “Partisan Pieces,” I interpreted the museum’s method to inform the public of the quilt’s involvement in politics. The quilt was represented as a symbol of a tradition of well-constructed craft having a deep connection with a women’s culture and their untold histories. Hodgkin’s technism articulates the museum’s choice in methodology. That is, in what the museum promotes about the quilts, it diverges from their original function and context; the museum misconstrues the original techne. For example, the themes along which the exhibition was organized narrate the quilts into contexts different from their original historical ones. Interestingly, in doing so, the exhibition diverges from its own publicity, especially the way the museum advertised its treatment of the quilts in a brochure about the exhibition. The brochure advertises the exhibition as
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a sampling of the numerous ways women cast their vote, if not their ballot, in the years before suffrage. Rather than reading between the lines, you can read between the stitches to gain new insights into the minds and emotions of our founding mothers” (“Partisan Pieces” 2008).

However, as installed in the exhibition, labels narrated the significance of the quilts as involving craft and political affiliation, with the greater concentration on craft. The exhibition’s emphasis on the craft elements of the quilts rather than their political significance is problematic because it did not delve into the maker’s engagement in the political arena or consider the quilt’s significance as an indicator of this engagement.

For each quilt, the label consisted of a title and approximate date followed by an interpretive essay. The label alluded to the manual construction of the quilt such as with the makers’ skills at sewing and stitching and barely suggested the makers’ participation in the political development on their own quilt presented in the exhibition. Emphasis was also placed on formal similarities between the quilt in the exhibition and a quilt introduced via a small digital image. In other words, the exhibition was making comparisons between the quilts it displayed and existing quilts not displayed in the exhibition space. The comparisons emphasized the quilt’s most important function as a means of expression for women of the past that was adapted to the artist’s personal agenda. Much of the narrative part of the label emphasized the comparison. The quilts that were absent were created recently by artists who considered themselves more like fine artists who quilted than the quilters who made the quilts in the exhibition. The descriptions entailed that the commonality between the quilts in the exhibition and those they were compared with did not develop on the basis of politics but the maker’s gender and formal methods of expressing her political opinion. The craft status of the quilts is reinforced by a documentary
video that was included in the exhibition space. It focuses on the relationship between female
gender and quilt creation. It ignores the subject of relationships between the quilts and the
political arena.

For example, the label for the 1876 Centennial Commemorative, provided a slight
historical account that did not suggest any sense of the makers’ participation or authorship of the
quilt in relation to the quilt’s historical significance. The label had a minute description of the
quilt’s historical context. The label’s description indicated the quilt was created as a
commemorative for the nation on its 100th birthday. I found this label to be limiting because the
formal qualities of this quilt raised questions about American economy in the first 100 years, a
relationship between the economy and women, and women’s involvement with and perspective
towards it. The description was more so an elaboration of the quilt’s title than an inquiry into its
context. These conclusions are from the elaborate choice of textiles on the quilt. 1876 Centennial
Commemorative was approximately ninety by ninety inches covered by approximately hundreds
of small one-inch by one-inch square patches. The textiles are not repeated often, which indicates
a plentitude of textiles available to the maker, and this raises interesting questions regarding
access to textiles: what an abundance of particular types might mean in regard to the economic
progress of America during its first 100 years as a nation, and, how economic achievements and
ways of living in any class position involves negotiating resources that are available and
obtainable. Furthermore, the themes are interesting to consider in view of the fact that the quilt
was made for the Centennial, as indicated by the applied embroidery that reads, “Centennial
1776-1876.”

The second major theme of the exhibition is political affiliation and support. Its evidence
involves the images, dates and words on the quilts. The exhibition’s treatment of the two themes,
craft and political affiliation-support, emphatically represent the quilt as craft rather than as a form of political support even though it was otherwise advertised. This is evident by the large amount of craft-related information appearing on the labels that overshadowed the smaller amount of political-related information. The quilt’s meaning, as a product of the technism or modern presentation, is viewed as it is treated and valued as a craft rather than an indicator of women’s participation in the political arena.

**Recovering a Quilt’s Techne**

I recover the techne aspects of one particular quilt, an untitled quilt created in 1833 by abolitionist Deborah Coates. I researched the iconography of some of the imagery and the overall pattern. Then, I interpreted the iconography of one motif in particular and understood it, along with the pattern, to function in correspondence with the quilt and its maker’s historical context. I based my research on empirically examining the quilt’s formal aesthetics and by consulting secondary scholarship, such as *Hearts and Hands* (Ferrero 1987), *Quilts from the Civil War Era* (Brackman 1997), and *Hidden in Plain View* (Dobard and Tobin 1999). Unfortunately, these scholars’ research primarily analyzes the quilt in portions, such as only viewing the quilt’s pattern in relation to its arrangement of patches. Their research does not recognize the historical context that encouraged the maker’s to arrange the quilt patches in a pattern that functioned as more than aesthetic.

Formally, slave historians would not recognize the quilt as being involved in the Underground Railroad development. It does not have the formal aesthetics that are consistent with other quilts recognized as having served important functions for the abolitionist development. The reason is that the pattern on the quilt consists of hundreds of small triangle-patches appliquéd in cleanly sewn rows. During the nineteenth century this type of pattern
typically appeared on quilts created for decorative or traditional purposes, as explained in *The American Quilt* (Kiracofe and Johnson 1993). The patterns indicate the makers had the time and possibly a sewing machine to undertake the construction of such a complex composition (Kiracofe and Johnson 1993). Time and a sewing machine were not normally available to those who made quilts that functioned in the Underground Railroad. Quilts involved in the Underground Railroad development were not primarily created for aesthetic purposes. The patches were applied by hand and arranged into recognizable patterns that runaway slaves acknowledged as safe routes to their next destination along the path to freedom (Dobard and Tobin 1999). Therefore, many of the key characteristics of Deborah Coates’s quilt are not consistent with quilts of the Underground Railroad. Nevertheless, at least one feature invites consideration of the politics promoted by the quilt.

Chiefly, the politics involves Deborah Coates’s quilt functioning as a map to safe haven in the Underground Railroad development. The interpretation depends on the stitched tear in the middle of the quilt and the application of socio-political iconography to one of the small patches on the quilt (Ferrero 1987). *Hearts and Hand* transcribes oral histories from the Coates family indicating that Deborah’s husband was a prominent Quaker abolitionist, as well as one of the founders and president of the American Anti-Slavery society. Their home was recognized as a marker for runaway slaves. Deborah Coates’s two granddaughters inherited the quilt and split it into two equal halves. After the period of its original creation and use, the quilt was reconstructed with new materials that differed from the original. In the process a conservator pulled it apart and then noticed the oddity of one of the patches. The oddity of the patch is the application of a stamped icon that unlike all of the remaining patches on the quilt are merely variations of floral or striped prints. The stamped icon is a man, begging, on his knees wearing
shackles with text underneath. This icon is almost identical to a well known British anti-slavery icon, revealing that this quilt is more than just a piece of wall-decoration but was perhaps involved in the Underground Railroad or used as a device to encourage abolitionist sentiment in America. The combination of the oral stories, the familial affiliations to the American Anti-Slavery Association, and new notice of this patch invited an interpretation of the quilt in relation to abolition and a consideration of Deborah Coates as a participant (Ferrero 1987).

The quilt’s origins are discussed in three distinct texts, *Hearts and Hands* (Ferrero 1987), *Quilts from the Civil War Era* (Brackman 1997), and *Hidden in Plain View* (Dobard and Tobin 1999). Each attempts to discuss the maker’s original intention and the quilt’s role in abolition. In *Hearts and Hands*, the oral stories of the quilt and the story of the conservator finding the patch are documented with supporting imagery of the quilt and a close-up of the patch. In *Quilts from the Civil War Era*, author Barbara Brackman mentions the quilt in reference to its type of pattern, which she concludes is a variety of a sawtooth design. Brackman’s conclusion enables me to compare the Coates’s quilt with other quilts of the same pattern that are reproduced in *The American Quilt: A History of Cloth and Comfort 1750-1950* (Kiracofe and Johnson 1993). I was able to conclude that the patches on quilts of the Geese Flying pattern, from other quilts provided by the text, are typically of a similar fabric and color and are organized in one dominant direction. From this comparison, I propose that because the Deborah Coates’s quilt consists of patches that are not formally consistent with other nineteenth century quilts of the Geese Flying pattern, it functioned as something more than a pleasing pattern. Moreover, that its iconography can be liked to abolitionist history is supplemented by Raymond Dobard’s theory of the quilt’s history, as published in *Hidden in Plain View*. 
Dobard proposes that the quilt mapped a safe haven along the path to freedom for runaway slaves in the Underground Railroad. Dobard claims that the pattern is Geese Flying, and on this quilt the organization of the patches makes them seem like they are flying in an organized northward direction that is not consistent with the direction of the other patches. The subtle disharmony of the directional markers occurs in the top right corner. The visual evidence of the quilt’s unique revision of the popular pattern is supplemented with oral histories indicating it marked a safe point for runaway slaves. These theories point to the quilt being made by the abolitionist Deborah Coates for use in abolitionist contexts; however, none of this research discusses the significance of the relationship between the patch’s placement on the quilt and Deborah Coates’s involvement, or the patch’s historical context. Moreover, although in *Hearts and Hands* (1987) the author, Ferrero, focused on this quilt, he did not address how the elements complemented one another in regard to abolitionist themes.

**Iconography and Historical Context**

Scholars, such as Dobard, suggest the pattern is a map in the Underground Railroad because the patches in the top right corner are not uniform with the other quilt patches, so they can serve as indicators to a safe haven. Dobard emphasizes the quilt’s formal qualities as a reason the quilt’s many components work together. However, there is another component indicating that Coates’s quilt was made for an abolitionist context. I argue that the quilt functions effectively for the abolitionist development in the combination of the direction of the patches in the top right corner with this patch.

My research on the patch indicates it was initially an abolitionist icon for the London Committee of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, which has no formal relationship with the American abolitionist movement. The icon I am referring to was created by Josiah
Wedgewood in 1787 for the London Committee of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. It is an image of a shackled African slave begging. Wedgewood created the image in England to encourage abolitionist sympathy in the mass public during the late eighteenth century (Wood 2000).

*Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* reproduces Wedgewood’s icon, which is veritably identical to the image on the patch in Deborah Coates’ quilt. Both depict an African bent down in a begging, shackled gesture. Their only significant difference is that Wedgewood’s image is accompanied by text that reads, “*Am I not a man and a brother?*” (Wood 2000, 17), while the patch on Deborah Coates’s quilt reads, “*Deliver me from the oppression of man*” (Ferrero 1987, 70). While the former queries the nature of social confraternity, the latter is a directive or plea for safeguarding. A theme corresponding to the Underground Railroad is its status as a solution for the oppression of Africans into slavery that protected the slaves’ humanity by helping them to escape to lands where slavery did not exist, and they could be treated as freedman and individuals. Therefore, this icon and its accompanied text portray transnational-shared abolitionist sympathy between England and the United States from the hands of an American woman. Deborah Coates’s adapted the uses of a quilt to the needs of the American abolitionists that led to the eventual freedom of slaves from their bondage.

**Conclusion**

My application of a linguistic and educational methodology to clarify the status of the quilts as material artifacts also brought forth the tendency to treat them as craft belonging to gendered activity in locations not directly connected to the public spaces of political life, thus necessitating the need to establish new lines of inquiry. This research and my choice of
methodology indicate that further scholarship on quilts has the potential to expand our understanding of the ways they and their makers responded to if not participated in political situations of their day. Compared to my research of the Deborah Coates’s quilts as techne, the “Partisan Pieces” exhibition, insisting on the quilts as women’s craft, is a manipulated technism. Furthermore, it ignores the direction of quilt scholarship and material culture research to inquire about connections between private and public spaces and discourses. This builds on the expectation that material artifacts often participated historically in many discursive contexts, as I have suggested is the case with quilts made by women during the nineteenth century.
References


