**Positions Through Dialogue
Written Response**

Reflecting on conversations with Argentinian researcher Franca López Barbera from Argentina and Kazakhi-Kyrgyz designer Aisha Jandosova

The conversations with Franca and Aisha that I had bookended time spent away from my enquiry, not only in terms of when they occurred — Franca at the beginning of the summer and Aisha towards the end — but in terms of the positions of these two designers themselves, both sharing similar interests in their work but with distinct approaches.

Upon reflection (but also as expected), the idea of ‘decoloniality’ was what tied both conversations together, despite the fact that this (consciously) hasn’t been an *explicit* focus of my work thus far, yet was ironically one of the reasons I reached out to both Franca and Aisha, as I was aware of the fact that this is a key thread in their work. Perhaps I was feeling guilty of consciously ignoring it, or simply wanted to learn from different approaches.

In response to the previous brief in which I explored archiving two cricket bats, my conversation with Franca revolved primarily around considering more deeply the act of archiving itself. She pointed to Albena Yaneva’s *Crafting History*, which explores the relationship between architecture and archiving — how the latter forms the ‘epistemological basis’ of architecture’s history. Franca argued that there is an epistemic dimension to archiving — that critically reflecting on archive is an archival practice itself and can thus form new knowledge rather than simply catalogue what is already (physically) present. Similarly, she mentioned Bruno Latour and the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) which argues against a static and binary form of classification that ignores the shifting reality of the world, relating to the idea of material kinship that I have been exploring and the transfer of materials and knowledge through objects.

While discussing the actual content of my archiving — the bats — I argued that I knew that cricket as a whole, stems from colonial origins which I purposely ignored, as that wasn’t what the project was about. Here is perhaps where our views differed; Franca believed that there had to be a valid justification of excluding the colonial history from the work. After all, archives are always selective and exclusionary. She said that if I began with the question of ‘Why do I have this relationship with a bat?’ and keep pulling on that thread, I’d inevitably end up at colonisation. I still maintain my position, however, I think this could be a really effective means of progressing my enquiry by following these series of questions and seeing where it leads me, without a preconceived outcome.

By contrast, Aisha and I spoke about how decolonisation is present in her own practice through preserving or reclaiming ancestral knowledge and healing. One of the reasons I reached out to her in the first place was the similarity I saw in our work — she has been translating ornaments from traditional Kazakh textiles into a collection of handcut papercuts, beautiful objects in their own right but also a meaningful act of archiving (and producing) knowledge that hasn’t been accessible to generations before. Central to her work is the notion of ‘rexistencia’ — a combination of ‘resistance’ and ‘existence’ or rather, resisting coloniality by creating or remembering a new existence. She emphasised the importance of imagination — giving ourselves permission to imagine possible histories to fill in gaps of knowledge, thus creating ‘imperfect archives’. This is something I resonate strongly with and would be interested in exploring further with the bats, particularly the idea of speculative narratives, as my relationships or connection to the bats are limited to my own experiences, but certainly part of a wider collective (and possibly national) memory. Similarly, Aisha’s attitude of learning from both the source material (the original textiles) as well as the physical process of translating them through new material (papercuts and subsequent digitisation) is key to producing this new knowledge; she spoke of how some knowledge can only occur when you make with your hands. Analogue making is something that ties our practices together and I have tried to engage with in this unit so far, and I’d like to continue to explore that. For Aisha, reexistencia is a decolonial act in itself, and she argued that it’s up to us to decide the extent to which we want to address colonialism in our work. Implicitly or explicitly, both are valid.

Ultimately, I think my practice could benefit from both Franca’s and Aisha’s approaches. I’m still interested in the work I was doing with material kinship by exploring my relationship with the bats beyond the constraints of simply ‘sport’ (or rather, expanding the bounds of what sport constitutes). It could be interesting to position my personal experiences within the broader socio-political and cultural context of cricket, through the actor-network theory as there are many threads to pull on — import of the sport, transfers of materials, its role creation of a cultural identity as well as exchanges between colonies and the empire, for example. I feel there is a larger system at play that surpasses conventional ideas of what sport entails and it might be an idea to investigate, express and speculate on these further. Aisha also mentioned Sarah Marks’ theory of ‘haptic visuality’ as the forming of a continuum between the beholder and the beheld, as opposed to ‘optic visuality’ which positions objects as things to be viewed from a distance or interpreted by the viewer. Optical emphasises distinction, while haptic is more about bodily immersion with or responses to something. This is linked to Walter Bejamin’s notion of the ‘aura’ of an object, which has also driven my work so far. So, it seems that there remains this idea of image-making and closeness, which I can continue exploring and merge with the research on cricket?