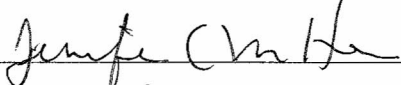
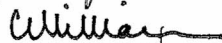
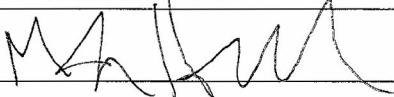
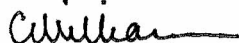
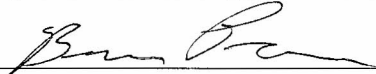
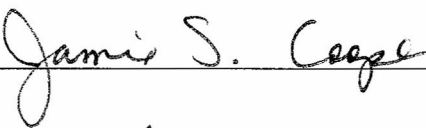
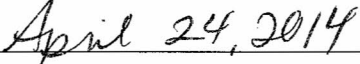


AMERICA CRAFTS:
THE CONTEMPORARY PURSUIT OF A HANDMADE MATERIAL LIFE

by

Gina Guzzon
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
History of Decorative Arts

Committee:

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America Crafts: The Contemporary Pursuit of A Handmade Material Life

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Lehigh University, 2009

Director: Jennifer Van Horn, Professor
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Spring Semester 2014
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my family, especially my female relatives. You are an inspiration in more ways than one, keep inspiring.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the personal interest, dedication, and expertise of both my thesis advisors, this endeavor would never have been possible. Jennifer, your nudges both big and small have helped me become a better student, thinker, and writer. Jeff, this would not have been written without your original intrigue over a class paper or without your continued enthusiasm over the past two years.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Figures	vii
Abstract	xi
Introduction.....	1
The State of a Crafting Nation	6
America’s History with Craft and Art.....	10
The Power of Contemporary Craft.....	14
Introduction: Figures	19
Chapter One: Crafting Movement’s Roots- <i>handmade’s history</i>	26
Americans’ Intellectual Relationship with Objects.....	28
The Hand-Touched Ideal: The Aesthetic of Contemporary Craft.....	31
Consumption of Morals and Moral Non-consumption	44
Chapter One: Figures	54
Chapter Two: Countercultural Craft- <i>the power of handmade</i>	69
Alternative Craft’s Universal Power	72
Beyond Art versus Craft.....	77
Product to Process: Craftivism for the Masses	82
Diversity in Craftivism.....	89
Chapter Two: Figures.....	96
Chapter Three: New Domesticity- <i>handmade craft and the home</i>	105
Old versus New	110
Why Women Craft: The Appeal of Hand-making in the Home	116
Modern Domestic Advice	126
Re-inscribing New Meanings on an Old Apron.....	132
Chapter Three: Figures.....	146
Chapter Four: Mainstreaming of Craft- <i>mechanizing handmade</i>	159
Craft’s Evolution Out of a Subculture.....	160
Marketing Craft as Pop Culture	172
The Impact of Craft’s Popularity	182
Chapter Four: Figures.....	192

Conclusion	221
Conclusion: Figures.....	231
References.....	242

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1: <i>Flora Charm Bracelet</i>	19
Figure 2: <i>Quirky Heirloom Throw</i>	19
Figure 3: <i>Hand-Loomed Diamond Pillow Cover – Feather Gray/Ivory</i>	20
Figure 4: <i>Fox Womens Grey</i>	20
Figure 5: <i>Hemp Embroidered Women's Classics</i>	21
Figure 6: <i>Hand Woven Bamboo/ Local Thai Basket</i>	21
Figure 7: <i>Trellis Drop Earrings</i>	22
Figure 8: <i>Spray Painted Console Table</i>	22
Figure 9: <i>Chalkboard paint mason jars</i>	23
Figure 10: <i>Custom Bench</i>	23
Figure 11: <i>Random Walnut Wine Rack</i>	24
Figure 12: <i>Bow Ties</i>	24
Figure 13: <i>Produce Bag</i>	25
Figure 14: <i>Vintage Thai Cloth Bag</i>	54
Figure 15: <i>Prada Slouchy Backpack</i>	55
Figure 16: <i>Vintage Louis Vuitton Monogram Alma Satchel</i>	55
Figure 17: <i>Peruvian Blue Opal Triangle Statement Necklace, Guitar String Hoop Earrings, Crystal Pyramid Ring</i>	56
Figure 18: <i>Godey's 'Plate 19. 1845, ';</i> 1870 Kimmel & Forster	57
Figure 19: <i>Vase</i>	58
Figure 20: <i>Josiah Wedgewood Jasperware Headboard</i>	59
Figure 21: <i>Gustavian Clock</i>	59
Figure 22: <i>Do it yourself x-stitch pattern and materials kit (home sweet home)</i>	60
Figure 23: <i>Library Table</i>	60
Figure 24: <i>Product label: Noble Goods</i>	61
Figure 25: <i>iMac computer</i>	61
Figure 26: <i>Jacquard Leaf Silk Pillow Cover</i>	62
Figure 27: <i>Better Homes and Gardens All-Over Ruffles Pillow</i>	62
Figure 28: <i>DIY Felt Circle Pillow</i>	63
Figure 29: <i>A Society of Patriotic Ladies</i>	64
Figure 30: <i>Nightshift Blue</i>	65
Figure 31: <i>Writing Arm Windsor Chair</i>	66
Figure 32: <i>362 Hastoe Windsor Chair</i>	67
Figure 33: <i>Hand-finished Stoneware Mixing Bowl</i>	67
Figure 34: <i>Handcarved Luca Dresser and Detail</i>	68
Figure 35: <i>DIY Tree Stump Sanding and Finished</i>	96
Figure 36: <i>The Reclaim Frame</i>	97
Figure 37: <i>Iggy Pop</i>	98
Figure 38: <i>Iggy Pop; Sampler</i>	99

Figure 39: <i>Tumblr post by Nora</i>	100
Figure 40: <i>La Llorona</i>	101
Figure 41: <i>Nike Blanket Petition</i>	102
Figure 42: <i>Yarnbombed Rocky statue, Philadelphia Museum of Art</i>	102
Figure 43: <i>Vintage Pillowcase Bag</i>	103
Figure 44: <i>Vintage Tap-Hook Towel Rack, Salvaged-Column Coat Tree</i>	104
Figure 45: <i>Ethical Bunting</i>	104
Figure 46: <i>Kitchen Cherry Courtney Apron</i>	146
Figure 47: <i>DIY Retro Apron</i>	147
Figure 48: <i>Ruffle Apron</i>	147
Figure 49: <i>Publicity photograph of Jessie Steele Inc. new Spring/Summer apron collection</i>	148
Figure 50: <i>"Crafts" section</i>	149
Figure 51: <i>Sweater Pillow</i>	150
Figure 52: <i>DIY vintage button and pin necklace</i>	150
Figure 53: <i>Vintage Lyre Table and Detail</i>	151
Figure 54: <i>Barn Wood Coffee Table</i>	151
Figure 55: <i>I'd Rather Be Thrifting</i>	152
Figure 56: <i>DIY Nautical Rope Ottoman</i>	153
Figure 57: <i>Cast Iron Bathtub Couch</i>	154
Figure 58: <i>Upcycled Hepplewhite Chair</i>	155
Figure 59: <i>Upcycled Sweater Dress Tutorial</i>	155
Figure 60: <i>Creative Clutter</i>	156
Figure 61: <i>Screen Shot from "About Us,"</i>	156
Figure 62: <i>Blurred edges of "DIY jewelry drawer; Magnified view of "DIY tags"; Lighting effect on "Doily Covered Lamp Shade"</i>	157
Figure 63: <i>Detail of "Sketchbook Project"; Detail of "fold-over clutch"; Detail of "Upholstery Button"</i>	157
Figure 64: <i>Lace Briefcase</i>	158
Figure 65: <i>Rack of Aprons</i>	192
Figure 66: <i>Sewing Basket Apron; Ruffle Apron</i>	193
Figure 67: <i>Natural Tree Stump Side Table; DIY Tree Stump</i>	193
Figure 68: <i>FEED USA + Target bag; Vintage Thai Cloth Bag</i>	194
Figure 69: <i>"Enjoy Napkin" at Anthropologie</i>	195
Figure 70: <i>Astrological Maps Bracelet</i>	196
Figure 71: <i>Children's Clothing</i>	196
Figure 72: <i>Magical Thinking One-Of-A-Kind Handmade Elephant Stamp Quilt</i>	197
Figure 73: <i>Magical Thinking Chevron Handmade Rug</i>	197
Figure 74: <i>Handmade 6' Mountain Boggan Sled</i>	198
Figure 75: <i>Duck Tape Wallet</i>	199
Figure 76: <i>"40 Under 40" Embroidery</i>	199
Figure 77: <i>Hokanson-Dix vendor stall</i>	200
Figure 78: <i>Gathered Goods- Indian Clutches- Akash</i>	201
Figure 79: <i>Aiden Sunglass Pouch; Luxe Orchid Key Fob; Rye Market Tote</i>	201

Figure 80: <i>Cardboard Chandelier</i>	202
Figure 81: <i>Cardboard Deer Head</i>	203
Figure 82: <i>Waterfall Spiral Mason Jar Chandelier; Mason Jar Pendant Light</i>	204
Figure 83: <i>Jelly Jar Lights; Mason Jar Light</i>	204
Figure 84: <i>DIY Mason Jar Lantern; Doily Luminaries; Mason Jar Solar Light</i>	205
Figure 85: <i>Mason Jar Shaker</i>	205
Figure 86: <i>Blue Ball Glass Mason Jar iPhone Case</i>	206
Figure 87: <i>Chalkboard Back-splash; Chalkboard Painted Stairs; Chalkboard Coffee Table</i>	207
Figure 88: <i>Chalkboard Wine Bottles; Chalkboard Garland; Chalkboard Place Cards</i>	207
Figure 89: <i>Chalkboard Fonts; Chalkboard Printable; Antique Framed Chalkboard Print</i>	208
Figure 90: <i>iWoody Chalkboard “iPhone”</i>	209
Figure 91: <i>Chalkboard Paint Refrigerator</i>	210
Figure 92: <i>Chalkboard Cabinet</i>	211
Figure 93: <i>Lost Art of Hand Lettering</i>	212
Figure 94: <i>Anthropologie Ordinal Dresser</i>	213
Figure 95: <i>Anthro Knock-Off Before & After</i>	213
Figure 96: <i>Burlap Bunny Banner; DIY crystal flower lattice necklace; DIY rope chandelier</i>	214
Figure 97: <i>Outdoor Happy Easter Flag; Crystal Necklace; Rope Chandelier</i>	214
Figure 98: <i>Blox 35x63 dining table</i>	215
Figure 99: <i>Rope Hooks- White; Wire Mesh Storage- Laundry Caddy; Glass Jar Pendant-Milk</i>	215
Figure 100: <i>Metal + Wood Console Table</i>	216
Figure 101: <i>Better Homes and Gardens Rustic Country Antiqued Black/Pine Panel TV Stand</i>	217
Figure 102: <i>Accent Table With Rope Handle - Natural; Woven Jute Bench – Multicolored</i>	218
Figure 103: <i>Stoneware Chalk Canister Collection; Embroidered Bird Toss Pillow; Artisan Glass Jug Lamp Base Small - Ancient Aqua</i>	218
Figure 104: <i>Ikat Toss Pillow</i>	219
Figure 105: <i>Threshold Mug- Holiday Light Blue</i>	220
Figure 106: <i>Flour Sack Cake Towel Set</i>	220
Figure 107: <i>Screen Shot of “A Song for Portland”</i>	231
Figure 108: <i>Songbird Chandelier</i>	232
Figure 109: <i>Bird Bowls; Lace Bird Clock</i>	232
Figure 110: <i>Flour Sack Plate Towel Set, Flour Sack Bowl Towel Set, Flour Sack Cake Towel Set</i>	233
Figure 111: <i>Alvine Flora Cushion Pillow Cover + Duck Feather Insert</i>	233
Figure 112: <i>Stars in my beard - mambo sun/trex embroidery</i>	234
Figure 113: <i>Upcycled T Shirt Statement Necklace</i>	234
Figure 114: <i>The Chunky Cowl Scarf”; Open Netted Eternity Scarf</i>	235
Figure 115: <i>Pond Scum Amoeba Necklace</i>	236

Figure 116: <i>Chicken Poncho</i>	236
Figure 117: <i>Wreath Pinstrocity</i>	237
Figure 118: <i>Yarn Easter Eggs Craft Fail</i>	238
Figure 119: <i>Failed Melted Crayon Art</i>	239
Figure 120: <i>LISEL Plastic-coated fabric, wood effect, light brown</i>	240
Figure 121: <i>Scarf-making Machine</i>	240
Figure 122: <i>Upcycled Jar Candle Holder / Vase - Recycled Home Decor - Lace Knit - Yellow - Recycled Cotton</i>	241

ABSTRACT

AMERICA CRAFTS: THE CONTEMPORARY PURSUIT OF A HANDMADE MATERIAL LIFE

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George Mason University, 2014

Primary Thesis Director: Dr. Jennifer Van Horn

Secondary Thesis Director: Dr. M. Jeffrey Hardwick

This thesis charts the resurgence of handmade craft in the contemporary “Do-It-Yourself” (DIY) movement illuminating its connections to past design movements. Similar to its American predecessors of past centuries, today’s pursuit of handmade objects is a significant and monumental movement that promotes moral reform and promises a better planet, an improved nation, and a happier individual. By examining handmade crafts and mass-produced crafty-looking objects, this thesis develops a new understanding of why this type of decorative art has gained mainstream popularity. Studying both the production and consumption of this movement uncovers why material culture is formed and how it is used in contemporary American society.

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-seven year old Zoe walks down 14th Street on a sunny Saturday afternoon, purchases in hand, basket on one arm, fedora shielding her eyes. She has just picked up some locally-grown organic produce at the “14th & U Street” farmers market after browsing the stalls at District Flea. On her way to meet fellow Hill-staffer friends for midday brunch at Pearl Dive, Zoe appears to embody a somewhat typical twenty-something urbanite of Washington, D.C. Even more symbolic, is the level to which Zoe has participated in a nationwide movement, simply by following an ordinary Saturday morning routine. In the course of one day, Zoe purchases, consumes, promotes, displays, and politicizes handmade material objects; she is a prominent and powerful promoter of this movement, of the handmade culture surging through America.

From the For The Makers bracelet (Figure 1) she slipped on this morning, to the crocheted Anthropologie quilt (Figure 2) and hand-loomed West Elm pillows (Figure 3) placed on her bed before leaving her apartment, Zoe steps through her day interacting with a material world that glorifies all things handmade.¹ After dressing in the screen-printed t-shirt she purchased last week at Crafty Bastards (Figure 4), she grabs a scarf she

¹ “Flora Charm Bracelet,” *For the Makers*, accessed October 11, 2013, <https://www.forthemakers.com/tutorials/flora-charm-bracelet>; “Quirky Heirloom Throw,” *Anthropologie*, accessed October 11, 2013, http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/home-bed-outfits/993345.jsp?cm_sp=Fluid-_-993345-_-Regular_12; “Solid Silk Hand Loomed Pillow Cover- Blue Teal,” *West Elm*, accessed October 11, 2013, <http://www.westelm.com/products/solid-silk-hand-loomed-pillow-cover-blue-teal-t826/>.

knit during her daily commutes on the metro last winter.² She slips on her Toms shoes (Figure 5), finds her hand-woven bamboo basket she purchased on Etsy (Figure 6), and complements her bracelet by adding the earrings she just made from the mail-order DIY kit (Figure 7).³ Snatching her keys off the vintage console table she learned how to refurbish from Pinterest pins last spring (Figure 8), Zoe walks out her door only to touch and associate with additional aspects of this current state of material culture.

District Flea teems with visitors this crisp October day as Zoe passes the Me and Phoebe stall where she bought a mason-jar, which had been painted with chalkboard-paint on the front (Figure 9), as a housewarming gift for a friend.⁴ After spying a bench made from reclaimed bowling alley wood with a hand-built steel base that was on sale at Carbon Industrial Design's stall (Figure 10), Zoe wanders over to get a cup of coffee from the tent that Vigilante Coffee Company has set up.⁵ While watching them handcraft her freshly ground, pour-over coffee, she spies a wine bottle holder at a nearby stall (Figure 11). She soon finds that besides the wine rack, all the wares at Dylan Design Co. are handmade, sourced from local materials, and are a stunning mix of raw wood, steel, and chrome. Zoe buys the black walnut wine rack from the Baltimore-based furniture

² "LOYALTY & BLOOD at the 2013 Crafty Bastards Arts & Crafts Fair," *Washington City Paper*, accessed October 11, 2013, <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/craftybastards/vendors/show/1461>.

³ "Trellis Drop Earrings," *For the Makers*, accessed October 11, 2013, <https://www.forthemakers.com/tutorials/trellis-drop-earrings>; "WeavingCircle- Etsy Basket," *Etsy*, accessed October 10, 2013, http://www.etsy.com/shop/WeavingCircle?utm_source=OpenGraph&utm_medium=PageTools&utm_campaign=Share.

⁴ "Vendor Preview: Me and Phoebe," *District Flea*, n.d., <http://districtflea.com/2013/09/vendor-preview-me-and-pheobe/>.

⁵ "Reusable Produce Bag Hand Printed With Drawstring 12x16 - GMO OMG WTF Are We Eating," *Etsy*, accessed October 11, 2013, http://www.etsy.com/listing/100740953/reusable-produce-bag-hand-printed-with?utm_source=OpenGraph&utm_medium=PageTools&utm_campaign=Share.

maker and leaves the purchase of Brownbelle’s eye-catching bowties made from vintage neck-ties (Figure 12) for next week’s visit to District Flea.

At the “14th and U Street” farmers market, Zoe’s eyes feast on the array of colors provided by the likes of eggplant, yellow squash, and fresh bright-green herbs. Hand-churned apple butter accompanies locally-grown and organic Brussels sprouts in Zoe’s basket. She places a handful of local mushrooms in her small, reusable, cloth produce-bag as she jokes with the vendor who notices the “GMO, OMG, WTF” which has been hand-printed on the front (Figure 13). She pays, leaves the market, and basks in the sun on her walk down the newly-energized 14th Street corridor. She passes restaurants, bars, and shops, not necessarily taking in the theme of these cultural establishments which surround her—hand-touched. Over the past year, this stretch of land has exploded with new construction, both residential and retail, with many stores promoting home furnishings and housewares and almost all steering clear of a “freshly built” appearance.⁶ Eateries add to the “Main Street” feel of the blocks, many of which are outfitted in a simple, raw, and rustic aesthetic. As Zoe walks into Pearl Dive to meet her friends for brunch, she is dutifully greeted by weathered floorboards and vintage-like décor, in fact most of the establishment is decked out in reclaimed and refurbished materials.⁷ After ordering her area-harvested Chesapeake oyster appetizer and French Omelet made with local farm eggs, Zoe sits back, munching on made-from-scratch cornbread muffins, pausing in the middle of an average, ordinary, D.C.-weekend outing.

⁶ Amanda Abrams, “In Washington, 14th Street N.W. Attracts Upscale Developers,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/02/realestate/commercial/in-washington-14th-street-nw-attracts-upscale-developers.html>.

⁷ “Pearl Dive- Thank You,” *Pearl Dive Oyster Palace*, n.d., <http://www.pearldivedc.com/thank-you/>.

There are currently many young women who could substitute as Zoe in and around Washington, D.C., yet Zoe herself is a fictional creation; Zoe's *world*, however, is a materialized reality. Each market, restaurant, and handmade object Zoe encountered in this vignette is very much concrete and in existence. As a narrative device, Zoe and her weekend-adventure illustrate the degree to which contemporary American material culture is saturated with all things 'handmade.' Over the past decade, America has evolved into a nation that publically celebrates the making of products by hand, her citizens fueled by diverse reasons but united in their effort to improve their lifestyles. Reflecting on the past few years alone, the ethos of a handmade life emerges as a widely adopted aspect of mainstream culture. A snapshot of Zoe's world illustrates a remarkably different material composition than that of her mother's, or even than the physical surroundings in which Zoe grew up. This narrative therefore, helps demonstrate a profound shift in contemporary culture.

America is crafting. America is picking up glue guns, pulling the trigger on staple guns, and becoming acquainted with the coarseness and grain of burlap and linen. America is getting her hands dirty, she is sowing seeds, sewing buttons, and learning how to do-it-herself. She is resourcefully turning mason-jars into chandeliers, tree-stumps into living room stools, and piles of old t-shirts into necklaces, handbags, and quilts of handmade love. America is *making* in a way that she hasn't before, esteeming the glories of goopy mod-podge through digital outlets and reviving the "lost arts" via virtual pin-

boards.⁸ America is riding the wave of a craft renaissance, a rebirth of dependence on her own two hands for security and fulfillment. Although ever in search for her next batch of craft materials, in reality, she is in pursuit of a handcrafted material life.

The establishment of an innovative high-tech society in the twenty-first century has, somewhat paradoxically, led to a return of making by hand; achievements in technology have provided a reason to conceptually reframe production and ironically also the means to enact a low-tech movement. As the twentieth century came to a close, Americans were swarmed with high-tech gadgets and methods of communication, changing the ways we interact with each other, ourselves, and our physical spaces. To many, the increase in virtual reality brought a deficit in the reality of our physical world. However, technology's ability to digitally connect individuals ultimately assisted in the return to handmade goods by promoting and spreading this lifestyle by means of websites, blogs, apps, and other virtual avenues of communication. This current return to handmade is by no means the first time that Americans have turned from a surge of technology towards a more low-tech ideal; the nation has a cyclical history of embracing and then rejecting technological innovations in favor of handicraft. Whether deemed "Handmade 2.0" by the *New York Times*, turned into a television show title, "Handmade Revolution," used as the subject of a critically-acclaimed documentary named, "Handmade Nation," or pasted in countless blog titles such as "Dear Handmade Life," this attitude and approach to living is recognizable in a dazzling array of forms.⁹ In

⁸ Pilar Guzman to Gina Guzzon (email), "The American Made Movement," July 11, 2013.

⁹ Rob Walker, "Handmade 2.0," *The New York Times*, December 16, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/magazine/16Crafts-t.html>; "BBC Two - Paul Martin's Handmade Revolution," *BBC*, accessed October 13, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01nd2pt>; Faythe

essence, the rising interest in handmade materials, and the lifestyle that is associated with ‘do-it-yourself’ (DIY) mentality, has emerged as a concrete *movement* in contemporary society. This movement represents a new era of material culture because now, *America* crafts.

The State of a Crafting Nation

A foreign-press publication provided an international outlook on DIY stating, “Americans unabashedly love three things: their food, their freedom and a football league the rest of the world hates – but damn it if a nice handcrafted crafting project doesn't come in a close fourth.”¹⁰ With crafting as the DIY-of-choice, the handmade movement has been promoted and sustained mostly by individuals in their twenties and thirties. Labeled by cultural commentators as “twenty-somethings” and “thirty-somethings,” these participants have emerged as the tastemakers and spokespersons for a widespread handmade culture that transcends easy boundaries to intersect with changes in foodways, politics, and the economy.¹¹ From artisan markets and restaurants using ‘old-fashioned’ or “retro” methods of production, to from-scratch cupcakes, craft breweries, and canned mason-jar goodies, the dominant theme of American food culture popularized by this

Levine, *Handmade Nation*, documentary, 2009, <http://handmadenationmovie.com/>; “About Dear Handmade Life - Living + Working from Scratch,” *Dear Handmade Life*, accessed October 13, 2013, <http://dearhandmadelife.com/about-dear-handmade-life/>.

¹⁰ Katie Rogers, “Joselyn Hughes: The Comedian Turning DIY Projects into YouTube Gold,” *The Guardian*, October 2, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/oct/02/joselyn-hughes-status-update>.

¹¹ Emma Green, “Fiftysomethings Reflect on Twentysomethings,” *The Atlantic*, July 3, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/events/archive/2013/07/fiftysomethings-reflect-on-twentysomethings/277518/>.

generation, is none other than—handmade.¹² These twenty and thirty-somethings have also turned to handcrafting their careers as a more personalized, highly fulfilling occupational path, and thus freedom in job mobility, has become prized over a regular paycheck and one-career goals.¹³ Millennials therefore, also known as Generation Y, embrace the dictum: “craft the life you want.”¹⁴ So why do so many twenty and thirty-somethings seem to be taking so many things, literally, into their own hands? What power is hidden in the handmade and what does a handmade life promise to Millennials that they cannot find in another lifestyle?

The handmade renaissance is a true ‘rebirth,’ reviving traditional methods and resuscitating old-fashioned ways of living. Energized by a “back-to-the-land” spirit, Americans are now turning *back* to lifestyles that counteract typical mainstream societal norms, marking them as “alternative” or “independent” behaviors.¹⁵ This “youth movement” is crafting these lifestyles as reactions to the current state of unease that proliferated in previous decades; the 2000s and early 2010s brought significant societal changes in this country from shifting international crises to internal domestic reform.¹⁶

¹² Tim Carman, “Pickle Producers Ride a New Wave,” *The Washington Post*, May 1, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/pickle-producers-ride-a-new-wave/2013/04/30/2e0dd314-a94a-11e2-a8e2-5b98cb59187f_story.html.

¹³ “Millennials: The Multi-Taskers,” *RELEVANT Magazine*, accessed October 13, 2013, <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/current/millennials-multi-taskers>.

¹⁴ “Fresh Wisdom,” *Freshwisdomonline.com*, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.freshwisdomonline.com>.

¹⁵ For a further reading on the alternative and independent aspects of the movement, see: Faythe Levine, *Handmade Nation: The Rise of DIY, Art, Craft, and Design* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008); “back-to-the-land” references 1960s mentality noted in: T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 95.

¹⁶ Henry Alford, “How I Became a Hipster,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/02/fashion/williamsburg.html>.

This “era of anxiety” has led many Americans to search for alternative means of security and fulfillment beyond the public realm.¹⁷ In truth, many individuals no longer see the outside world as a means to gain the life they hope for: the successful, prosperous, rewarding life, known as the “American dream.”¹⁸ Amidst the Great Recession, concerns over national security and the government, publicizing of global warming, and increasingly high-tech and impersonal workplaces, American anxieties have been steadily on the rise. Emily Matchar charts this burgeoning outlook among America’s middle-class in her book, *Homeward Bound*, where she claims many are “longing for a more authentic, meaningful life in an economically and environmentally uncertain world.”¹⁹ A handmade lifestyle therefore, with its prescription for a more satisfying and meaningful life, promises to quell such anxieties that other facets of modern life have seemingly jeopardized.

The DIY revolution and the rise of contemporary craft in America have been well documented, especially alongside studies of Generation Y’s impact upon the current American mindset. Nonetheless scholars have yet to fully explain the pervasiveness of this movement or its ideological power. In particular, the material products of the craft revolution have not yet sparked analysis from a material culture perspective. This thesis will hold these two goals in tension: analyzing the creation and consumption of craft

¹⁷ Emily Matchar, *Homeward Bound: Why Women Are Embracing the New Domesticity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 11.

¹⁸ “Watch Out, ‘American Dream,’ There’s A New Dream In Town... And New Shopper Needs To Go With It - Shopper Culture,” accessed April 1, 2014, <http://shopperculture.integer.com/2014/02/watch-out-american-dream-theres-a-new-dream-in-town-and-new-shopper-needs-to-go-with-it.html>.

¹⁹ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 5.

while seeking to understand both the object and the action.²⁰ The object, a *craft*, or finished piece of materialized creativity, usually connotes the requirement of both skill and manual ability. The action, *crafting*, expresses the act of creating, making, generating, being creative. Making a piece of creative artistry therefore, implies both tangible and ephemeral ability. It is not the act alone, nor simply the isolated object, that is embedded with creativity and meaning. Building upon scholarship which situates crafts as artistic *objects* and upon examinations on the importance of doing the *act* of crafting yourself, this study will examine both, to prove that layers of meaning constitute the construction of a handmade material life. Furthermore the pursuit of such a lifestyle does not necessarily denote achievement of a state, but rather often a continual seeking-out of desires. Through the interaction with material objects and through conscious choices about the state of their creation, one can achieve a successful pursuit without ever having to reach a complete, handmade-materialized life. By looking at handmade crafts and crafted-looking objects, the sources that spread and promote them, and the individuals who interact with these, this thesis will provide a new understanding of why this type of decorative art has gained mainstream popularity. For it was not only the knitting needles, glue guns, and sequins that “launched crafting out of the sewing room and into the mainstream,” but also society’s thirst for authenticity and truth, through these old-fashioned, handmade ways.²¹

²⁰ For importance of action, regarding the movement, see: Matchar, *Homeward Bound*; Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008.

²¹ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 3.

America's History with Craft and Art

Understanding handmade crafts as a piece of contemporary material culture is vital to capturing the story of this thriving movement. Situating them within the trajectory of decorative arts is an important step which adds to the value of these handmade products. Although now often positioned as inimical fields of study, craft was actually introduced within the study of the history of decorative art, linking these two areas through the beauty that functional products could possess.²² In a 1916 essay, Edwin Blashfield wrote, “*decorative art is the art of embellishing the background of life*. It is the art of making necessary things beautiful [italics added].”²³ As relevant today as it was a hundred years ago, these opening lines of his essay titled, “A Definition of Decorative Art,” provides a historical reference point for viewing a decorative art such as a handmade craft. Blashfield, one of America’s most prominent muralists, has “embellished” countless public spaces from towering state capitols, to grand cathedrals, to the celebrated dome of the Library of Congress.²⁴ Never content with simply painting his piece in isolation, Blashfield was instead often deeply involved with the entire building’s creation. He worked closely with architects, designers, investors, laborers, and other artists to generate a cohesiveness to his decorative artwork. He understood that the act of “using design, form, color, to render more pleasing our buildings, clothing, furniture, utensils, in sum, our general surroundings,” was in fact, an art. The idea of

²² For the Aesthetic reform aspect to the introduction and context of “craft” see: Lears, *No Place of Grace*; for discourse on historic ideation of decorative art as central to idea of art, see "Preface" of: Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Temple University Press, 1986).

²³ Mural Painters, *The Brochure of the Mural Painters: A National Society Founded 1895* (The National Society, 1916), 7.

²⁴ For biographical scholarship on Blashfield, see: Mina Rieur Weiner and Anne Day, *Edwin Howland Blashfield: Master American Muralist* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009).

gesamtkunstwerk was certainly a turn of the twentieth century idea, but has resurfaced in the twenty-first, even if as an unconscious means to generating a romantic notion of harmony and accord within *and* beyond the walls of one's home.²⁵

How often do we stop to look at the embellishments of the background of life, to acknowledge the beauty in the necessary things? If ancient buildings and historical clothing, furniture, and utensils have been studied as artistic entities for decades, then why is there a disconnect between the study of art from the past and the study of the art outside of museums in contemporary America? The best and most unique, if any at all, have ended up in the cannon of decorative art analysis, but the study of the history of decorative art reveals that design, style, and societal values are reflective in all objects of the everyday.²⁶ A full, complete analysis of the background, conceptualized through the understanding of material culture, is the next step in understanding the history of decorative art. More than a sum of trends in materials and techniques, design history addresses the underlying motivations and priorities of society whether during fads of streamlined simplicity or infatuations with overly-textiled parlors.²⁷ An understanding of the material jet, for example, is only complete when the knowledge of its brittleness and delicate structure is coupled with the knowledge that many have prized it for being

²⁵ Noël Riley, *The Elements of Design: A Practical Encyclopedia of the Decorative Arts from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 300, 307.

²⁶ For traditional views towards decorative art history, degree of importance, and similar viewpoints towards design history in a larger art history context, see: Edgar de Noailles Mayhew and Minor Myers Jr, *A Documentary History of American Interiors: From the Colonial Era to 1915* (Scribner, 1980); Riley, *The Elements of Design*; Victor Margolin, *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1989).

²⁷ For the understanding of design scholarship prior to 1990 see, Margolin, *Design Discourse*; Penny Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture: 1900 to the Present* (Routledge, 2004).

talismanic in nature.²⁸ Combining materials and techniques with society's current values gives scholars a better grasp on the 'how' and 'why' of our past through the history of design. Studying decorative art therefore, and building upon the perception of design via *objects*, becomes much more tangible than simply following trends and patterns; using a material culture approach with base materials, finished pieces of furniture, and kitchen utensils brings the background to the foreground. This paper will shed light on the background embellishments currently decorating our spaces: the ornamentation of our clothes, the beautification of tables and chairs, the way we enhance the aesthetics of our homes. Objects of the everyday are far from unexceptional, commonplace artifacts to overlook and ignore.²⁹ Rather, these objects, infused with design as they are, have the vital role of ensuring "that people's need and desires (whether consciously acknowledged or not) are met... [ultimately] help[ing] us define who we are."³⁰

Can history be studied in the present tense? Studying material culture allows discoveries of connections between the past and the present, but can studying objects in contemporary society help us better understand the historical past? Does observing the mobility of such everyday material within society as they maneuver from one set of hands to the next enlighten our understanding of material culture more profoundly? Studying the material culture of today does in fact add richness to the understanding of both the history of things and the future of materiality. Americans in particular, live in a

²⁸ Lucy Trench, *Materials & Techniques in the Decorative Arts: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), vii.

²⁹ For the a major work on the significance of everyday objects, see: Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, (New York, NY: B. Blackwell, 1987); Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward, *Blue Jeans: The Art of the Ordinary* (University of California Press, 2012).

³⁰ Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture*, 2.

material world and always have, even prior to the nineteenth century's Industrial Revolution or even the eighteenth century's Consumer Revolution. Understanding physical history is just as vital as understanding the intellectual history of a culture. Spotlighting the handmade craft movement and the impact it currently has on society allows a fragment of American material culture to be featured in the now, therefore adding to our understanding of the relationship between people and things.³¹

Within this craft movement analysis, more traditional decorative art pieces will be replaced with current handmade objects. Where Duncan Phyfe chairs have been studied for their societal value and impact on neoclassicism, hand-hewn, raw wood stools made in 2012 will replace them as objects of analysis.³² Etsy infinity scarves and handmade embroideries made within the past decade will undergo the same scholarly treatment as an 1880s Worth gown or a tweed Chanel suit-jacket from the middle of the twentieth century.³³ This paper will continue the conversation surrounding the history of decorative art by focusing on those everyday objects which have been crafted into today's culture of handmade.

³¹ In-depth anthologies referenced for their history and evolution of craft include: Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2010); Peter Dormer, *The Culture of Craft* (Manchester University Press, 1997).

³² John T. Kirk, *American Furniture: Understanding Styles, Construction, and Quality* (Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 135–136.

³³ For examples of Worth and Chanel, see The Costume Institute Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; for scholarly discourse on objects of fashion, see: Harold Koda, *100 Dresses: The Costume Institute / The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Yale University Press, 2010).

The Power of Contemporary Craft

Choosing *crafts* as the subject of this thesis, creates a lens through which to focus this immeasurable handmade movement. Martha Stewart recently concurred that, “from Spokane to Savannah, communities are choosing Main Street over super-malls—supporting small businesses or handmade goods and contributing to the Maker Movement.”³⁴ The movement has spread nationwide, impacting different realms of society. From social events to cityscapes, to environmental initiatives, gender role transformations, and even the increasing presence of household chicken coops, this movement now touches and influences many different aspects of American society. Craft has reached into the homes, eateries, civic centers, and both urban and rural spaces of this country in the twenty-first century. By no means can each and every aspect of the return to handmade be addressed in this thesis. Instead thematic chapters will introduce a constellation of objects each of which help to answer the question of why the effect of hand-contact is so highly valued in today’s society for its ability to create concrete objects.

This thesis will use crafts to chart economic trends and priorities, including the rise in small-businesses, yet will not be a commentary on the business culture that has arisen from the increase in handmade crafts.³⁵ Similarly, the term “crafts” has been

³⁴ Martha Stewart, American Made to Gina Guzzon (email), “The American Made Market,” October 23, 2013.

³⁵For crafts as a new economic enterprise, see: Kari Chapin, *The Handmade Marketplace* (Storey Publishing, 2010); Walker, “Handmade 2.0”; Kelly Rand, Christine Ernest, and Jaime Zollars, *Handmade to Sell: Hello Craft’s Guide to Owning, Running, and Growing Your Crafty Biz* (New York: Potter Craft, 2012).

historically and markedly tied to the female gender.³⁶ I intend to explain the totality of women's experiences within the handmade craft movement, but aim to keep the analysis centered on the objects women use; these objects will precipitate discussion of feminism and gender roles in the twenty-first century. Lastly, other publications choose to view this return to crafting in light of the artists who initiated new designs, products, and opinions.³⁷ While acknowledging the impact these advocates had on the birth of the handmade movement, this thesis will move beyond the artists. It will develop and extend the topic into the formation and maturation of an actual movement, for 'movement' can be defined as a *group* action that creates a *social* change. A thorough examination requires a complete analysis of all those who make up that powerful group: the artists, the non-artists, the professionals, the amateurs, the successful, the unprofitable, the intentional, and the subconscious participators. Together, through their interaction with crafting, actual crafts, and craft-like objects, they promote the advancement of shared ideas.

In fact, the term "movement," originating from the Latin word *movere*, or "to move," indicates a certain shared motion or shift, notably in thought or ideas.³⁸ Oxford English Dictionary defines *movement* as "a group of people working towards a shared...

³⁶ Gillian Elinor, *Women and Craft* (London: Virago, 1987); For craft as "women's work," see: Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America*, xii; For a primary source take on the most recent cultural perceptions of women and craft, see both: Betsy Greer, *Knitting for Good!: A Guide to Creating Personal, Social, and Political Change, Stitch by Stitch* (Shambhala Publications, 2008), 14; Shannon Hayes, *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2010).

³⁷ For artist-centric publications, see: Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008; Amy Spencer, *The Crafter Culture Handbook* (Marion Boyars Publishers, Incorporated, 2007); Olivier Dupon, *The New Artisans: Handmade Designs for Contemporary Living* (Thames & Hudson, Limited, 2011).

³⁸ "Movement," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed March 30, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/123031>.

political, social, or artistic objective.”³⁹ Craft goods have gained mainstream popularity in contemporary America, because of the shared belief in their ability to carrying meaning and act as agents of change. As opposed to other aspects of material culture, crafts are unique in that they are both charged with internal meaning and yet play a vital role in the creation of a meaningful life. The physical qualities of contemporary craft are intertwined with their intrinsic attributes, making them powerful players in our world today. Most importantly, current crafts hold a tension that other material products of society do not; crafts are inherently about creation *and* consumption, producing *and* using, mechanical output *and* personal absorption. Crafts are simultaneously able to stand for one’s active performance of societal beliefs and another’s passive participation within the same movement. It is this mutability of meaning that allows crafts to be seen as tools of activism, feminism, or as a general life-reformer. By juxtaposing handmade craft against machine-made by-products of society, the characteristics of these crafts are highlighted, making their flexibility and dexterity of meaning more pronounced and powerful.

The wanderlust that twenty-first century crafts possess is an undeniable characteristic of this type of decorative art. Their flexibility extends into mobility as crafts of today travel across America from artists’ hands to screen-print-lovers’ t-shirt drawers, from junkyard heaps to remodeled living rooms and kitchens. They enter into a cycle of mobility where they are overturned, reused, made, or remade, constantly generating creativity. Whether recycled, up-cycled, or newly added to the cycle, the crafts of today are more ambulatory in design than the crafts of prior years. Their ability to

³⁹ Ibid.

move and reach, whether physically across the nation or virtually on blogs and cyber-corkboards, is a critical reason that America is now in the midst of a revival of handmade objects. In essence, the *movement* of craft has enabled the viability of the handmade *movement*.

Set within this larger handmade culture, crafting's mobility helped it claim its place as a means of transformation and reform for many twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings. Technology clearly has a role in mobilizing craft, connecting producers and consumers nationwide, and spreading craft's ideals and promises. Crafters can create their own websites to promote and sell their goods or they can easily join the profitable online marketplace, Etsy, and sell their goods next to eighteen million other items listed on the site.⁴⁰ With the site's gross merchandise sales reaching upwards of 1.35 billion dollars in 2013, participation on Etsy has become somewhat of a prerequisite for those who sell crafts.⁴¹ The popularity of social media is equally responsible for spreading the crafting aesthetic, as Facebook, YouTube, and most recently, Pinterest, connect not only people, but also their ideas, their plans, their crafts.

It is this power of portability, mutability, and ability to hold tension which has fueled crafts as the material game-changers of the twenty-first century, engendering DIY with renewed authority and ultimately, crafts as agents of improvement. Crafts' power to affect morality and to reform or modify current living habits are the reasons they are

⁴⁰ "Etsy - Press," *Etsy*, accessed October 10, 2013, http://www.etsy.com/press?ref=ft_press.

⁴¹ Liz Stinson, "Why Etsy's Future Depends on Redefining 'Handmade' | Design," *WIRED*, April 9, 2014, <http://www.wired.com/2014/04/why-etsys-future-depends-on-leaving-behind-the-simply-handmade/>.

symbols of the handmade movement. Handmade crafts promise individuals a better planet, a better home, a better life. An examination of these promises and thus of the contemporary crafting movement's wide appeal follows. First, contemporary craft's intellectual roots will be considered, as a proper understanding of how crafting culture was previously generated is vital to the story. The focus will then move to the initial game-changers, radicals, and counter-culturists who, with cries of 'craftivism,' spoke of the initial powers of craft. Politically-charged crafters, crafts, and their sources still make up a vital section of moral crafters today. The group of individuals who largely consume this rhetoric and take to spreading the movement by doing-it-themselves, are largely of the female demographic. With women carrying on crafting through personalized action and with renewed fervor, these mainly domestic crafts bring female work within the home into the spotlight once again. Lastly, the focus will center on the crafting movement's entrance into the mainstream. Examination will include how these crafts became marketed and adopted, how they gained widespread popularity, and ultimately how America entered into the mechanization of handmade.

Introduction: Figures



Figure 1: *Flora Charm Bracelet*, c. 2013. “Field Guide Collection,” For the Makers (image in the public domain), <https://www.forthemakers.com/shop/products/147>.



Figure 2: *Quirky Heirloom Throw*, c. 2013. Anthropologie (image in the public domain), <http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/home-bedding/993345.jsp>.



Figure 3: *Hand-Loomed Diamond Pillow Cover – Feather Gray/Ivory*, c. 2014. West Elm (image in the public domain), http://www.westelm.com/products/hand-loomed-diamond-pillow-cover-feather-gray-ivory-t1138/?cm_src=PIPRecentView.



Figure 4: *Fox Womens Grey T-shirt*, c. 2014. Gnome Enterprises (image in the public domain), <http://www.gnomeenterprises.com/product/fox-womens-grey>.



Figure 5: *Hemp Embroidered Women's Classics*, c. 2014. TOMS (image in the public domain), <http://www.toms.com/womens/shoes/classics/embroidered-women-s-classics/s>.



Figure 6: *Hand Woven Bamboo/ Local Thai Basket*, c. 2014. WeavingCircle, Etsy (image in the public domain), <https://www.etsy.com/transaction/165098346>.



Figure 7: *Trellis Drop Earrings*, c. 2013. "Field Guide Collection," For The Makers (image in the public domain), <https://www.forthemakers.com/tutorials/trellis-drop-earrings>.



Figure 8: *Spray Painted Console Table*, 9 October 2013. Kate Riley, "Spray Painting Furniture (Revisited)," Centsational Girl blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.centsationalgirl.com/2013/10/spray-painting-furniture-revisited/#more-37665>.



Figure 9: *Chalkboard paint mason jars*, 24 January 2010. MeandPhoebe, Flickr (image in the public domain), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/meandphoebe/8889543780/in/photostream/>.



Figure 10: *Custom Bench*, 8 February 2012. Carbon Industrial Design (image in the public domain), <http://carbonindustrial.com/products/custom-lane-wood-bench>.



Figure 11: *Random Walnut Wine Rack*, c. 2013. Dylan Design Co. (image in the public domain), <http://www.dylandesigncompany.com/product/walter-walnut-wine-rack>.



Figure 12: *Bow Ties*, c. 2013. Brownbelle (image in the public domain), <http://www.brownbelle.com/2013/09/brownbelle-at-district-flea-saturday.html>.



Figure 13: *Produce Bag*, c. 2014. HandmadeLaConner, Etsy (image in the public domain), https://www.etsy.com/listing/177768977/gmo-omg-wtf-produce-bag?ref=shop_home_active_16.

CHAPTER ONE: Crafting Movement's Roots- *handmade's history*

A blue tote bag hangs against an exposed brick wall, next to a rack of Native American inspired rugs, some old leather belts, and a few dusty books (Figure 14). This handmade bag, approximately 12 inches by 18 inches, hangs next to two sister-like bags which seem equally “worn in and waiting to tell you their story.”⁴² These new handmade products fit seamlessly into the vintage décor they surround; they look as though they are just as weathered and worn as their fellow antiques. Nestled in Greenpoint (Brooklyn, New York’s newest hip neighborhood), is Bklyn Curated, vintage store and purveyor of household goods. The shop’s mid-century modern clocks, old peeling posters, and frosted antique glass bottles, are sprinkled with an assortment of handmade goods, mixing old-fashioned and modern in a seamless appeal. These handmade goods are new products, which are handcrafted by local artisans, and created to have a highly specific aesthetic – *hand-touched*.⁴³

This trendy blue bag appears opposed in every way to what Americans consumed a decade or two ago. Fashionable urbanites in the 1990s and early 2000s toted black “parachute-nylon” drawstring backpacks with thin straps, various zip pockets, and silver

⁴² “Local Finds — Bklyn Curated in Brooklyn, New York ~,” *Krrb Blog*, accessed October 23, 2013, <http://blog.krrb.com/2013/06/24/local-finds-bklyn-curated-in-brooklyn-new-york/>.

⁴³ The term “hand-touched” has been casually used to describe things such as the aesthetic of popular clothing brands and individual artist’s work, but I suggest it’s applicability to the entire craft movement; “Free People Opening First South Florida Stores, at Dadeland Mall and on Collins Avenue in Miami Beach,” *The Miami Herald*, accessed March 30, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/15/3872323/free-people-opening-first-south.html>; “Brooke DeLorme,” *Portland, Maine*, accessed March 30, 2014, <http://liveworkportland.org/people/featured/brooke-delorme>.

metallic tuck-lock clasps (Figure 15), some form of a damier-like, monogram-patterned carry-all (Figure 16), or perhaps a lower-priced, non-labeled version of either.⁴⁴ Bklyn Curated's hip, \$295 'it-bag' of today is aptly tagged as "vintage thai cloth, batik cloth, horse reins, copper rivet, suade bottom."⁴⁵ While the top three-quarters of the bag emanate rawness and imperfection from the coarse-grained Thai and batik cloth, the smoothness of the suede bottom creates a worn-in warmth and familiarity. The romantic appeal of the cracked leather straps are emphasized by the label's description which states they originated from horses' reins. The slight unevenness to the deep-orange, jagged stitch, which rides a vertical strip along the edge of the bag, picks up the golden tones of the shining copper rivets, appropriately dinged and worn. Rough edges, visible rivets, raw materials, evidence of hand-altered irregularities, these are all prized qualities in many of today's decorative artworks and household furnishings. Looking to the past and adhering to a "return-to-our-roots" approach however, is not new in practice.⁴⁶ In fact, this idea has been continuously repeated throughout American design history within a cyclical pattern.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "It Bags," *Voguepedia*, Turning Points, n.d., http://www.vogue.com/voguepedia/It_Bags; Eric Wilson, "Is This It for the It Bag?," *The New York Times*, November 1, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/01/fashion/01BAGS.html>.

⁴⁵ "RIGG Bag," Product Label, October 18, 2013 (Brklyn Curated, Brooklyn, New York).

⁴⁶ Along with "back-to-our-roots," this phrase is utilized by many cultural commentators, including: Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 150.

⁴⁷ This loosely references Hegel's notion of evolution and sequence, for the current state is contextualized within a pattern, yet distinctly separate from prior states of design history; For Hegelian nature of history, see: Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History's History* (Prentice Hall PTR, 1994), 93–101; Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, 19–34; For importance of change verses stability narrative, see: Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 15–21.

Americans' Intellectual Relationship with Objects

Understanding how design has cycled and evolved over the past two hundred and fifty years is a vital piece in the story of today's celebration of craft. In comparison to documenting our past through traditional literary means, design and by extension art, provides another avenue through which to ascertain society's prominent values and interests. In *Objects of Desire*, a text which chronicles the formation of product design and how it is reflective of society's values, author Adrian Forty quantifies the importance of design in understanding cultural history. Forty states that design, by nature, "has much more enduring effects than the ephemeral products of the media because it can cast ideas about who we are and how we should behave into permanent and tangible forms."⁴⁸ Seeing the development of artistic and social movements through the material culture of that period puts a physicality to the beliefs each movement established and promoted. From the eighteenth century's love of Greek revival through the late twentieth century's cyber-style, the physical design of material products have reflected the prominent values of that historic period of time. Products such as clothing, furniture, and lighting fixtures, in essence the materiality of a household, are a case study of not only personal expression, but of societal norms, values, and situational habits.⁴⁹ Equally, products circulating within a society actively shape and transform consumer beliefs, establishing

⁴⁸ Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 6.

⁴⁹ For a specific case study of the utilization of objects as both personal and social expression, see: Miller and Woodward, *Blue Jeans*.

popular tastes, priorities, and habits.⁵⁰ Herein lies the ‘power’ of decorative art objects, they are both an “agent and a mirror of change.”⁵¹

Applying a certain aesthetic to a chair, textile, vase, or piece of clothing is intended to convey a message, one that the producer hopes consumers will desire.⁵² From the cabinetmaker of the American colonies who crafted Windsor chairs in his workshop to the Vice President of Product Design and Development for Target’s 2013 “Threshold” collection, designers generate products with desirable physicality.⁵³ But an object’s desirability is not ever determined solely by its formal qualities, for consumers to demand an item they also require that concrete values and beliefs be *attached* to the design. At one level our Thai and batik cloth bag, for example, is purchased to tote necessities; the selection of *this* bag however, can also be attributed to the appeal of the generative quality of the cloth, leather, and rivets, which link physical qualities to larger social trends or styles. The bag’s utilitarian characteristics are obvious, but what makes it a valuable article is its ability to initiate social commentary for the producer and the consumer. Tracing the production of design therefore, reveals not only a history of aesthetics, but also the corresponding alterations in social norms and values. Particularly important for understanding the current craft revolution is attention to Americans’ relationship with their own history and future. Charting historical events reveals how

⁵⁰ Object’s ability to (re)generate, influence, and shape is analyzed in: Leora Auslander, “Regeneration Through the Everyday? Clothing, Architecture and Furniture in Revolutionary Paris,” *Art History* 28, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 227–47.

⁵¹ Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture*, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵³ “Behind the Bullseye: Julie Guggemos Talks the Research of Design,” *A Bullseye View: Behind the Scenes at Target*, September 5, 2012, <http://www.abullseyeview.com/2012/09/target-video-julie-guggemos-talks-research-of-design/>.

Americans created objects based in traditions which glorified the past. Similarly, futuristic and avant-garde objects have fueled Americans' embrace of progress and technological advancements.⁵⁴

This chapter places the current craft movement in the tradition of past American social and artistic movements to uncover craft's ties to past reform movements. As with prior design revolutions, contemporary crafters impose morality through consumption and select material goods for their use in reforming society. Crafters too adopt a framework of ethical consumerism, a form of politicized consumption, also with a long history in America. What distinguishes this new movement, is contemporary craft's ability to bridge producer and consumer. By emphasizing the importance behind the creation of goods and ideas and the simultaneous consumption of products and beliefs, craft has successfully merged past aesthetics and methods within a technologically advanced and socially communicative culture in a way previously unseen in American history. Contemporary craft ties material production and consumption with the highly politicized belief that what you produce, how you consume, and even the direct act of not consuming, are powerful avenues towards reforming your life and improving your planet.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The concept of design shaping culture during times of progress, is covered in: Jeffrey Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design In America 1925-1939* (Temple University Press, 2010); also see "Modernism" and "Space Age" chapters in: Riley, *The Elements of Design*.

⁵⁵ For a contemporary analysis of the rise of identity formation through consumerism, see: Rob Walker, *Buying in: The Secret Dialogue between What We Buy and Who We Are* (New York: Random House, 2009); David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001); Bryant Simon, *Everything but the Coffee: Learning about America from Starbucks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

The Hand-Touched Ideal: The Aesthetic of Contemporary Craft

The idea of a hand-touched aesthetic signifies both physical attributes and intangible, cultural perception. An object which looks hand-touched has been altered by the human hand in some recognizable way, either in creation or usage, but also connotes that alteration by hand humanizes and in some way improves the object. The current popularity of the contemporary craft movement aesthetic represents the triumph of the hand-touched look. Physically, these objects are defined by certain formal qualities that are visible in the blue Brklyn Curated tote-bag; they often have visible construction, make use of raw materials, and have a highly tactile appeal. Moreover, many point to past American traditions of hand-crafted goods, proposing that historical associations add validity to these contemporary objects. Three distinct abstract qualities emerge as the motivating factors behind this physically diverse yet distinctive aesthetic: uniqueness, authenticity, and integrity.

Of these the pursuit of *uniqueness* is the most important quality that unites these shockingly diverse objects. From small local boutiques to artists' pages on Etsy and from Boston's Bazaar Bizarre to Los Angeles's Renegade Craft Fair, millions of objects exhibit features which mark them as distinct when in comparison to each other and even to other aspects of material culture. For instance, although similar to the thirty-two other stalls also selling jewelry at the 2013 Brooklyn Renegade Craft Fair, Nikki Peterson's Beach Bones Jewelry was distinct from the other jewelry for sale in the historic old bank building in Brooklyn, NY (Figure 17).⁵⁶ Because she and her fellow crafters made their

⁵⁶ Erin Dollar to Gina Guzzon (email), "Brooklyn Renegade fair question," December 3, 2013.

objects by hand, it would be virtually impossible for two pieces to look exactly alike. This individuality of crafted objects has kept goods for sale on Etsy, which now number over twenty million in total, in constant and increasing demand. Even Etsy's mission statement highlights the importance of individuality in crafted products as it now includes the phrase, "a marketplace where people...buy and sell unique goods."⁵⁷

The extent to which each object is hand-touched varies greatly. The creation of some of these crafts involve a certain degree of industrial or digital manufacture.⁵⁸ More important than the actual level of hand production is the appearance of individuality and a hand-touched aesthetic. Interestingly, this fascination with hand-touched objects also helps to explain the concurrent popularity of *vintage* decorative art objects. The natural wear occasioned by prior use of vintage or antique material goods signifies previous hand contact, and thus unique manipulation, by human hands. Uniqueness therefore, is often a quality perceived in the object by a consumer, as handmade products are frequently one of a kind creations, but vintage-inspired, handmade-looking products utilize a means of tactics to simulate a hand-touched appearance. The distinction however, is less important than the aim of contemporary craft products, to maintain a level of exceptionality through imperfection, for imperfection implies non-mechanical creation. It is the "consumer craving for novelty, for the unique, the special, [which] seems unquenchable," regardless of the specific form it materializes into.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ "Etsy - About," *Etsy*, accessed December 14, 2013, <http://www.etsy.com/about>.

⁵⁸ This idea is discussed further in this thesis in Chapter Four: Mainstreaming of Craft.

⁵⁹ Walker, "Handmade 2.0."

Contemporary designers and artists create ‘unique’ products with the intention of making them distinct from goods that have a production-line appearance. Comments from artists like “as the world becomes more and more homogeneous, handmade things become more precious,” show a commitment that echoes artistic reformers in American design history.⁶⁰ Reformers in the nineteenth century blamed the Industrial Revolution for generating an aesthetic characterized by “poor design,” which became synonymous with commercially produced furnishings.⁶¹ Influenced by English Arts and Crafts reformers such as William Morris and John Ruskin, American artists and producers opposed the over-ornamented material products of the Victorian era and recognized handmade goods as distinct from machine-made.⁶² New technology, such as creation of the sewing machine in the 1850s for example, had altered form and ornament in innovative ways (Figure 18). Patterns and increased mechanization led to a more unified appearance, making individuality within each garment less of a physical attribute. Therefore, the praise of distinctiveness in the nineteenth century came to be outlined in direct relation to its machine-made counterpart; being *crafted* by human hands, at least in part, defined what it meant to produce a unique object. Craft, “created as an absence” is then more of a modern notion rather than a long-existing aspect to how handmade products were systematized within American history.⁶³

⁶⁰ Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008, 80.

⁶¹ Kevin W. Tucker, *Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement* (Texas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2010), 22.

⁶² For a American perspective on the Arts & Crafts movement and the varying motives behind it, see: Tucker, *Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement*.

⁶³ Glenn Adamson, “Goodbye Craft” (presented at “Nation Building: Craft and Contemporary American Culture,” Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, November 8, 2012).

Adherents to the Arts and Crafts movement, on both sides of the Atlantic, undertook this task of styling a piece of furniture, such as a table, to look separate from its machine-made counterpoints. These reforms and their accompanying rhetoric helped to form the notion of crafted objects as unique, which continues to significantly impact crafts in the twenty-first century. Originating in England, Arts and Crafts designers such as Richard Redgrave and Charles Eastlake professed the degradation of art by the machine and the superior taste of products created by hand.⁶⁴ In his 1868, *Hints on Household Taste*, Eastlake avowed “every lady recognizes the superiority of hand-made.”⁶⁵ This assertion of the supremacy of hand-crafted objects underlines the larger argument that the use of technology generated a very different, and in this case, inferior aesthetic. In today’s handmade movement, this sentiment is repeated; rather than glorifying the advancements that new technology has brought to society, many have turned away from man-made materials and the cookie-cutter look of production line manufacturing. Products with a mechanized, ready-made aesthetic gained ground in the mid-twentieth century with the boom of post-war manufacturing. This continued to grow, so that by the end of the century, the shopping experience was marked as one of department stores, suburban malls, and Walmarts.⁶⁶ With popular authors of the twenty-first century newly stating “as a society, we seem to have lost the connection with our makers,” a shift in sentiment resonates the nineteenth century’s American Arts and Crafts

⁶⁴ Forty, *Objects of Desire*, 49.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁶ For an understanding of Walmart’s impact on consumer mentality in early twenty-first century, see: Charles Fishman, *The Wal-Mart Effect: How the World’s Most Powerful Company Really Works--and How It’s Transforming the American Economy* (Penguin, 2006).

call to “make art join hands with commerce.”⁶⁷ This widely shared sentiment reaffirms that makers are individuals who the consumer can and should know. Martha Stewart also affirmed “it’s the same with pretty much everything, I would rather eat off of a dish that somebody made by hand than something mass-produced.”⁶⁸ Stewart indicates that not only the act of purchasing, but also the use of that product upholds the notion of hand-crafted goods as better than mass-produced. This joins the using, or that act of consuming, with the object’s creation in new ways.

The mechanization of production during the nineteenth century was directly connected to the look of products and the goal of reformers, ultimately generating a desire among many Americans to abstain from technology in the twenty-first. Gustav Stickley, one of the chief shapers of Arts and Crafts ideology in America, owned the United Crafts furniture workshop, later Craftsman Workshop, and published the influential magazine, *The Craftsman* (1901-1916).⁶⁹ In it he wrote,

Originally intended to make simpler and easier the doing of necessary things...the introduction of machinery with its train of attendant evils has so complicated and befuddled our standards of living that we have less and less time for enjoyment and growth.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Jennifer Causey, *Brooklyn Makers: Food, Design, Craft, and Other Scenes from a Tactile Life*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 11; Glassie, *Material Culture*; Tucker, *Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement*, 22.

⁶⁸ Martha Stewart, “‘American Made’ with Martha Stewart” (Lecture presented at the Smithsonian Craft Show, National Building Museum, April 25, 2013).

⁶⁹ For a comprehensive study on Gustav Stickley and his influence, see: Tucker, *Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement*.

⁷⁰ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 69.

Stickley's idea that the recent surge in technology generated negative side effects echoes in contemporary crafters' discussions, now extended to digital devices. With the internet available at every moment, through numerous screens both large and small, Americans have become concerned about the increased demand for individuals to stay connected.⁷¹ Adam Gazzaley, a neuroscientist at the University of California, San Francisco, explains, "We are exposing our brains to an environment and asking them to do things we weren't necessarily evolved to do...we know already there are consequences."⁷² Such rapid and drastic increases in technology, as Stickley wrote in 1906, often result in the loss of down-time, personal creativity, and pleasure; once again crafting with your hands is the valorous resolution. The late nineteenth century's concerns with hysteria and its prescriptions to practice consumption as a way to cure personal ills resonates with twenty-first century physicians' apprehensions; crafting is seen as not only a tool of reformation, but an antidote to a disconnected, unimpassioned, over digitized personal life.⁷³ Crafting's medicinal powers have been touted by members of the contemporary craft movement and extended into issues as wide-ranging as marketplace practices. Though not all explicitly state it, artists and consumers frequently imply that progress in manufacturing and advancements in market production have led to a world where big-business has mushroomed into an over-bearing authority. Taking stock of the current

⁷¹ For a current discussion on the various effects of digital connection upon family life, career aspirations, and personal hobbies, see: Matchar, *Homeward Bound*.

⁷² Matt Richtel, "Attached to Technology and Paying a Price," *The New York Times*, June 6, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/07/technology/07brain.html>.

⁷³ For nineteenth century discussion on mental condition, see "Part Three: The Hysterical Woman," in: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

state of the market, and what consistent development and growth now signify, has directed influential figures such as Martha Stewart to join in, hailing entrepreneurial makers who choose to craft instead of climbing the corporate ladder and laudably choose “Main Street over mini-malls.”⁷⁴

Antimodernist though this may sound, nineteenth century Americans expressed this hesitation toward technology as well. For them it was more a realization of modern culture’s “limitations and contradictions [and] its failure to live up to its claim of perpetual progress and perfect autonomy,” rather than a direct backlash against machines, as historian T. J. Jackson Lears has argued.⁷⁵ Numerous authors have addressed the current state of unease that permeates the twenty-first century, describing similar perceptions about the limits and failures of the government, the economy, the environment, and the marketplace.⁷⁶ From this unease comes a desire among crafters and consumers to achieve a communal state of trustworthiness thought to be lacking from outside public sources. In essence, the quality of *authenticity* has surfaced as an attribute of crafts and handmade products today. Authenticity emerges as a sought-after characteristic because it stands for credibility and legitimacy that consumers perceive to be missing elsewhere in society. Rather, genuineness and reliability are found through the creation of solid, tangible objects and generated by the individual crafters—who are often magnanimously labeled as “the salt of the earth.”⁷⁷ Etsy’s original mission statement made similar claims of nobility, arguing that crafters are adding the “heart” back into the

⁷⁴ Guzman to Guzzon, “The American Made Movement.”

⁷⁵ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 26.

⁷⁶ See Introduction of this thesis, Chapter Two: Countercultural Craft and: Matchar, *Homeward Bound*.

⁷⁷ Stewart, “‘American Made’ with Martha Stewart.”

marketplace and changing commerce by making things more balanced and fair.⁷⁸ Though utopian in cast, descriptions like these encourage burgeoning crafters, shape consumers through marketing, and undoubtedly appeal to individuals who are already looking for a truer, more ‘authentic’ way to live.

The idea of authenticity has been employed at various times in American history by designers, marketers, and producers who share a yearning for stability and grounding in an unstable world. Design has reflected, through the material culture of that era, this quest of the ‘authentic.’ For example, neoclassicism in the late eighteenth century involved a search for a “true style,” which was then sourced from history which provided much needed traditions.⁷⁹ American craftsman and artists in the post-colonial period, looked back, not towards their own devoid history, but towards the traditions of ancient civilizations, mimicking the grandeur of the past, specifically a triumphant and solid, antiquarian past. Having a connection with Greek and Roman civilizations allowed the new republic of America to link itself with stability and power; in an appreciation of classical form such as urns, columns, and cameos, America sold fast-growing progress to an apprehensive nation (Figure 19). During an unstable time of growth for the American people, the “rediscovery of a lost craft of antiquity,” such as cameos helped decorative artwork to be profitably sold.⁸⁰ Echoing the phrase almost entirely, Martha Stewart’s 2013 “American Made” event awarded a maker who reprised “a lost art form”; the idea

⁷⁸ “Etsy - About.”

⁷⁹ Riley, *The Elements of Design*, 126.

⁸⁰Forty, *Objects of Desire*, 27; For the state of material culture in the early republic of America, see: Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2011); David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

of reviving the crafts of the parents and grandparents of Generation Y is not only applauded but also awarded in today's society.⁸¹ Also in 2013, Design Sponge (well-known blog) contributor, Amy Azzarito, published *Past and Present*, a book which chooses twenty-four historic decorative art moments and offers twenty-four DIY projects inspired by them (Figure 20).⁸² A nod to traditions of the past (Figure 21), this book also revives styles and materials along with authentic techniques such as wood-blocking or weaving.

Likewise, the theme 'authenticity' was a prominent motif for commentators and craftsman of the American Arts and Crafts movement of the nineteenth century. The fast-paced progress of that age meant that society as a whole, "sought 'authentic' alternatives to the apparent unreality of modern existence."⁸³ By rooting designs in historical traditions, and more specifically celebrating crafted arts of the past, many American producers and consumers regained a sense of safety and surety. Historic revivals of specific aesthetics were incredibly popular, including Gothic, Egyptian, and American Colonial traditions. This was a tangible way to connect post-industrial America with the past, thus linking it with certain characteristics of cultural tradition, mainly stability, fortitude, and prosperity.⁸⁴ Although these designs were intrinsically diverse, they were united in a newly harmonious way since the "appreciation of the sensory qualities of

⁸¹ Guzman to Guzzon, "The American Made Movement."

⁸² Amy Azzarito, *Past & Present: 24 Favorite Moments in Decorative Arts History and 24 Modern DIY Projects Inspired by Them*, 2013.

⁸³ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 5.

⁸⁴ For scholarship on the application of values of authenticity in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see: Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (UNC Press Books, 1989).

material encouraged a new freedom in the mixing of media, resulting in painted panels, stamped leatherwork, ceramic tiles, and cloisonné panels being incorporated into [one piece of] furniture.”⁸⁵ Similarly, lustre glazing and lost wax casting were revived and reflected in the decorative art of late nineteenth century and early twentieth.⁸⁶ As craft reformers such as Gustav Stickley pulled from American vernacular traditions, creating goods that emphasized materials and construction, the past was celebrated again, if for different reasons than with neoclassicism a century prior.⁸⁷ This melding of historical traditions is highly visible in handmade crafts today, either through the designs and styles they salute or the technique employed. *Chez Sucre Chez*’s embroidered messages are modern and witty, but the designs inside the wooden hoops look as though they were hand-stitched decades ago (Figure 22). Crafts today seem infused with a love of tradition and historic styles as though a connection with the past legitimizes their physicality and existence.

A similar pattern emerged in the mid to late twentieth century, reverberating a lack of trust through the decorative art designs of that period. Out of the minimalist look of mid-century modern design came a renewed interest in eclecticism as well as a ‘back-to-our-roots’ revival in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The uncertainty and change that quantified these decades was reflected in the reversion from “space-age” progress and machine-like perfection; macramé, paisley, earth tones, and wood paneling reigned over

⁸⁵ Riley, *The Elements of Design*, 253.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

chrome, streamlining, and geometry.⁸⁸ Again, specific crafts and skills were revived alongside hand-crafted decorative art. Many also celebrated the act of crafting as an alternative way to depend on your own hands and as a new medium for modern, avant-garde art. Until this time, older techniques such as knitting and crocheting had been created inside the home and practiced by older generations, largely for utilitarian reasons.⁸⁹ It surfaced, often under the community-focused label “folk art,” with an attached, alternative message of ‘authenticity.’⁹⁰

Lastly, contemporary crafts of the twenty-first century are unified in their promotion of *integrity*. To possess integrity means to adhere to ethical principles and to have a soundness of moral character. Why is it that handmade objects have been repeatedly prized for upholding morality and ethics? The answer lies in what commentators both past and present, have deemed to be dishonest design, false construction, and impure materials. Most important, however, is that this detection of impure design goes hand-in-hand with the realizations of the impure state of society. Individuals pursue objects that socially embody honesty because they do not feel that the current popular aesthetic equips this security, nor the society which produced them.

⁸⁸ For more postmodern design analysis see, Victoria and Albert Museum, *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990* (London: V&A Pub.; 2011).

⁸⁹ Gwen Blakley Kinsler, *The Fine Art of Crochet: Innovative Works from 20 Contemporary Artists* (Author House, 2013), 5.

⁹⁰ For a concise historical synopsis of American folk art, see: “About the Collection | American Folk Art Museum,” accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.folkartmuseum.org/collection>.

“False” design has often been promoted in times of fast-passed progress in America and followed with periods of historic revivals and celebrations of handmade production.⁹¹

The Aesthetic movement of the nineteenth century was just that, a reversion from design perceived to be dishonest, heralding both beauty and artistry. Although members of the Aesthetic movement did not promote the moral character of decorative arts, the Aesthetic movement nevertheless made attempts to improve design and redirect good or “best” design toward more nature-centered and honest aesthetics.⁹² The Arts and Crafts movement which followed the Aesthetic movement, similarly celebrated honest design but by elevating the level of craftsmanship that was applied.⁹³ In this pursuit of antimodernism in the nineteenth century, the goal was to “resurrect a solid sense of self by recapturing the ‘real life’ of the pre-modern craftsman.”⁹⁴ This search for integrity was transferred to decorative art objects not simply *because* they were handmade, but also through physical qualities they possessed. Arts and Crafts producers in America championed visible construction, as seen in mortise and tendon joints and metal rivets (Figure 23). For them this construction represented soundness of character and ethical virtue. They preferred these qualities to the hidden construction of manufactured goods and deceptiveness that many felt was inherent in the way that machines assembled products. Terms such as honest, real, noble, and true are repeated today by crafters on

⁹¹ See Wilson’s essay, “What is the Colonial Revival” for a contextualization of revivals in American history in: Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring, and Kenny Marotta, *Re-Creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival* (University of Virginia Press, 2006).

⁹² Riley, *The Elements of Design*, 250.

⁹³ For a thorough look at the American Aesthetic movement through essays and objects, see: Metropolitan Museum of Art, *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art: 1986).

⁹⁴ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 6.

their blogs, websites, sale tags (Figure 24), and business cards. By applying these same words, like the Etsy shop SimplyHonest, they employ a larger cultural context of what a *real* wood means to consumers as well as what it means to *honestly* craft an article of clothing or household good.⁹⁵ Even larger companies who promote handmade today, frequently mention this sound connection to the creation of products. For example, in advertising their handmade products West Elm points to the past by wanting to revive a time “when people knew who made their product,” emphasizing not only solid products but also idealizing the forging of real connections and relationships.⁹⁶

The use of the term integrity to characterize contemporary crafts implies a societal search for credibility and a belief that handmade design and construction somehow repudiates a falsity in non-handmade products. Aesthetically, contemporary crafters conceive of this falseness in the styles which proliferated during the 1990s and early 2000s. Socially these crafters perceive it through the distrust of capitalism, the “super-size-me” mentality, and the cyber culture which propagated the same era.⁹⁷ Cultural critics have retrospectively viewed the end of the twentieth century as a time where ‘more’ meant ‘better’ and where volume in consumer items was a social pursuit.

Monumental progress in technology and the proliferation of digital media brought a new

⁹⁵ “Simplyhonest,” *Etsy*, accessed April 23, 2014,

https://www.etsy.com/shop/simplyhonest?utm_source=OpenGraph&utm_medium=PageTools&utm_campaign=Share.

⁹⁶ West Elm to Gina Guzzon (email), “Introducing HANDCRAFTED...,” September 26, 2013.

⁹⁷ “Super-size-me” as a mentality is discussed by professional authors and bloggers alike, following are three examples which utilize the phrase: Rob Gregory, *Key Contemporary Buildings: Plans, Sections, and Elevations* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 216; milambc, “A Greasy Mirror: Analyzing the Film Super Size Me and Fast-Food,” *Ginger Musings*, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://milambc.wordpress.com/2013/05/15/a-greasy-mirror-analyzing-the-film-super-size-me-and-fast-food/>; “Small Format Groceries Take Hold - Shopper Culture,” accessed April 1, 2014, <http://shopperculture.integer.com/2009/01/small-format-groceries-take-hold-1.html>.

“hi-fi” or cyber-look that was reflected in many decorative art objects.⁹⁸ “Apple” and “iMac” products (Figure 25) were not only modern and futuristic in themselves, but also influenced other aspects of popular culture. The first decade of the twenty-first century, with Americans racked by concern over national instability and change, was a climate ripe for a reversal in design influence. Out of the 1990s wallpaper and faux-finish craze, slipcover trend, and popularity of Thomas Kincade artwork came the birth of Etsy, a celebration of handmade, ‘authentic’ imperfection, and the pursuit of the natural, organic, and pure.⁹⁹ America once again looked backwards to traditions of the past for not only design inspiration, but also for guidance on *how* to live a more stable, healthy, and favorable life. While on my visit to Etsy headquarters, Sarah Abramson, Manager of the Marketplace Integrity team, explained “we call ourselves the ‘crafty police’ ... but really we are less about the look or style and more about the *integrity* of the craft.”¹⁰⁰

Consumption of Morals and Moral Non-consumption

Objects, handmade objects in particular, are often symbolically charged through their means of production. In particular, the materials, the way in which they are created, the individual who created it, and the specific aesthetic they possess all assist in defining handcrafted goods as symbolizing sound principles. Therefore, the act of consuming these handmade products is often equally imbued with ethics and values. The term ‘moral

⁹⁸ Riley, *The Elements of Design*, 503.

⁹⁹ For the “faked” or faux design present in postmodernism, see: Victoria and Albert Museum, *Postmodernism*.

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Abramson, Interview with Manager of Marketplace Integrity at Etsy by Gina Guzzon, November 26, 2013.

consumption' is used here to denote the purchase of not only a physical object, but also the social and ethical implications that are attached to it.¹⁰¹ Within this practice, not only are morally-charged products favored, but the act of purchasing them can be seen as possessing morality as well. This idea of ethical consumerism abounds with contradictions, particularly with handmade products, as the act of *not* buying has often been celebrated as an ethical practice throughout American history.¹⁰² Indeed, the idea of being thrifty, and thus consuming *less*, can be seen as oppositional to moral consumption which includes buying products to promote either economic growth or certain ideologies a company upholds.¹⁰³ However, I argue that both the act of consuming morally-charged objects as well as the act of refraining from consumption can be categorized as ethical consumerism for *both* acts are laden with societal values. More important, objects from both these acts are symbolically charged with moral meaning.

Making wise decisions with one's finances is an ever increasing value in the twenty-first century between the economic recession and new interests in the origins of one's consumer goods. Therefore, purchasing a hand-loomed pillow from West Elm (Figure 26) that could positively impact thousands of crafters and artisan families instead of a production-line pillow made by a machine in China (Figure 27), have come to

¹⁰¹ For a study on the politicization of consumerism and the American tradition of consumer activism, see: Lawrence B Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); "Building Sustainable and Ethical Supply Chains," *Forbes*, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dougguhtrie/2012/03/09/building-sustainable-and-ethical-supply-chains/>.

¹⁰² For more on the contradictory aspect of consumerism and the historical issues behind consumption see: Susan Strasser, "The Alien Past: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Policy* 26, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 375–93; T. H Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰³ For more on the under-studied importance of the concept of thrift in America, see: Joshua J Yates and James Davison Hunter, *Thrift and Thriving in America: Capitalism and Moral Order from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

represent, for many consumers, certain values.¹⁰⁴ Equally, crafting a DIY pillow (Figure 27), especially from material that need not be purchased, showcases the individual's values of frugality and resourcefulness. Being sensible and judicious with one's money when it comes to consumerism in the twenty-first century can be exemplified through both the purchase of a specified product or through the act of non-consumption.

As with the history of design and production, Americans consumerism has cycled through stages of promoting the purchase of products versus non-consumption, often mirroring celebrations of handicraft with campaigns against consumption. In order for society to differentiate between the two, a market with purchasable goods and a societal reason to revolt against the consumption of such products is required. Looking at the eighteenth century, there was a marked time when common goods publicly communicated social power; leading up to the American Revolution, everyday objects suddenly became politicized.¹⁰⁵ This consumer shift represented the first large-scale movement "to organize itself around the relation of ordinary people to manufactured goods" which were then used to protest unfair political representation and authority.¹⁰⁶ In the simple pursuit of happiness, colonists used symbolic goods such as cloth and tea to create a uniquely American invention, the consumer boycott (Figure 29).¹⁰⁷ In the twenty-first century, this practice is revived as both BPA in plastic and its disposability

¹⁰⁴ For a case study on the making of a consumer item and the ethical questions behind its path of production, see: "Planet Money Makes A T-Shirt," *NPR.org*, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://apps.npr.org/tshirt/>.

¹⁰⁵ For more about the birth of organized revolution around consumer objects see: Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, xvi.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, xv.

are boycotted in profound ways.¹⁰⁸ It may be part of an unconscious history, that choosing one product over another implies support or abhorrence, but in the eighteenth century it was a distinct realization that objects of everyday life “suddenly acquired new shared meanings.”¹⁰⁹ Just as colonists symbolically redefined such decorative arts, it is hard to purchase a bag of coffee today without also buying sustainability, becoming eco-friendly, or supporting fair-markets.¹¹⁰ The use of the mason jar, discussed in a later chapter, exemplifies this symbolic redefinition of handcrafted and DIY objects. This object has been embedded with countless societal values: promoting renewability, denouncing disposable products, and reviving homemade goods and their home-arts counterparts. The mason jar stands as a boycott against the sheer volume of products in society, the lack of transparency in product origin, and the types of (potentially harmful) materials utilized in the creation of household goods.

This reviling of dependence upon outside sources and instead turning inwards and relying upon yourself, is an American institution. During the transitional time of the mid-eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin went to England to be interviewed by the British House of Commons. Speaking to a Parliament member in 1766, Franklin explained his country’s new interaction with consumer goods:

Parliament: What used to be the pride of the Americans?

Franklin: To indulge in the fashions and manufactures of Great Britain.

Parliament: What is now their pride?

Franklin: To wear their old cloaths over again, till they can make new ones.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Jerome Groopman, “The Plastic Panic,” *The New Yorker*, May 31, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/05/31/100531fa_fact_groopman.

¹⁰⁹ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 200.

¹¹⁰ Simon, *Everything but the Coffee*.

¹¹¹ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 198.

To see this as the birth of DIY mentality is not a stretch, for Americans patriotically held steadfast to the virtues of sacrifice, upholding not only non-importation, but also to the idea of making-it-themselves. The twenty-first century handmade craft movement is spurred on by virtuous calls to choose crafted objects over mass-produced ones, therefore, labeling the consumer as ethical and moral. These mass-produced objects, especially in recent decades, have been increasingly produced by manufacturers outside the United States.¹¹² Furthermore, the act of non-consumption, by handcrafting or DIY-ing an object for yourself or home, affixes a sense of positive identity to the crafter (Figure 30). Just as colonists socially identified themselves as attaining gentility and sensibility through the rustic and simplistic fashions they donned, Americans today made similar connections of superiority with clothing that is produced in a manner perceived to be more ethical. The “slow-fashion movement,” a nod to the “slow-food” trend, involves sustaining from ‘fast,’ mass-produced fashions and instead hand-making clothes and accessories; these participants are socially identified as people who “stop and think about the materials and processes behind the things they consume,” or rather, are enlightened and mindful individuals.¹¹³ Separating oneself from others, showcasing specific values and ideals through purchases, has been a trend in the American market since the market was born. The “virtues of modesty, industry, frugality, and sensibility were used to further political goals”—although stated about the eighteenth century, this is strikingly

¹¹² As a discussion of outsourcing, Nike Company is utilized as a case study in: “Building Sustainable and Ethical Supply Chains.”

¹¹³ Starre Vartan, “From Roots to Rack,” *Whole Living*, September 2012, 122; “About Us- Slow Food USA,” *Slow Food USA*, n.d., <http://www.slowfoodusa.org/about-us>.

relevant to those crafting through the American (handmade) Revolution of the twenty-first.¹¹⁴

This crafting of one's identity is another characteristic tied to the act of consumption. Ethical consumption therefore, identifies an individual as a person with a marked moral stance in a social, not only personal, way. This is substantiated by the idea of consumer choice, which was introduced to society during the eighteenth century's consumer revolution; this idea of choice in the marketplace "must have heightened [colonists'] sense of self-importance."¹¹⁵ They were able to shape their identity by choosing one teapot or another, or imported cloth over homespun. In essence, consumer goods mediated one's status in society and became the "spark for a new kind of social discourse."¹¹⁶ This was the start of how everyday objects and items helped to socially identify the consumer and is the basis for how contemporary handmade objects are able to gain such cultural importance and shape individuals' identity within society today.

Choice, or consumer action, was stamped as a means to enact moral sensibility in the eighteenth century. Similarly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, beauty was "consistently attributed a moral value," giving consumers further means to participate in social ethics.¹¹⁷ The idea of beautifying your home was ascribed an ethical undertone, the more a consumer chose to enhance the aesthetics of their home through specified decorative arts, the more morally adept the consumer felt and appeared. The

¹¹⁴ Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 118.

¹¹⁵ T. H. Breen, "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690-1776," *Journal of British Studies* 25, no. 4 (October 1, 1986): 489.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 496.

¹¹⁷ Forty, *Objects of Desire*, 108.

purchase and use of Colonial Revival design in particular emerged, and has continued to be practiced, as a way for individuals to harken the glories of the New Republic and romanticize the strong American values of honor and simplicity (Figure 31).¹¹⁸ What's striking, is that those who used, in the early twentieth century, designs and techniques of the past "though they craved authenticity, were more concerned with the symbolism of the furniture than with literally reproducing ancient living rooms."¹¹⁹ Therefore, consumers used these decorative art objects to convey character and moral fiber; purchasing and displaying a Chippendale-inspired armchair or a Wallace Nutting cupboard deemed you an upright and patriotic American citizen.¹²⁰

Although not as distinct as the nineteenth century, today's revivals of historical traditions point to the current love and fascination with the past. Some have even equated current interest with material objects which draw on simpler, less overwhelming times in American history, with reviving past revivals, such as Design Sponge's "Trend Watch" for a "Colonial Re-revival."¹²¹ Windsor chairs (Figure 32) and "hand-finished vitrified stoneware bowls" (Figure 33) both made within the past decade, revive an idealized past when times are perceived to be slower, more honest, and devoid of a post-industrial degradation of design. Similarly, pieces such as Anthropologie's "Handcarved Luca Dresser" (Figure 34) utilizes "rustic reclaimed pine" which is bleached, sanded, and

¹¹⁸ For a contextualization of America's Colonial Revival, see: Wilson, Eyring, and Marotta, *Re-Creating the American Past*.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Abigail Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 168.

¹²⁰ Thomas Andrew Denenberg, *Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹²¹ Maxwell Tielman, "Trend Watch: Colonial Re-Revival," blog, *Design Sponge*, September 24, 2013, <http://www.designsponge.com/2013/09/trend-watch-colonial-re-revival.html>.

waxed so that “natural knots and notches shine through.”¹²² It has a unique combination of eighteenth century furniture characteristics such as a serpentine front, bun feet, and Federal Era drawer pulls, yet does not revive any one design with actual accuracy. With contemporary handcrafted products, nostalgia often trumps accuracy; it is the attempt to draw on the past that is essential. These decorative art objects, aesthetically varied though they may be, are consumed and used in homes today to identify the user on both a personal and socially understood level.

In contemporary America, consumers have looked to objects once again as a way to voice their concerns, express their beliefs, and initiate change. Because this action has become an established practice throughout American history, contemporary crafters can replicate past methods of social and artistic reform. The current movement could be called an “Arts and Crafts Revival,” a “Neo-Arts-and-Crafts” movement, or perhaps an “Aesthetics and Crafts Revolution” because it undoubtedly mimics American ideologies about artistic reform and social initiatives which called for action through improved consumer habits. Pursuing handcrafted goods, whether through production, consumption, or non-consumption, illustrates the belief in the power of these goods to possess specified meanings. In his publication, *Objects of Desire*, Adrian Forty wrote, “No design works unless it embodies ideas that are held in common by the people for whom the object is

¹²² “Handcarved Luca Dresser,” *Anthropologie*, accessed December 13, 2013, http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/home-furniture/27257641.jsp?cm_sp=Fluid_-_27257641_-_Large_15.

intended.”¹²³ The wide-spread aesthetic of the handmade movement today therefore, implies that the praise of uniqueness, celebration of the authentic, exploration of identity, and the pursuit of a more moral and ethical society, are embodied in the handmade crafts of today.

These objects of the twenty-first century have been so successfully reenergized into society as part of a “reskilling” or ‘back-to-our-roots’ movement, because historical reference points exist from which to cite the act, the aesthetic, or the material used in the craft.¹²⁴ These objects reiterate that consumers truly possess a purchasing power, one that shapes their own identity, but also encourages shared ideas in American society. The success of the handmade movement therefore, is realized in these countless crafted decorative arts, from curtains to clothing and from upcycled desks to newly crafted Thai and batik cloth tote-bags. It is in their reflection of known motifs, shapes, forms, and techniques that they have once again come to be celebrated for improving the life of the producer *and* consumer. Furthermore, their ability to improve society and inflict positive change has been both augmented and propagated. Stemming from their cultural history as objects of specific value, their capacity to improve has been applied to numerous areas of contemporary culture. However, this modern handmade craft resurgence unfolds in an entirely new moment in history, thwarting any chance of this movement flawlessly mirroring, and therefore emerging as, any true American “revival”; though facets of past revolutions and reformations have been plucked from American history as inspiration,

¹²³ Forty, *Objects of Desire*, 245.

¹²⁴ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 23.

today's contemporary craft movement does not react against any one, explicit ideology. Most significant, is that today's movement fuses the power of shared value and meaning of material goods with practices and ideas unique to the twenty-first century, thus eventually transforming society's views of handmade crafts as countercultural, alternative objects into powerfully mainstream, pop-culture trends.

Chapter One: Figures



Figure 14: *Vintage Thai Cloth Bag*, c. 2013. RIGG, Brklyn Curated, Brooklyn, NY, image by author.



Figure 15: *Prada Slouchy Backpack*, c. 1990. RomeosLair, Etsy (image in the public domain), https://www.etsy.com/listing/174323083/prada-slouchy-backback-black-parachute?ref=shop_home_active_16.



Figure 16: *Vintage Louis Vuitton Monogram Alma Satchel*, c. 1990s. LEOandJOY, Etsy (image in the public domain), https://www.etsy.com/listing/173570228/vintage-louis-vuitton-monogram-alma?ref=shop_home_active_5.



Figure 17: *Peruvian Blue Opal Triangle Statement Necklace, Guitar String Hoop Earrings, Crystal Pyramid Ring*, c. 2014. Nikki Peterson, BeachBonesJewelry, Etsy (images in the public domain), <https://www.etsy.com/shop/beachbonesjewelry?ref=l2-shopheader-name>.



Figure 18: *Godey's 'Plate 19. 1845,'* c. 1845. Image from "Fashion Timeline 1840s," Karlee A. Turner, America's Victorian Era in the Age of Sail: Women at Sea blog (image in the public domain), <http://karleeturner.wordpress.com/2013/03/23/fashion-timeline-1840s/>; 1870 *Kimmel & Forster*, c. 1870. Image from "Post Civil War fashions for American Women," Barbara Wells Sarudy, 19th-century American Woman blog (image in the public domain), <http://b-womeninamericanhistory19.blogspot.com/2013/06/post-civil-war-fashions-for-american.html>.



Figure 19: *Vase*, c. late 18th century, jasperware. Josiah Wedgwood and Sons, England. Metropolitan Museum of Art (image in the public domain), <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/09.194.7>.



Figure 20: *Josiah Wedgwood Jasperware Headboard*, c. 2013, designed by Eddie Ross. Amy Azzarito, *Past and Perfect*. Image from “‘Past & Present’ Book Preview + A History-Inspired DIY Project,” Liz Gray, 28 February 2013, Design Happens blog (image in the public domain), <http://blog.hgtv.com/design/2013/02/28/past-present-book-preview-a-history-inspired-diy-project/#sthash.uE6fx0q8.dpuf>.



Figure 21: *Gustavian Clock*, c. 2013, designed by Kate Pruitt. Amy Azzarito, *Past and Perfect*. Image from “Design Sponge's Past & Present column now a DIY book,” Lisa Boone, 14 February 2013, Los Angeles Times (image in the public domain), <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/feb/14/news/la-lh-design-sponge-past-present-book-amy-azzarito-20130204>.



Figure 22: *Do it yourself x-stitch pattern and materials kit (home sweet home)*, c. 2014. ChezSucreChez, Etsy (image in the public domain), https://www.etsy.com/listing/56503259/do-it-yourself-x-stitch-pattern-and?ref=shop_home_active_15.



Figure 23: *Library Table*, c. 1906, oak, leather. Gustav Stickley, New York. Metropolitan Museum of Art (image in the public domain), <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/4786>.



Figure 24: *Product label: Noble Goods*, c. 2013. Noble Goods, Brklyn Curated, image by author.



Figure 25: *iMac computer*, c. 1998. “Thirty Years of Mac,” Apple (image in the public domain), <http://www.apple.com/30-years/1998/>.



Figure 26: *Jacquard Leaf Silk Pillow Cover*, c. 2014. West Elm (image in the public domain), <http://www.westelm.com/products/jacquard-leaf-pillow-cover-slate-t668/?pkey=call-handcrafted&>.



Figure 27: *Better Homes and Gardens All-Over Ruffles Pillow*, c. 2014. Walmart (image in the public domain), <http://www.walmart.com/ip/Better-Homes-and-Gardens-All-Over-Ruffles-Pillow/15573847>



Figure 28: *DIY Felt Circle Pillow*, 7 November 2012. Vidya Sukumaran, "Felt Circle Pillow," Whats Ur Home Story blog (image in the public domain), <http://whatsurhomestory.com/felt-circle-pillow/>.



Figure 29: *A Society of Patriotic Ladies*, c. 1775, mezzotint. R. Sayer and J. Bennett, London. British Propaganda depicting American woman refraining from drinking tea, included in "John Bull and Uncle Sam: Four Centuries of British-American Relations," Library of Congress exhibition. Image from LOC (image in the public domain), <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/british/brit-2.html>.

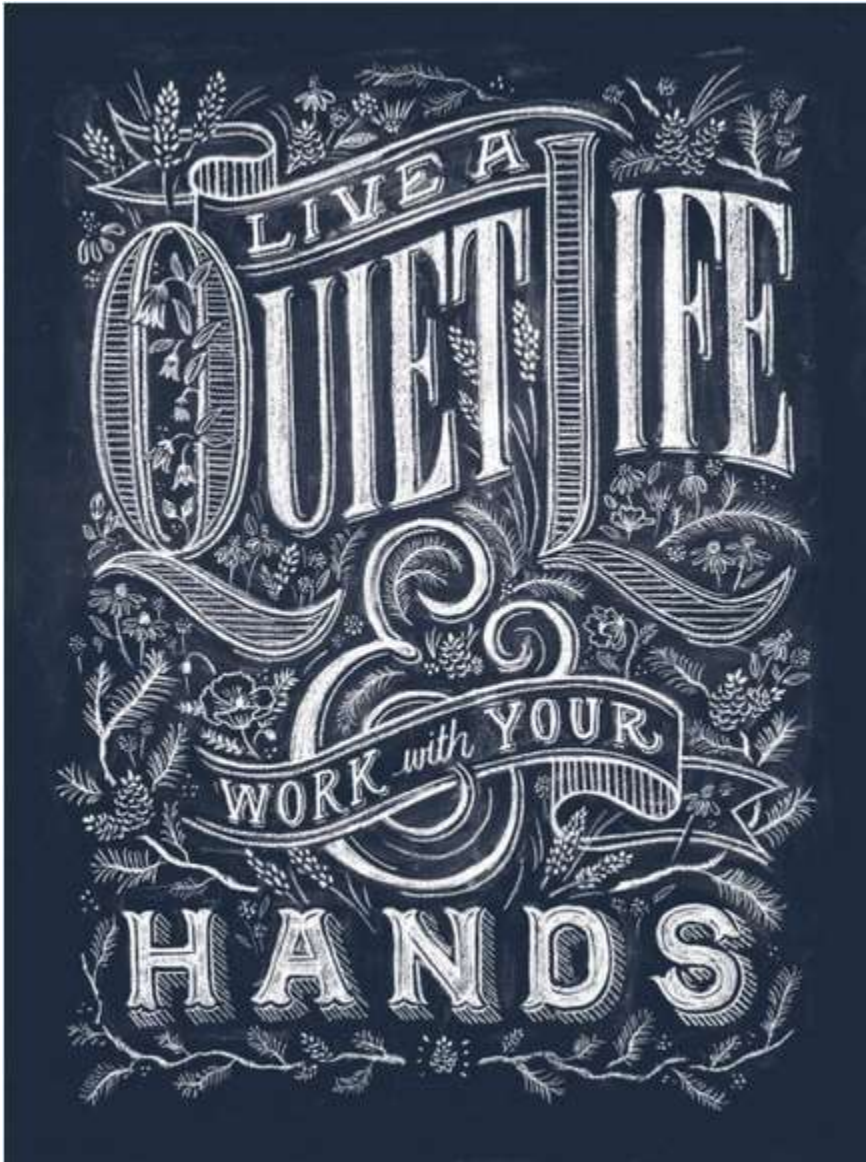


Figure 30: *Nightshift Blue*, c. 2013, screen-print. Dana Tanamachi, Tanamachi Studio (image in the public domain), <http://tanamachistudio.shopsilentempire.com/>.



Figure 31: *Writing Arm Windsor Chair*, c. early twentieth century. Wallace Nutting Furniture Shop. Eleanor Roosevelt National Historical Site (image in the public domain), http://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/elro/gallery/writingchr_ELRO5186AB.html.



Figure 32: 362 Hastoe Windsor Chair, c. 2013. Featured on "Colonial Re-revival," Design Sponge blog. Design by Matthew Hilton, made by Ercol for De La Espada (image in the public domain), <http://www.yliving.com/de-la-espada-362-hastoe-windsor-chair.html>.



Figure 33: Hand-finished Stoneware Mixing Bowl, c. 2013. Kaufmann Mercantile (image in the public domain), <https://store.kaufmann-mercantile.com/collections/kitchen-home/cooking-canning-baking/products/hand-finished-stoneware-mixing-bowls>.



Figure 34: *Handcarved Luca Dresser and Detail*, c. 2014. Anthropologie (image in the public domain), http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/home-furniture/27257641.jsp?cm_sp=Fluid-_-27257641-_-Large_15.

CHAPTER TWO: Countercultural Craft- *the power of handmade*

Bradley and Leena salvaged some abandoned rough-hewn tree stumps from nearby railroad tracks and proceeded to dry the organically shaped, cracked, and ash brown pieces of wood. After using a chisel and pry-bar to splinter off the craggy, uneven bark, they sent sawdust flying with a planer that leveled out the top and bottom of the now-bare stumps. A few different sanders, some chisels, and a thorough hand-sanding cleaned up the wood without stripping it of its cracked and knotted façade. Some padded feet were attached for easy maneuvering and they slathered on a coat of polycrylic to seal the stumps.¹²⁵ Bradley and Leena then sanded, sealed, sanded, sealed, sanded, and finally sealed the tree stumps for a fourth and last time. A quick steel-wool burnish and their rescued stumps were carefully crafted into chic, ‘new’ side tables (Figure 35). Once left to decompose, they were now velvety smooth with visually striking darkened knots and cracks, adding to their tactile allure. Wanting to share their enthusiasm for their latest DIY masterpiece, Leena narrated a lengthy and minutely descriptive blog post (complete with forty-four pictures) which details the transformation of two hunks of dead tree into shining, smooth side tables. Proudly, the makers articulated: “this is the kind of project that we live for...you take something that’s essentially garbage and you turn it into something beautiful and functional.”¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Leena, “DIY Tree Stump Side Tables,” *Bye Bye, Brooklyn*, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://byebyebrooklyn.wordpress.com/2012/07/30/diy-tree-stump-side-tables/>.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Turning garbage into art is just one way in which crafters save, and thus better, the planet. The tree-stumps double as political statements when made into living room stools; they are powerful advocates for environmental awareness especially when compared with their market-based furniture counterparts. On a larger scale, companies like Brooklyn-based Holstee, handcraft picture frames (Figure 36) from “Douglas fir wood sourced from abandoned and deconstructed houses in Detroit.”¹²⁷ Each new “Reclaim Frame,” adds a rustic chic vibe to the purchaser’s interior while simultaneously promoting renewable sources and political issues of urbanization. A co-worker’s scarf, hand-knit from local wool, is both a fashion statement and an expression of its creator’s belief in sustainability and small-businesses. Wooden side-tables, vintage-looking picture frames, and knit scarves are remarkably ordinary and commonplace items today, their ubiquity a testament to the collective, social *acceptance* of commercializing such beliefs as environmentalism and eco-consciousness. These same types of objects however, were once labeled as *alternative* products and *radical* craft made by *independent* thinkers and doers. The chapter that follows traces the origins of the radical crafting subculture who helped initiate the handmade craft movement in the turn of the twenty-first century. It then considers the process by which this vocal minority achieved mainstream recognition and success through the popularization of “craftivism.”¹²⁸ Finally, it explores how the parameters and political stakes of the radical craft movement broadened and diversified to reflect this new constituency’s needs and interests.

¹²⁷ “Rustic Wood Frame by Holstee,” *The Grommet*, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://www.thegrommet.com/holstee-cards-posters-and-frames>.

¹²⁸ Jean Railla, *Get Crafty: Hip Home Ec* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), 6.

As Jenny Hart’s new-age embroidery company proudly states, these tree-stump stools and various handmade products, either DIY-ed or purchased—“ain’t your grandma’s” crafts.¹²⁹ Instead, these objects promote *craftivism*, a practice of “using crafts and crafting to make the world a better place” as prominent pro-crafters like Jean Railla have defined it.¹³⁰ Some promote it vocally, such as in the blog titled, Craft + Activism= Craftivism, others promote activist agendas without the consumer’s conscious awareness. Although typically used to describe extremes of political action, craftivism in its broadest sense involves craft (made by the user or by another person) that generates any perceived positive ethical impact. In truth, craftivism is an extension of past movements’ belief in the connection between ethics and consumption; buying a product which represents a societal value. Yet craftivism distinguishes itself from past movements in its successful amalgamation of moral consumption *and* activist execution; it is a combination of ethically ‘using’ and politically ‘doing.’ From the start, the crafting movement has been fueled by both the producers and consumers of a subculture, not merely the users of these goods nor solely idealist artists disconnected from the mass consumer base. It is this uniting of both sides which led to crafting’s ability to grow out of a subculture into a nation-wide pastime.

Initial crafters, defined within this chapter, promoted a DIY ethos because it is in doing-it-yourself, that you can both ethically consume *and* politically act. “DIY” therefore, is the keystone of the early years of the contemporary crafting movement,

¹²⁹ Jenny Hart, “Sublime Stitching- Who We Are,” *Sublime Stitching: This Ain’t Your Gramma’s Embroidery*, n.d., http://sublimestitching.com/pages/who_we_are.

¹³⁰ Railla, *Get Crafty*, 8.

helping it to successfully branch out and create the creator-consumer.¹³¹ If craftivism is contemporary craft's power in-action, then DIY can be seen as the most effective example of craftivist action. Since it intrinsically encourages attainability and feasibility through its definition of amateurial creation, it has been easily adopted by ordinary individuals. From the influence of politicalized, rebellious art in the 1990s to Etsy's 60 million visitors per month in 2013, the movement has taken shape and flourished through the pursuit of shared ideas and common belief in the power of craft.¹³² Craftivism generates 'new' objects through hand-making, but also produces a narrative of that creation which supplies the activism component to this hand-making action. Through these narratives, both materially and intrinsically attached to the crafted object, the contemporary craft movement transpired from the ground up, out of everyday individuals. Understanding the full credence of a mass movement, starts with identifying the foundation and framework of these average advocates.

Alternative Craft's Universal Power

Jenny Hart's 2004 embroidery, "Iggy Pop," (Figure 37) elicits intrigue and yet generates contradictory reflections as the stitch-by-stitch aesthetic of embroidery has historically evoked thoughts of decorous and sedate images. "Iggy Pop" however,

¹³¹ This concept of the creator-consumer is later developed into the idea of the consumer acting as a creator, building a collection of physical and virtual objects, which follows Stewart's idea of a collector as a producer of objects, "producer by arrangement and manipulation" in: Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1984), 158.

¹³² "Etsy - Press."

combines the same material and technique as an eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth century hand-embroidered motif (

Figure 38), but clearly with an entirely new conception of design. By embroidering an icon of punk and heavy-metal music, Hart creates a new symbiotic for handmade craft to possess; contemporary craft can communicate in a unique way because of its concurrent possession of established conventions *and* inherent otherness. Fayette Levine writes in her book, *Handmade Nation: The Rise of DIY, Art, Craft, & Design*, that craft possesses a “unique ability to set its practitioners outside of mainstream industrial society.”¹³³ Building upon Levine’s argument, modern crafters employ this attribute of craft, but combine it with known, mainstream visuals and aesthetics, making it relatable and relevant to a larger population of American consumers. Craft is inherently “repeating the past,” meaning it is a reference of tradition, of a practice already established in history.¹³⁴ This gives the viewer or consumer of such an object a reference point for how to intellectually digest this piece of material culture—crafts are sewn, woven with yarn, carved of wood, fundamentally generated manually or rather, by hand. This physical and ideological connection has been used as a tool by subcultural crafters.

By the start of the twenty-first century, cultural subgroups of alternative crafters used the well-established world-wide-web to knit together a community of like-minded craft artists. Levine’s *Handmade Nation*, published in 2008, documents the creation of this new crafting mentality in its early years. By outlining significant events and

¹³³ Levine also published a documentary under the same name in 2009; Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008, 2.

¹³⁴ Jenni Sorkin, “Craft-like: The Illusion of Authenticity” (presented at “Nation Building: Craft and Contemporary American Culture,” Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, November 8, 2012).

interviewing prominent crafters, Levine charts how she and fellow artists “were redefining what craft was and making it our own.”¹³⁵ Crafter extraordinaire, Jennifer Perkins, states she was influenced by the progressive artistry of the Riot Grrrl scene.¹³⁶ Others express that alternative crafting “was better than drugs, alcohol, therapy—anything I had ever tried.”¹³⁷ In an effort to amass a crafting rebellion, the internet proved to decrease isolation and provide a nation-wide venue to express the new crafting mentality that had arisen.¹³⁸ A few artists established themselves early, such as Jean Railla and Jenny Hart. By the late 1990s Debbie Stoller started her “Stitch ‘n Bitch” group in New York City and by 2000 a few craft fairs were realized on both coasts.¹³⁹ By 2003 the “Craftifesto” was born out of the DIY Trunk Show in Chicago, Illinois: “craft is powerful, craft is personal, craft is political, craft is possible.”¹⁴⁰ The movement of alternative crafters was becoming a reality, promoting the idea that creativity and the DIY ethos can both empower the individual and change their life.¹⁴¹ These early advocates, although mostly white, middle-class, urbanites, posed themselves (as youth-cultures have proven to do) in opposition to a demographic with similar constituents; the tension therefore, was held in their association with a gritty rebelliousness.

The idea of change, of craft being political, of craft symbolizing an alternate way of life, points to this fact that these crafters and DIY-ers saw themselves in opposition to

¹³⁵ Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008, ix.

¹³⁶ Also see, for a narrative on the early years of this movement and the influence of Riot Grrrl scene: Greer, *Knitting for Good!*.

¹³⁷ Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008, 116, 94.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30–33.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xx.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, ix.

mainstream culture. Their existence as a subculture of American society in the late 1990s and early 2000s is what gives the objects they employ the ability to attain any power. Crafts were used as the tools of their movement and garnered meaning and societal value because they were framed in direct opposition to accepted memes; images of individuals in punk-rock attire knitting yarn exemplifies this contrast (Figure 39). However, by utilizing accepted linguistics and norms, these groups of crafters allied themselves with socially understood labels, creating titles such as *The Craft Mafia*, *The Renegade Craft Fair*, *Crafty Bastards*, *The Ladies Independent Design League*, *Urban Craft Uprising*, *Craftin' Outlaws*, *Redefining Craft*, *Craft Revolution*, *Indie Craft Experience*, and *The Reform School*. Renegade mafias and outlaw uprisings—the agenda attached to these embroidered, crocheted, and mod-podged creations was clear and explicit. In his study, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige states that “notions concerning the sanctity of language are intimately bound up with ideas of social order.”¹⁴² These early crafter’s word choice confirms the oppositional discourse that such subcultures can bring to an established society. The crafting subculture of the early twenty-first century acted as most subcultures do, they “represent[ed] symbolic challenges to a symbolic order.”¹⁴³

It is not merely the practice of a subculture or the use of innovative linguistics which fuels a burgeoning movement, but also the establishment of an aesthetic or physicality that becomes attached to the group as well. Sometimes sartorial, subcultures invariably use *style* to diffuse their agenda. Style in particular, generates a unique social

¹⁴² Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 91.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 92.

response: “it fluctuates between dread and fascination, outrage and amusement.”¹⁴⁴ Hart’s “Iggy Pop” is understood as contemporary craft because it combines traditional embroidery and unconventional designs. These new characteristics, whether an alternative design or unusual use, are recognized and accepted as new meanings of the crafted object because they are attached *through* the act of hand-crafting. Holstee’s “Reclaim Frame” is understood as contemporary craft because it combines the act of handcrafting wood into a frame with the new-age value of sustainability. Contemporary crafts’ aesthetic or style therefore, is this combination of known and unknown, of traditional and modern. Rather than a debate between form and function, contemporary craft is a discussion of how the *act* of hand-crafting impacts form and function to garner its new-found power.

Using Bradley and Leena’s tree-stump table as an example, meaning is not generated solely from the form, shape, and materiality of the object; the tree-stump table is more than a cylindrical piece of sealed wood. Nor is it simply a table to hold various household objects, equal in functional worth to a \$10 LACK side table from Ikea. Its meaning, and thus its power, is generated from the fact that it was *not* a product of mainstream society. Yet by transforming the wood with a new finish and new feet, or rather hand-touching, its *use* as a holder for magazines or television remotes is now socially relevant. With contemporary crafts, this reprocessing is accompanied by a concurrent change in the state of the object, so that as these objects are ‘finished’ they become morally charged by the creator-consumer. The human manipulation of these

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

objects creates not only physical alteration, but symbolic evolution as well. Hart's "Iggy Pop" stands for more than a combination of red, pink, yellow, and black stitches.

Through her hand-work, Hart creates a unique piece that communicates craft's ability to change the symbolic impact of a known craft technique – embroidery. This abstract maturation is completed, however, only with the invitation that these objects impart; craft impacts contemporary culture because of its theoretical power *and* its practical accessibility. For Hart, her crafting started with the creation of "Sublime Stitching," her own company which creates embroidery designs *for* the people, with patterns "aimed for a new generation," which ultimately promotes that anyone can do-it-themselves.

Beyond Art versus Craft

At the very end of the Renwick's 40th Anniversary Symposium, "Nation Building: Craft and Contemporary American Culture," host and curator, Nicholas Bell, made one last remark. He casually added, "for those of you that still love craft fairs, DC's best craft fair, Crafty Bastards is tomorrow. I had actually forgotten this, and [symposium lecturer] Garth Johnson very kindly reminded me."¹⁴⁵ Bell, the Curator of American Craft and Decorative Art at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, had just served as the leader of a rather heated three day symposium which was being held in conjunction with the Renwick exhibition, "40 under 40: Craft Futures." The symposium's main goals were to "examine craft's increasingly urgent role within contemporary

¹⁴⁵ *Session 7- Symposium: Nation Building: Post Craft*, vol. 7, Nation Building: Craft and Contemporary American Culture (Washington, DC, 2012), <http://americanart.si.edu/multimedia/webcasts/archive/2012/nationbuilding/post/>.

American culture,” enrich “our understanding of modern craft as a response to mass culture,” and examine the evolution of craft beyond the studio movement.¹⁴⁶ The tension that pervaded the intellectually engaging discussion was present right in the symposium’s title, juxtaposing craft *and* contemporary American culture meant attempting to step outside the carefully constructed institutional boundaries of the ‘art versus craft’ debate, something that was not easily embraced by such an art-world-centered environment. That Bell even remarked upon the happening of the Crafty Bastards fair seemed remarkable after such a high-art focused three days. Where a mandatory field-trip could have been instated for all symposium attendees to see craft in action out in contemporary American culture (beyond the museum walls), this comment was nearly forgotten about, once again presupposing utilitarian or for-profit craft as separate than ‘real’ art.

Unmistakably, Bell’s groundbreaking exhibit, “40 under 40: Craft Futures,” was a step forward in understanding how craft has evolved and the role it plays in contemporary society. As a branch museum for the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Renwick Gallery is seen as a leader in the scholarly discourse on modern decorative arts. With its “40 under 40” exhibition, the Renwick made a daring attempt to bridge that gap between the worlds of high art and the utilitarian arts by adding a younger generation’s crafts to the presumably outdated “contemporary” museum.¹⁴⁷ Jenny Hart’s embroidery, “La Llorona,” (Figure 40) was one of the forty pieces showcased in the exhibition.¹⁴⁸ Like her

¹⁴⁶ “The Renwick Gallery- Symposium” (presented at the Nation Building: Craft and Contemporary American Culture, Washington, DC, November 8, 2012), <http://americanart.si.edu/renwick/symposium/index.cfm>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “40 under 40: Craft Futures,” *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, accessed January 20, 2014, <http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2012/renwick40/index.cfm>.

“Iggy Pop,” Hart’s “La Llorona” highlights the intersection between craft for the art world and craft for and by the average person; Hart’s company is, as she states, based off the notion that “patterns for embroidery had become really out-of-date and not at all aimed at a new generation.”¹⁴⁹ The symposium held by the Renwick featured a wide range of scholars and commentators from across the nation including an artist from “40 under 40” and Glenn Adamson, noted craft scholar, as the keynote speaker. With proclamations that “now, more than at any point in the last thirty years, craft is about making a better world,” the Renwick was applauded by numerous sources, including the National Endowment for the Arts, *The New York Times*, *American Craft* magazine, and even Etsy, for opening a scholarly discussion about the power that is associated with contemporary craft.¹⁵⁰

This is the closest, however, that contemporary craft of this handmade movement and high art have ever come; the discussion of the impact that craft has on society and why we juxtapose “Craft and Contemporary American Culture,” in the first place, falls short. As Bell articulated in *American Craft* magazine, “Craft is getting stronger. It’s growing in ways that we would never have imagined in 2000. And its values are being shared by an ever-expanding population.”¹⁵¹ Yet this ever-expanding population is never given center stage, never given due attention for how they, as the masses, impact society, including the artists, the amateurs, the industrial designers, the authors, and the culturally influential bloggers in America today. It is true that the art world recognizes the

¹⁴⁹ Sarah, “Best Job Ever: Jenny Hart, Embroidery Entrepreneur,” blog, *Story by Modcloth*, November 16, 2010, <http://blog.modcloth.com/2010/11/16/bje-jenny-hart/>.

¹⁵⁰ “40 under 40.”

¹⁵¹ Monica Moses, “Future Tense: 40 Under 40,” *American Craft*, November 2012.

newfound power that is associated with craft and how it has been used in the past decade to change the status quo. Contemporary craft scholar, Maria Elena Buszek comments, “in just the past five years we have seen an explosion of publications that illuminate the recent boom in craft practices from a range of perspectives...which express less a colonization of craft by outside forces but a revolution within.”¹⁵² Instead of striving to attain conceptual significance by employing fine art techniques and aesthetics which it has done in the past, craft is now obtaining abstract value and meaning by generating it itself.¹⁵³

Therefore, valuing craft for its prescriptive power, “its potential to make life better,” is not just a common denominator for the forty artists in the Smithsonian’s Renwick exhibition.¹⁵⁴ Rather, it is a congruity among *all* contemporary crafters from the museum-worthy to the weekend DIY-er. Scholars need to recognize art is being changed not as an isolated entity by and for the art world, but as part of a bigger consciousness of the ability of material culture to initiate and impact societal change. Art therefore, is not necessarily the fount of social change, but rather the ideal instrument in contemporary society to enact widespread acceptance and reception. DIY and craftivism are part of a larger movement that may intersect with the academy but which, as part of a mass

¹⁵² Maria Elena Buszek, “‘Labor Is My Medium’: Some Perspective(s) on Contemporary Craft,” *Craft, Archives of American Art Journal*, 50, no. 3–4 (2011): 68.

¹⁵³ Buszek’s interviews of contemporary crafters unveil this shift from traditional perspective on craft’s meaning to new shift in how younger artists view the value of contemporary craft. Buszek, “‘Labor Is My Medium’: Some Perspective(s) on Contemporary Craft”; Maria Elena Buszek, *Extra/ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). Buszek’s introduction in *Extra/ordinary* provides a thorough analysis of the sociohistorical understanding of craft and its relationship with the art world.

¹⁵⁴ Moses, “Future Tense: 40 Under 40,” 86.

movement progression, cannot be defined as a top-down effect, but rather a self-defining initiative among grass-roots crafters and craft consumers.

Contemporary craft is seen as popular and fashionable therefore, because it is *not* molded into a uniform definition which enacts boundaries and limitations; its ability to dodge and skirt any institutional or mainstream classification in the abstract, other than maintaining the ability to provide powerful change, is what makes it popular and accepted by such a wide range of individuals. Buszek's book is artfully titled, *Extra/ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, pointing to the strange and wonderful weight that contemporary craft possesses because of its ordinary or seemingly commonplace existence. Connecting this unquantifiable quality with the physical characteristics that communicate contemporary crafts' symbolic meaning (i.e. the handmade *style*), creates a totality of authority and cultural strength.¹⁵⁵ The handmade 'look' combined with craft's all-embracing, plebian attitude, is what has spread its acceptance from alternative objects of the subculture to, according to the Renwick, claiming an "urgent role within contemporary American culture."¹⁵⁶ Through the growth of the independent craft scene, a visual vocabulary was established in the handmade imperfections of screen-printed clothing, the chunky knots and loops of crocheted accessories, the uneven rawness of ceramic bowls, and the application of stylized motifs such as mushrooms and birds. That this vocabulary could speak to larger issues however,

¹⁵⁵ For another discussion about the cultural weight of ordinary, everyday objects, see: Miller and Woodward, *Blue Jeans*.

¹⁵⁶ "The Renwick Gallery- Symposium."

that hand-making-it-yourself could address and enact change, is how this new material language helped shape and advance crafting into an actual movement.

Product to Process: Craftivism for the Masses

The shining difference in how the contemporary crafting movement differs in nature from other artistic craft movements (i.e. the studio craft movement) in American history is the promotion of doing the act yourself. DIY takes craft out of the art realm and puts it into the everyday world of average Americans, or rather it makes craft relevant to more than just artists and academic scholars. This idea of shifting “craft from product to process, from noun to verb,” is what provides contemporary crafters, whether professionals or amateurs, increased opportunities to participate in craft practices.¹⁵⁷ Narratives documenting craft as a verb have emerged in practically all forms: Facebook posts, Pinterest comments, Tweets, and artistically de-digitized Instagram images. Art students are leaving the classroom and adding to the “re-energized return of craft to popular culture and politics” while bloggers, novices, and average individuals equally encourage ideas about what craft can provide to American society.¹⁵⁸ The power of craft to represent beliefs is not new, but the idea that *anyone* can and should practice craft, should generate material goods with their hands, should encourage each other to hand-craft, is the very essence and distinction of the contemporary handmade craft movement. Americans, those who can be labeled as the second-wave handmade crafters, are not all

¹⁵⁷ Buszek, “‘Labor Is My Medium’: Some Perspective(s) on Contemporary Craft,” 73.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

that much different from a first-wave “rebel,” but they include a wider demographic as participation in the movement evolves into craft fair attendance and participation through online communities.¹⁵⁹ These individuals look to countercultural avenues of change, like crafting, rather than typical cultural avenues because crafting relies on a seemingly infallible source: yourself. Control, theoretically, is continuously in your hands. Craftivism is the use of craft to better the world, whether that world may be your immediate surroundings, your community, or the planet.

Buszek articulates what many cultural commentators attempt to address in their explanations for why today’s use of craft is both impactful and universally adoptable. In *Extra/ordinary*, Buszek posits that in today’s information-age,

the sensuous, tactile ‘information’ of craft media speaks...of a direct connection to humanity that is perhaps endangered, or at the very least being rapidly reconfigured in our technologically saturated, twenty-first century lives- thus demonstrating the extraordinary potential of these seemingly ordinary media and processes.¹⁶⁰

The overall consensus is that Americans seek to reconnect with humanity, and handmade crafts are what *ground* us with grounding being a base, a safety, to anchor, fortify, or entrench; thus, crafts stand in opposition to un-groundedness, baselessness, or superficiality extant elsewhere in society. Hand-created objects connect us to humans, rather than to machines or technology, businesses, the government, or other components of America perceived today to be unreliable. The *New York Times*’ Rob Walker charted the distaste of mass production as “a ‘major cause’ of global warming” and crafting as a

¹⁵⁹ Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008, 31.

¹⁶⁰ Buszek, *Extra/ordinary*, 1.

statement against the “dehumanizing global supply chain.”¹⁶¹ In her article on craft, *Newsweek*’s Michelle Goldberg quoted economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett on the “62 percent of Generation Y women [who] say they don’t want to emulate the long hours of their mothers’ ‘extreme’ careers.”¹⁶² Recognized craft scholar, Bruce Metcalf, weighs in that this craftivist craft “is anti-globalist, anti-corporate, green, [and] enthusiastic about any attempts to get off the grid.”¹⁶³ Finally, Emily Matchar’s *Homeward Bound* points out it is unsurprising that “in this culture of anxiety,” many are turning to handmade products.¹⁶⁴ Concerns abound over the environment, the drain of a high-tech-driven society, a growing distrust of the corporate world, big-businesses, and even the government, and of course the strain of economic recession that flooded the first decade of the twenty-first century.

With its promise of change and its claims to power and potential, the handmade revolution’s craftivism was seen as a direct antidote to this post-9/11 world view. Handmade crafts, as rebellious artists, independent stitchers, renegade fair vendors, and manifesto-making outlaws declared, connect us to humans, ground us to traditions of the past, and safeguard us from the anxieties of the world. Because contemporary crafts have been established as possessing a sense of authenticity and integrity through their connection with past reform movements in America, they possess a transformative power

¹⁶¹ Walker, “Handmade 2.0.”

¹⁶² Michelle Goldberg, “The Rise of the Crafty Hipster,” *Newsweek*, May 6, 2013, <http://www.newsweek.com/urban-mamas-get-crafty-63219>.

¹⁶³ Bruce Metcalf, “DIY, Websites and Energy: The New Alternative Crafts” (presented at the SNAG Conference, Savannah, Georgia, March 5, 2008), http://www.brucemetcalf.com/pages/essays/diy_websites_energy.html.

¹⁶⁴ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 12.

to affect change whether employed by those who construct them or by those who consume political-charged crafts.

Joan Tapper, author of *Craft Activism: Ideas and Projects Powered by the New Community of Handmade*, poses the question, “how is it that knitting has emerged from one’s sitting room onto a broader stage?”¹⁶⁵ It is true that plenty of powerful artists have created one-of-a-kind art pieces which boldly address political action within the museum setting. Cat Mazza and company knitted and crocheted a fifteen foot long blanket of the Nike swoosh motif as a microRevolt project (Figure 41), petitioning fair labor for Nike employees. After its completion in 2008, the “Nike Blanket Petition” was exhibited for public viewing by nationally renowned museums in Canada and America including the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon and the Sheldon Museum of Art in Lincoln, Nebraska.¹⁶⁶ Even more Americans, especially those in urban centers, have stumbled upon “yarn bombing.”¹⁶⁷ Also known as knit bombing (Figure 42), this act of covering public spaces with swatches of knitted yarn, is both “community textile graffiti” and “artistic vandalism.”¹⁶⁸ A less permanent and gentler form of graffiti, yarn bombing is now a global phenomenon which has covered everything from statues, trees, signs, bicycles, street poles, and even Wall Street’s “Charging Bull.”¹⁶⁹ Yet the fact that knitted

¹⁶⁵ Joan Tapper and Gale Zucker, *Craft Activism: Ideas and Projects Powered by the New Community of Handmade and How You Can Do It Yourself* (New York: Potter Craft, 2011), 6.

¹⁶⁶ “About- Nike Blanket Petition,” *microRevolt*, n.d., <http://www.microrevolt.org/web/blanket.htm>.

¹⁶⁷ Tapper and Zucker, *Craft Activism*, 6.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 11; Malia Wollan, “Creating Graffiti With Yarn,” *The New York Times*, May 18, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/fashion/creating-graffiti-with-yarn.html>.

¹⁶⁹ Wollan, “Creating Graffiti With Yarn.”

and crocheted crafts are not just visible components of culture, but are now happily in the hands of countless Americans, points to an important shift that differentiates contemporary crafts. The Gothamist blog, a source of popular culture commentary, offered reflection on a cultural phenomenon in a post titled, “Man Spotted Knitting On The Subway Is Your New Winter Boyfriend.”¹⁷⁰ Yet one of the largest ways that craftivism has impacted American society is through the act of consumption. Crafts in the twenty-first century have become such a large part of society, outside the museum walls, because of their entrance into the marketplace.

Rather than being viewed first as artistic endeavors, contemporary crafts are seen (perhaps subconsciously or indirectly so) as consumer items. Even though not all craftivism is consumer-based, craftivism’s staying power is largely due to its connection to consumption, for it has spread as part of the handmade movement because of how it can comment upon consumer action. This is why the common-craftivist chooses to create a DIY project on their free weekend, because it not only has the potential to generate a new product and subsequent satisfaction through creativity, but it also addresses the larger notion of changing one’s consumer habits, via practicing anti-consumption. Doing-it-yourself rather than buying it, is not the only form of craftivist commentary in the effort to implement change in American consumer society—*buying* handcrafted products is also seen and accepted as an ethical way to consume. It offers, as does DIY-ing, an alternative to consumption of mass-produced, environmentally *un*-friendly, *un*-

¹⁷⁰ “Man Spotted Knitting On The Subway Is Your New Winter Boyfriend,” *Gothamist*, accessed April 1, 2014, http://gothamist.com/2013/12/17/man_spotted_knitting_on_the_subway.php.

sustainable, and globally *un-fair* goods. This purchasing of handmade is often posited as equal under the larger call towards reformation of consumer habits and has only become increasingly equivalent as the movement grows and incorporates varying crafts and participants. Cyclical shifts of American society show times of “conspicuous consumption” alternating with more reticent periods of displays of wealth, yet the inclination towards consumption never vanishes.¹⁷¹ Indeed, materialism has traditionally guided American society whether during the Gilded Age, Great Depression, Post-war boom, or the recent Great Recession.¹⁷²

Although often pejorative in use, *materialism* is used here to simply explain an emphasis on material objects to frame and establish a shared cultural value system.¹⁷³

Although the handmade revolution is a rebellion against current consumer practices in American society, it does not have an anti-materialistic stance. If this movement actually endorsed anti-materialism, then all its varied practitioners would call for a refrain from making, abstinence from purchasing, and an avowal to live a life devoid of material possessions. Imagining a true anti-materialistic society is difficult, but it would, despite contemporary crafts’ similar call to start “living simple,” come closer in nature to the simplistic communities of the Quakers, Amish, and Mennonites.¹⁷⁴ Where scholars have

¹⁷¹ Ann Smart Martin, “Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 28, no. 2/3 (July 1, 1993): 147.

¹⁷² “The Great Recession | State of Working America,” accessed February 15, 2014, <http://stateofworkingamerica.org/great-recession/>; For more on a shared American identity through consumerism, see: Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*.

¹⁷³ Martin, “Makers, Buyers, and Users.”

¹⁷⁴ Cristin Frank, *Living Simple, Free & Happy: How to Simplify, Declutter Your Home, and Reduce Stress, Debt & Waste* (Betterway Books, 2013); “WGBH American Experience . The Amish | PBS,” *American Experience*, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/amish-who/>.

previously analyzed this return to ascetic American roots, Ann Smart Martin points out that “those examining self-sufficiency sought, in essence, the *unconsumer*, those looking for the noble craftsman hunted the *anti-consumer*, and both came up empty-handed.”¹⁷⁵ This is because both the unconsumer and the anti-consumer associate with material objects, one by making it themselves then consuming it, the other handcrafting for personal use or to commodify. Scholars may have abandoned the notion of the noble craftsman or honorable self-reliance in the academic study of craft, but Americans continue to affix value and morality to the acts of independent craftsmanship and self-sufficiency—both of which involve the making of material goods. Otherwise, a movement centered around the value or the power that handcrafted items have to change the status quo of modern society would have never developed.

Just as anti-modernism in the late nineteenth century was not a reaction *against* modernizing tendencies, anti-consumption in the twenty-first is not a reaction against actual consumption, but rather a realization of current consumer issues and a preoccupation with improving how consumption works in American society.¹⁷⁶ Although renowned crafter, Jean Railla denounces the mainstream “hypermaterIALIZED” American consumer society, she then qualifies that “perhaps making stuff is the ultimate form of rebellion.”¹⁷⁷ Although she rallies against *hyper*-materialism, she actually contributes to a materialistic society by her simple act of “making stuff” which holds value or meaning.¹⁷⁸ Within the contemporary craft movement this making, creating, and using however, is

¹⁷⁵ Martin, “Makers, Buyers, and Users,” 147.

¹⁷⁶ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, xvi.

¹⁷⁷ Jean Railla, “The Punk of Craft,” *CRAFT: Make Cool Stuff*, vol. 2, 10.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

undertaken in new ways that aim to transform American consumption. The result is the creation of handmade goods and a celebration of consumption's transformative power from the environment, to the economy, to the global marketplace, to your own personal disposition.

Diversity in Craftivism

Craft's visual vocabulary, such as raw wood construction and visible stitches, combined with its vernacular nature and impressive power to create change through consumer choices, led the movement from a few street corner stalls into a thirty billion dollar industry.¹⁷⁹ Seemingly ordinary products, once handcrafted, were able to inch their way into American culture visually and ethically by offering individuals an alternative option involving their consumption. Reusable shopping bags, once novel, are now almost expected (and even provided by producers themselves), with countless tutorials online providing audiences with dozens of ways to craft your own reusable tote. Creating a DIY shopping bag out of a vintage pillowcase (Figure 43) or purchasing a handmade grocery bag from online or a local market, both speak to the creation and consumption of a sustainable and eco-friendly marketplace. From Susan Wasinger's *Eco-Craft: Recycle, Recraft, Restyle*, to totallygreencrafts.com, working with one's hands to make and reuse products for the self, home, and family is a means to having less "eco-guilt" in an environmentally conscious world; buying a product connected to sustainability and eco-

¹⁷⁹ *TODAY: TODAY Visits the Country's Biggest Arts and Crafts Fair*, accessed February 16, 2014, <http://www.today.com/video/today/54176189>.

consciousness is equally practiced as a green-activity in today's society.¹⁸⁰ From the roots laid by early activists, craft's transformative power now extends to market-place products through the creation of the handmade aesthetic.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was increased commentary on what is now called, "New Environmentalism."¹⁸¹ Environmental activism, having its origins in the nineteenth century alongside the conservation movement, is of course anything but new. It is however, deemed *new* now because of its recent and distinct change in popularity and motivating factors. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, scientists and scholars alike spotlighted environmental concerns amidst gas shortages, climate changes like droughts and floods, GMO research discoveries, and sustainability issues. Called the "most significant environmental debate since the early 1970s," it is marked as culturally impacting society in profound ways.¹⁸² Becoming aware of environmental concerns became quite unavoidable, whether that knowledge was transmitted by online sources, news reporters, local or government politicians, eco-minded celebrities raising funds for charities, or even your corner grocer charging you five cents per plastic bag. Over the past ten years, phrases such as "eco-friendly," "go-green," "natural," and the top buzz word, "organic," have entered or reentered the American vocabulary in profound ways.¹⁸³ They surface daily, with consumer goods as their main means of transport.

¹⁸⁰ Susan Wasinger, *Eco-Craft: Recycle-Recraft-Restyle* (Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2009), 8.

¹⁸¹ "A Brief History of the Modern Green Movement in America | WebEcoist," accessed February 14, 2014, <http://webecoist.momtastic.com/2008/08/17/a-brief-history-of-the-modern-green-movement/>.

¹⁸² Andrew G. Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (University Press of Kansas, 2011), x.

¹⁸³ "A Brief History of the Modern Green Movement in America | WebEcoist."

With Railla stating that making is an “anti-consumerist decision to craft,” *upcycling* enters as a means to promote additional issues including sustainability and eco-consciousness.¹⁸⁴ Recycling old material, many crafters then upcycle the wood, glass, or fabric into a newly created object for saleable consumption or personal use.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, the idea of using a “reclaimed” material has become a marketable selling point among craft producers; reclaimed wood from abandoned barns or houses and reclaimed household fixtures remedy problems of wastefulness.¹⁸⁶ Faucet handles and doorknobs can be turned into towel racks, architectural elements into coat racks (Figure 44), and doors into full-length mirrors.¹⁸⁷ Salvaged materials can be employed by anyone attempting to add some DIY into their life, but are also sold at craft fairs and local markets; buying or making, handmade crafts often signify an effort to reform the health of the planet.

Crafting’s power to influence the marketplace reaches to include the re-organization of companies and the adoption, by many, of alternate market practices. For example, West Elm now features a “Handcrafted” line which consists of handmade items such as pillows, woven baskets, rugs, and glass lighting fixtures.¹⁸⁸ Where stores such as the well-known nonprofit fair trade organization, Ten Thousand Villages, has been

¹⁸⁴ Railla, *Get Crafty*, 11.

¹⁸⁵ Danny Seo and Jennifer Lévy, *Upcycling: Create Beautiful Things with the Stuff You Already Have* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Book Publishers, 2011).

¹⁸⁶ Ellen Dyrop and Hanna Kristinsdóttir, *Rediscovered treasures: [a new life for old objects]* (London: New Holland Publishers (UK), 2011); Amy R Hughes and Kristine Larsen, *This Old House Salvage-Style Projects* (New York, NY: Time Home Entertainment, 2011); Randy Florke and Nancy J Becker, *Restore. Recycle. Repurpose. {create a Beautiful Home}* (New York, NY: Hearst Books, 2010).

¹⁸⁷ Hughes and Larsen, *This Old House Salvage-Style Projects*.

¹⁸⁸ West Elm to Guzzon, “Introducing HANDCRAFTED...”

helping underprivileged artisans around the world for decades, mainstream stores with established clientele have recently added handcrafted products to their shelves.¹⁸⁹ The idea is not simply to sell the woven blanket, but to express the company's belief system around what is actually involved in the sale of that blanket. For example, West Elm's "Handcrafted" page of their website is studded with large font quotes from people like Jim Bret, the West Elm President, who states, "We have an unprecedented opportunity to create a large-scale platform for small-scale artisanal production. We are helping people grow their businesses from the ground up."¹⁹⁰ The site also provides details on the number of craftspeople that are employed in Jaipur, India in the making of a block-printed hand-stitched quilt, as well as vital data from the U.S. Department of State and the Aspen Institute which confirms that, "Behind agriculture, artisan activity is the 2nd largest employer in the developing world. It's often the primary means of income."¹⁹¹ A subsidiary of Williams-Sonoma, high-end parent company of Pottery Barn and most recently Rejuvenation, West Elm sells the values of "ethical sourcing" and "socially responsible practices" with each handcrafted pillow, rug, or quilt.¹⁹²

This idea of ethical economics, or "ethnomics," has risen over the past decade.¹⁹³ Spreading the call to social responsibility, there has been a push for business that "are good for the world as well as the bottom line."¹⁹⁴ Large and small purveyors of

¹⁸⁹ "About Us- Fair Trade," *Ten Thousand Villages*, n.d., <http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/fair-trade/>.

¹⁹⁰ "About- Handcrafted," *West Elm*, 2014, http://www.westelm.com/shop/handcrafted/?cm_sp=SuperNav-_-Handcrafted-_-LP.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Noah Robischon, "What Is Ethnomics?," *Fast Company*, accessed February 17, 2014, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1174713/what-ethnomics>.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

handcrafted goods now make a point to promote their impact on the global marketplace and how buying their products adds to the ethical betterment of the economy. Where Etsy's current mission statement reads, "re-image commerce in ways that build a more fulfilling and lasting world," 2012's mission statement was more illustrative, stating that Etsy was "bringing heart to commerce and making the world more fair, more sustainable and more fun."¹⁹⁵ Locally, a mixture of handmade and vintage boutiques are on the rise, some of which profess that "retail is secondary," bolstering the idea that profit should not precede ethical business practices.¹⁹⁶

Just as purchasing a product from a nation-wide retailer who proudly commits to improving the marketplace can be an action which defines the handmade craft movement, choosing to *not* purchase from any retailer is equally seen as commentary on the same issues. Boycotting big-businesses who buy and sell without regard to their global impact, is also accomplished by making your own products rather than buying any at all. "Let's be fair: a thoughtful lifestyle and beauty blog" offered a post titled, "DIY ethical bunting," (Figure 45) a tutorial on how to create a garland for a party: "using recycled fabric for a new purpose keeps it out of landfills longer and then you don't have to worry about purchasing an item that was made unethically."¹⁹⁷ These crafts are seen as a means

¹⁹⁵ Both citations are from the same source, the first from 2014, the latter from 2012: "Etsy - About."

¹⁹⁶ Jen G, "'Retail Is Secondary' Chat with Interior Designer Kevin Jakob of BKLYN Curated in Greenpoint," *Greenpointers*, July 23, 2013, <http://greenpointers.com/2013/07/23/retail-is-secondary-chat-with-kevin-jakob-of-bklyn-curated/>.

¹⁹⁷ "DIY Ethical Bunting - Let's Be Fair," accessed February 17, 2014, <http://www.letsbefairblog.com/my-blog/2013/04/my-entry.html>.

to contribute to improving your community and planet, to many it is not what you make, “it’s that you choose to make it at all.”¹⁹⁸

For many creating crafts in the twenty-first century, the outward appearance of the finished product is secondary to the inward characteristics it upholds: sustainability, fair-trade, or ethical principles. The act of creation and making by hand, the article of clothing, the household furnishing, or the personal accessory, is what gives the object that immaterial quality which is then marketed alongside the physical product. Through the consumption of these morally-packed products, individuals believe they participate in activism via crafts. Simply because these crafted objects are consumed, or rather used, does not mean they are any less theoretically valuable in society than a craft product which is exhibited at the Mint Museum, Renwick Gallery, or Portland’s Museum of Contemporary Craft. Rather, it is through the individual’s choice in consumption, either by buying through an ethically supportive company or through the act of producing the craft themselves, that these objects become a powerful piece of today’s American material culture. Contemporary crafts are the megaphones and spray paint of many of today’s activist-minded young adults; however, because of their ubiquity in form they have a power to generate societal change in new and approachable ways. More specifically, because they fluctuate physically they can appeal to a wider range of individuals, and because they often promote different craftivist agendas they interest

¹⁹⁸ Railla, “The Punk of Craft.”

those with varying beliefs and activist viewpoints. Despite these variations, the active use of contemporary crafts has transformed them from alternative, unconventional objects into ordinary and commonplace, yet powerfully poignant products of the American consumer society.

Chapter Two: Figures



Figure 35: *DIY Tree Stump Sanding and Finished*, 30 July 2012. “DIY Tree Stump Side Tables,” Bye Bye, Brooklyn blog (image in the public domain), <http://byebyebrooklyn.wordpress.com/2012/07/30/diy-tree-stump-side-tables/>.



Figure 36: *The Reclaim Frame*, c. 2014. Holstee (image in the public domain), <http://www.holstee.com/products/the-reclaim-frame>.

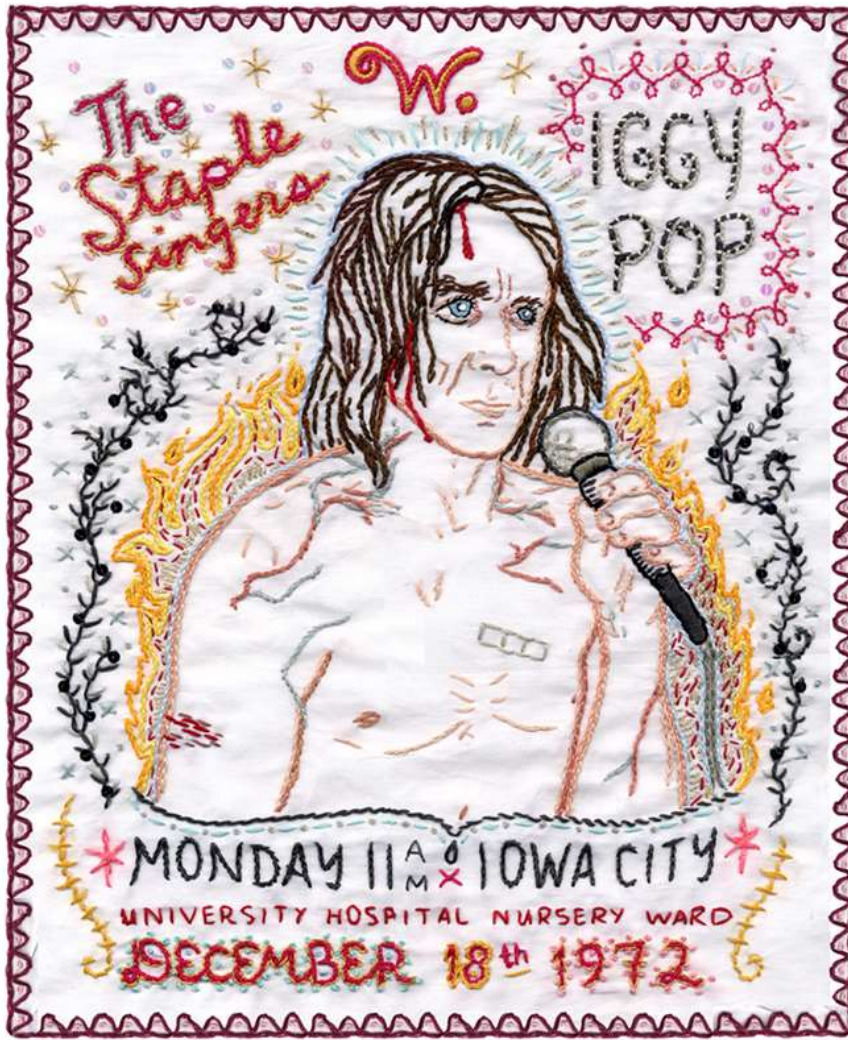


Figure 37: *Iggy Pop*, c. 2004, hand embroidery and sequins on cotton. By Jenny Hart, at Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection. Image from Jenny Hart (image in the public domain), <http://www.jennyhart.net/skzfdv1h3d8zoa8rgf8632past51r5>.



Figure 38: *Iggy Pop*, c. 2004, hand embroidery and sequins on cotton. By Jenny Hart, at Arkansas Arts Center Foundation Collection. Image from Jenny Hart (image in the public domain), <http://www.jennyhart.net/skzfdvlh3d8zoo8rgf8632past5lr5>; *Sampler*, c. 1788, linen, silk. By Abigail Purinton, at Winterthur Collection. Image from Winterthur Museum Collections (image in the public domain), museumcollection.winterthur.org.



Figure 39: *Tumblr post by Nora, c. 2014. Image from ENVILN (image in the public domain), <http://envlin.com/post/73326935930>.*



Figure 40: *La Llorona*, c. 2005, hand embroidery on cotton. By Jenny Hart, at Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Image from Jenny Hart (image in the public domain), <http://www.jennyhart.net/6w60c2t7ggw298w1gy7ge8gcmnyt2>.



Figure 41: *Nike Blanket Petition*, c. November 2007. microRevolt (image in the public domain), <http://www.microrevolt.org/blanket.htm>.



Figure 42: *Yarnbombed Rocky statue, Philadelphia Museum of Art*, 3 April 2011. Jesse Hemmons aka Ishknits. Image from “Ishknits Bombs The Art Museum,” Streets Dept blog (image in the public domain), <http://streetsdept.com/2011/04/03/ishknits-bombs-the-art-museum/>.



Figure 43: *Vintage Pillowcase Bag*, 10 April 2012. Cassandra, "Tutorial: Lined Vintage Pillowcase Bag," Cass Can Sew blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.casscansew.com/2012/04/tutorial-lined-vintage-pillowcase-bag.html>.



Figure 44: *Vintage Tap-Hook Towel Rack, Salvaged-Column Coat Tree*, c. 2014. "23 of Our Best Salvage-Style Projects," This Old House (image in the public domain), <http://www.thisoldhouse.com/toh/photos/0,,20683983,00.html>.



Figure 45: *Ethical Bunting*, 30 April 2013. "DIY Ethical Bunting," Let's Be Fair blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.letsbefairblog.com/my-blog/2013/04/my-entry.html>

CHAPTER THREE: New Domesticity- *handmade craft and the home*

A trend has emerged over the past decade which has brought ruffles, pin-tucks, overtly floral patterns, bowed ribbons, and dainty pockets back into the domestic kitchen. A “DIY” search on google for this item provides nine million results, an Etsy search under “handmade” provides over sixty thousand, and on Pinterest, over three hundred and twenty boards (not pins) contain within the title, the word: *apron*.¹⁹⁹ This however, is no ordinary apron; it is a vintage-inspired, lace-trimmed, flower-bedecked apron, utilized for its practicality, but prized for its physical appearance and similarity to its highly feminine ancestor from the 1950s (Figure 46). “We were so thrilled when hostess aprons made a comeback” wrote the *Huffington Post*’s Nicole Guzzardi, a sentiment shared by the authors of countless books, blogs, and magazines who showcased ideas like the *Post*’s “Craft of the Day”—a “retro cute reversible” DIY apron (Figure 47).²⁰⁰ Morgan Moore of the blog, *One More Moore*, offers a “Ruffle Apron” tutorial (Figure 48), one of many DIY apron lessons available on the web.²⁰¹

Sweetheart necklines and flared-out skirts certainly evoke wafts of homemade cookies popping out of the oven, but arouse more than one sensation in contemporary society. The frilly apron, and the social weight this archetype of domesticity has garnered

¹⁹⁹ “Search: ‘DIY Apron in Boards,’” *Pinterest*, accessed February 22, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com>; “Search: ‘Apron in Handmade,’” *Etsy*, accessed February 22, 2014, http://www.etsy.com/search/handmade?q=apron&order=most_relevant&view_type=gallery&ship_to=US&ref=auto3&explicit_scope=1.

²⁰⁰ Nicole Guzzardi, “Craft Of The Day: A Retro Cute Reversible Apron,” *Huffington Post*, May 18, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/17/craft-of-the-day-apron_n_1525622.html.

²⁰¹ Morgan Moore, “Valentine Tree & Apron 101,” blog, *One More Moore*, February 9, 2007, http://morganmoore.typepad.com/one_more_moore/2007/02/valentine_tree__1.html.

in the twenty-first century, stands as a symbol of the resurgence of feminist discussion, holding in tension conflicting beliefs about whether to embrace or refute domesticity and its complex past. Once condemned as an artifact of women's oppression, the apron has become a tool for autonomy in the latest debates about women's work in the home—the place where handmade objects are crafted.

Beyond the artists, the movers and shakers, and the authors who have each found a voice in the handmade cause, there are the listeners, the readers, and the viewers, essentially, the consumers of such weighty insight and profoundly powerful products. When asked if she, or her co-workers at Etsy headquarters, ever really thought about where the millions of handmade goods end up, Sarah Abramson replied, “Not really, *I do*, but as a whole, no we don't really think about the impact of Etsy products out there [in society].”²⁰² Abramson, a jeweler, independent promoter of the handmade ethos, and manager of the Marketplace Integrity Team at Etsy, would be the first to say that she acknowledges and encourages a society based upon handcrafted work. However, Etsy as a company has not necessarily paused to comprehend, beyond the natural objective of marketing, what new world is being created through the sale and output of millions of handmade products annually. Where do these goods go? Who reads Kate Payne's, Jean Railla's, or Joan Tapper's popular 'how-to' DIY books?²⁰³ Who peruses those incredibly trendy blogs which include Karen Bertelsen's *The Art of Doing Stuff*, Jenny Komenda's

²⁰² Abramson, Interview with Manager of Marketplace Integrity at Etsy with Gina Guzzon.

²⁰³ Kate Payne, *The Hip Girl's Guide to Homemaking: Decorating, Dining, and the Gratifying Pleasures of Self-Sufficiency--on a Budget!* (New York: Harper Design, 2011); Railla, *Get Crafty*; Tapper and Zucker, *Craft Activism*.

Little Green Notebook, Elsie Larson and Emma Chapman's *A Beautiful Mess*, or Sherry and John Petersik's *Young House Love*? Who are the individuals empowering themselves through DIY and thereby enacting change within society? Although encompassing a diverse population, these twenty and thirty-something crafters are overwhelmingly *women*. Women are salvaging and reclaiming not only raw materials, but with their own two hands, are also "reclaiming domesticity."²⁰⁴ Their uniform of choice, is often the retro apron (Figure 49).

The apron may be crafted by the owner, purchased as handmade, or, as the movement grows, simply appear handmade. But once donned to perform household tasks, work which has traditionally been completed by women, these aprons allow for a powerful statement about the value and importance of this work. Although once an emblem of repression, now "a growing community of self-proclaimed apronistas is seizing the apron back from such dusty, anachronistic thinking."²⁰⁵ It was a "symbol of kitchen drudgery, [but now] the apron has returned with a vengeance, ushered by a renewed appreciation of all things domestic" as countless blogs attest.²⁰⁶

This has led to the profusion of online DIY tutorials on how to craft your own dainty pinafore and a surplus of companies who sell feminine aprons, including Modern June, Sugar Pie Chic, The Cupcake Provocateur, The Hostess With the Mostest, and

²⁰⁴ Shannon Hayes, *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture* (Richmondville, NY: Left to Write Press, 2010).

²⁰⁵ Rene Lynch, "Aprons: Go Ahead and Tie One on," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/06/food/la-fo-0506-aprons-20100506>.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Fashionista Aprons.²⁰⁷ A few others include Sugar Baby Aprons, Flirty Aprons, Sweetie Pie Aprons, Kitchen Flirt Aprons, and Tie Me Up Aprons.²⁰⁸ The names of these companies are anything but subtle, utilizing language that alludes to the apron's previous social status. The retro wording spurs implications about women's role as an "angel in the house" provocatively associating heavenly hostess with women's sexuality.²⁰⁹ Etsy alone has over one hundred shops devoted to apron making and with "apron" in the shop's title, not to mention the thousands of shops which sell aprons alongside their other crafted goods.²¹⁰ Books abound with information about the glories of making one's own apron, such as EllynAnne Geisel's *The Apron Book: Making, Wearing, and Sharing a Bit of Cloth and Comfort*, Denise Clason's *Sewing Vintage Aprons: Classic Aprons for Today's Lifestyle*, Robert Merrett's *The Perfect Apron: 35 Fun and Flirty Designs for You to Make*, and Nathalie Mornu's *A Is for Apron: 25 Fresh & Flirty Designs*, all of which were published within the past decade.²¹¹ As for blogs, there are Apron Goddess: Domestic Goddesses Wearing Aprons, Apron Anxiety, The Apron Gal, and Apron Stringz: Diary of a Revolutionary Housewife, to name just a few.²¹²

²⁰⁷ Julia, "Why the Apron Goddesses?," *The Apron Goddesses*, December 18, 2008, <http://aprongoddesses.blogspot.com/2008/12/why-apron-goddesses.html>.

²⁰⁸ "Search: 'Apron in Pinners,'" *Pinterest*, accessed February 22, 2014, <http://www.pinterest.com>.

²⁰⁹ Referencing Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1863), this phrase has come to symbolize the idealized femininity of the nineteenth century and is still utilized contextually in contemporary feminist discussion.

²¹⁰ "Search: 'Shop Names Containing Apron,'" *Etsy*, accessed February 22, 2014, http://www.etsy.com/search/shops?search_query=apron+.

²¹¹ EllynAnne Geisel, *The Apron Book: Making, Wearing, and Sharing a Bit of Cloth and Comfort* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Pub., 2006); Denise Clason, *Sewing Vintage Aprons* (Stanhope, NJ: All American Crafts, 2010); Rob Merrett, *The Perfect Apron: 35 Fun and Flirty Designs for You to Make* (London: Cico, 2009); *A Is for Aprons: 25 Fresh & Flirty Designs*. (New York: Lark Books, 2008).

²¹² Julia, "Why the Apron Goddesses?"; "Apron Anxiety," accessed February 22, 2014, <http://apronanxiety.com/?og=1>; "The Apron Gal: About," accessed February 22, 2014, <http://www.theaprongal.com/p/about.html>; "Reclaiming Housewifery," *Apron Stringz*, accessed February 22, 2014, <http://apronstringz.wordpress.com/reclaiming-housewifery/>.

To be certain, this media speaks to a wider trend. Producing handmade products from one's home is a growing phenomenon which encompasses more than aprons or even knitted scarves or repurposed lighting fixtures. In fact, with its inclusion of the kitchen, things like canning, bread baking, pickling, and from-scratch meals add to the countless ways that women in particular are choosing to spend more time with hands-on work in the home. Emerging beyond its subcultural roots, the handmade revolution soon “sparked a growing trend for handcrafts and handmade goods—knitted scarves, embroidered tote bags, hand-sewn 1950s style aprons.”²¹³ As this movement grew female crafters and authors began, via crafts and craft commentary, to reappropriate domestic activities as important and meaningful, thus spreading a new enthusiasm for hand-making in the home environment. This new, highly female-centric fascination emerged as a viable trend, sparking a new wave of women who began crafting and reviving handmade work in the domestic setting. Fashioned by Railla in *Get Crafty*, examined by Matchar in *Homeward Bound*, and adopted by women across America, this trend earned the label, “New Domesticity.”²¹⁴ As women continue to search for a handmade material life, however, they are uncovering the complexities that surround the values placed on tasks performed in and out of the house and thus the fluidity in meaning that objects undergo when created and consumed in the home.

²¹³ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 44.

²¹⁴ Emily Matchar, “The New Domesticity: Fun, Empowering or a Step Back for American Women?,” *The Washington Post*, November 28, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-new-domesticity-fun-empowering-or-a-step-back-for-american-women/2011/11/18/gIQAqkg1vN_story.html.

Old versus New

“New Domesticity,” as described by Emily Matchar, author of the provocative *Washington Post* article published in 2011, is a social movement involving this “generation’s newfound mania for old-fashioned domestic work,” such as “reviving ‘lost’ domestic arts like canning, bread-baking, knitting, chicken-raising, etc.”²¹⁵ Jean Railla used it first in her book, *Get Crafty: Hip Home Ec*, pointing to those who were “domestically challenged” but now *newly* participated in such home-based activities.²¹⁶ Railla even questioned her own actions, “am I too crafty, too girly? After all, our culture continues to thumb its nose at domesticity.”²¹⁷ The contemporary use of the word, *domesticity*, therefore, is an interesting choice due to its long history and this negative connotation that our culture clearly attaches to the word. Second-wave feminism and post-feminists alike concur that existing in a pre-Friedan, domestic-housewife, inequitable world is less than favorable.²¹⁸ The reason for applying this culturally defined term and what makes it different now, is the *use* of the term. Shannon Hayes, a leading DIY feminist, precedes the term domesticity with the word, *reclaiming*, in the title of her 2010 book.²¹⁹ She points out that domesticity is something that needs to be rescued and reassigned a new meaning as both radical and progressive, a nod to the alternative message of the early years of the handmade revolution. Similarly, Railla’s “new” domesticity points to the attempt to distance domesticity from previous social meanings.

²¹⁵ Ibid.; Emily Matchar, “Home- New Domesticity,” *New Domesticity*, 2014, <http://newdomesticity.com/>.

²¹⁶ Railla, *Get Crafty*, 4.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ For a comparison of feminism and post-feminism, see: Mary Hawkesworth, “The Semiotics of Premature Burial: Feminism in a Postfeminist Age,” *Signs* 29, no. 4 (June 1, 2004): 961–85.

²¹⁹ Hayes, *Radical Homemakers*, 2010.

Domesticity's current emergence as a topic of social discussion reiterates what scholars have already pointed out, that domesticity "transcends historical periods and continues to be meaningful to generations of American women."²²⁰ This is further supported by the attempts to redefine domesticity, making it a powerful statement about gender division in America and an extension of the connection between women and consumption of household goods.

'Old' domesticity, although impossible to actually define, is explained by contemporary critics as the social view of domestic work prior to this new and revised outlook. Therefore, the mainstream view in the 1990s of domesticity, was fairly pejorative and depreciatory, defined in opposition to the 'real' or 'valuable' work that women performed outside the home and for which they received pay. This corresponds with the traditional definition of work, which is derived from its market-based value; since the beginning of America's history wages have been utilized as the means to determine the status, and thus level of importance, of work.²²¹ This definition, however, does not account for the "social capital" earned by acts of un-waged work performed in the home nor acknowledge it as a prerequisite due to its "reproduction of conditions necessary for the creation of capital."²²² Therefore, the media of the 1980s and early

²²⁰ Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart*, 4.

²²¹ For the definition of work as a context for household labor, see: Jennifer Van Horn, "Samplers, Gentility, and the Middling Sort," *Winterthur Portfolio* 40, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 219-48; Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford University Press, 1994); For histories of domestic work, see: Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000); Glenna Matthews, "*Just a Housewife*": *The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (Oxford University Press, 1987); For more of a history of home economics within the context of domesticity, see: Sarah Abigail Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice*; Megan J. Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

²²² Horn, "Samplers, Gentility, and the Middling Sort," 226; Boydston, *Home and Work*, x.

1990s painted a picture of the “chic career woman with ‘power’ wardrobes and Elysian lifestyles...if mentioned at all [homemakers] were set apart as a quaint and rapidly vanishing breed.”²²³ Rightfully valued for the positive impact they made in the workforce, woman working outside the home were unjustifiably juxtaposed against women working in the home. The cultural shift is also evidenced in how Martha Stewart, a prominent figure in the domestic discussion since the 1980s, was first demonized in the 1990s, and now in the second decade of the twenty-first century, valorized. In 1996, *New York Times* entitled an article about Stewart, “Public Enemy No. 1.” Exactly sixteen years later to the day, *New York Times* published an article labeling Stewart “a patron saint for entrepreneurial hipsters, 20- and 30-somethings who, in a post-recessionary world, have begun their own pickling, cupcake and letterpress businesses and are selling crafty goods online.”²²⁴ Stewart, and her business conglomerate Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, have indeed helped to chart the rise in domestic interests, but Stewart is certainly not the only one to credit for “the idea that DIY homemaking can lead to happiness,” as some may claim.²²⁵

Domestic advice literature has been a significant part of the reading material directed at a female audience since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

²²³ Linda Burton, Janet Dittmer, and Cheri Loveless, *What’s a Smart Woman like You Doing at Home?* (Vienna, Va.: Mothers At Home, 1992).

²²⁴ Patricia McLaughlin, “Public Enemy No. 1,” *New York Times*, November 24, 1996, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/109665062/abstract/7BE8556736E94B4BPQ/20?accountid=14541>; Christine Haughney, “For Martha Stewart’s New Fans, Tattoos Meet Appliqué,” *The New York Times*, November 24, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/25/business/media/for-martha-stewarts-new-fans-tattoos-meet-applique.html>.

²²⁵ Hillary Kelly, “Martha Stewart: Original Hipster,” *The New Republic*, December 6, 2012, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/110849/martha-stewart-original-hipster>.

when books and magazines started instructing women on their consumer choices. From Lydia Maria Child's *The American Frugal Housewife* (1828), to the highly influential *Godey's* magazine edited by Sarah Josepha Hale (beginning in 1837), to Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The American Woman's Home* (1869), domestic advice has come in a range of formats. Uniting them, however, has been the historic idea that "a woman's virtue and worth can be found in the way she furnishes her home."²²⁶ Although as the twentieth century progressed, and gender equality embraced, a woman's personal worth was increasingly generated from outside sources such as careers and education, the fact remains that female identity is still closely tied to the furnishing and care of the home. This belief has grown to more broadly express the idea that identity formation is directly connected to the way one assembles her physical surroundings.²²⁷ Recent discussions of this idea in a multitude of sources, affirms the existence of this gendered relationship and the societal importance that domesticity has continued to possess. Sarah Leavitt's *From Catherine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice*, provides a comprehensive illustration of the how domestic media, and the domestic advisors that create them, have impacted American women for centuries.²²⁸ The influence of today's domestic media on American women, therefore, cannot be underestimated. The weight of these cultural arbitrators is evidenced in

²²⁶ Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart*, 5, 17, 9.

²²⁷ For a social understanding of identity formation through objects, see: Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*; For a case study on identity formation through fashion, see: Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward, *Blue Jeans*; For identity formation through household objects, see: David Halle, *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²²⁸ Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart*.

contemporary crafts maintaining (not necessarily generating) both their societal value and their transformative power to affect change.

Today's focus on domesticity and the varied voices which bring renewed commentary on it therefore, is not merely a flash reaction, but rather part of a long history of female peers providing advice to affect the lives of American women. Throughout the nineteenth, twentieth and up through the twenty-first century, commentary on women's choices regarding consumer objects for the home and personal use has been prevalent and abundant.²²⁹ Although some advisors have emerged as amateur-like and insignificant, there is a strong history of educated domestic advisors who have played key positions in advancing the roles of women and improving the lives of those who perform work within the home. Not all domestic advisors provide what is seen as stereotypically flippant advice, such as whether lace curtain are 'in' or 'out.' Rather many have played a key position in the discussion of women's role in society and the efficiency of household activities. It is not surprising, then, that in the birth of the information age, blogs, websites, magazines, books, social media, and television continue this task, scrupulously covering everything from the best living room furniture, to cleaning advice, to quick and healthy meals. These domestic advisors are often highly influential authorities who, because of their ability in the past to shape female consumers, are recognized (consciously or not) by the consumer as providing a social value to furniture, curtains,

²²⁹ For the impact of domestic advice and the shaping of female identity over varied centuries, see: Strasser, *Never Done*; Katherine C. Grier, *Culture & Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850-1930* (Strong Museum, 1988); Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart*.

and bathroom accessories since these objects do not possess such inherent qualities on their own.²³⁰

The number of books published in the past decade alone which address the handmade production and consumption of crafted household objects is enormous (Figure 50). Quantifying the blogs and websites which promote similar ideas, tutorials, and lifestyle choices is impossible, but as a whole they showcase an ever-growing array of advice on “where to stash your stuff: simple solutions for a happy home,” “tips for prolific living,” or how to build a “DIY dollhouse.”²³¹ Common themes emerge in the twenty-first century over the vast array of design and home-life media however, such as simplicity, improvement, and achievability; they promise that by following a few steps which are easy and do-able, the (female) reader’s life will be improved and simplified.²³² This genre of DIY publications has increased exponentially in the past decade, making DIY projects and advice on how to improve your life through crafting your home, a highly popular topic of today’s female-focused media. In fact, it is the female audience who unites many of these publications, both in print and online. This renewed fervor among American women to have control over and make conscious decisions about what they consume in their homes is unequivocally conjoined with the promise of

²³⁰ Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart*, 5.

²³¹ Nancy Mitchell, “Where to Stash Your Stuff: Simple Solutions for a Happy Home Apartment Therapy Video Roundup,” *Apartment Therapy*, January 26, 2014, <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/where-to-stash-your-stuff-simple-solutions-for-a-happy-home-apartment-therapy-video-roundup-199502>; “5 Tips for Prolific Living! - A Beautiful Mess,” accessed March 8, 2014, <http://www.abeautifulmess.com/2010/12/5-tips-for-prolific-living.html>; Ashley Mills, “How to Build a Dollhouse,” blog, *The Handmade Home: Creating a Haven for the Every Day*, July 25, 2013, <http://www.thehandmadehome.net/2013/07/how-to-build-a-dollhouse/>.

²³² Despite the multitude of self-help books, DIY publications are an entirely separate genre: Kathreen Ricketson, “How to Get Your Craft Book Published: Part 1,” blog, *Whip Up*, January 12, 2012, <http://whipup.net/2012/01/12/how-to-get-your-craft-book-published-part-1/>.

improvement that crafting provides. New Domesticity covers everything from kitchen basics to clothing production, but the idea of making and producing objects for the home and making specific consumer choices for the domestic sphere highlights crafts as a unique way. It shows that the making of handmade products by women, focusing here specifically on crafted items, is not just part of a movement under the heading New Domesticity, but under the larger title of the Handmade Movement.

Why Women Craft: The Appeal of Hand-making in the Home

In their pervasiveness and promise of improvement, contemporary crafts have reached beyond the artists and outspoken craftivists, influencing the lives of everyday Americans. Women, specifically, are crafting because of the influence of cultural arbitrators, because they are attempting to newly connect with femininity of the past, and because they want to forge a new version of domesticity in the present. Contemporary crafts, through the alteration of their societal meaning, provide the means to fashion these connections and form these new definitions. Rather than the object's form changing drastically, the objects of New Domesticity adjust in *meaning* to shift and move with a changing society. Contemporary crafting has professed to fix disillusionment of outside, public forces by providing a newfound power into the individual's hands. Female crafters, gaining this sense of control, then feel empowered and inspired. This power is why crafts are employed as tools of adaptation, as prescriptions on how to thrive in a post-9/11 world. Furthermore, these objects do *not* only include doilies, quilts, and styrofoam holiday décor, but feature a wide range of crafts with varied mediums and skill

levels required. This makes for a diverse array of New Domesticity participants who use these objects for reasons as opposite as those to which the apron alludes. By tracing such personal motives for crafting, as well as the larger goals of forging a new femininity in the twenty-first century, it becomes clear that New Domesticity surfaces complex and engrained object-meaning relationships.

Diversity, mainly in physicality, that is found throughout the handmade craft movement explains how and why crafting is so widely appealing to many women in America. First, contemporary craft's equivalence with ordinary objects of everyday society affords a natural embrace of such objects. Because tables, chairs, mirrors, and fashion items are part and parcel of most American's lives, these ubiquitous forms naturally create a broad audience. Where Female A hopes to improve the appearance of her home office by painting an old desk and making seat cushions from sweaters (Figure 51), Female B finds knitting scarves and hot gluing buttons and pins into necklaces as her way of employing crafting into her life (Figure 52). Female A saves money and creates a comfortable space to use her computer, Female B reverts from technology, seeking out hands-on hobbies. A third, Female C, doesn't have the time or interest in sewing pillows or gluing buttons, but wanting to promote a fair marketplace and small businesses, she buys handmade necklaces on Etsy and handmade pillows at her local alternative craft fair.

The point is that these types of objects are not new additions to women's lives and therefore can be adopted, as handmade versions, with ease and minimal adjustment by

many women. Furthermore, historical associations between women and craft objects are profuse and consistent; needlework in the eighteenth century was, in period terms, “a truly feminine employment,” and scrap-booking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a “domestic amusement” of middle class American females.²³³ Women have viewed domestic pursuits as valuable, even if culturally less valuable than workplace labor, by utilizing the hobbies and objects to shape and improve their own lives.²³⁴ To see today’s use of craft as an extension of this practice is a potent yet effective association.

Another reason crafts appeal to a wide range of women in America is because a crafted lifestyle can be tailored to those with different economic and political beliefs and values. Crafts do not prescribe a univocal means to improve a specified area of the consumer’s life, therefore women with varying skill levels and opinions of what is seen as entertainment employ crafts for diverse reasons. Take for example, the highest concentration of Etsy vendors in America—Mormons of Provo, Utah.²³⁵ Where some women see their “from-scratch life” as part of their faith, other women from areas with a high-percentage of crafters, such as Portland, Oregon, often have no religion-crafting connection.²³⁶ Likewise, websites like Etsy allow women to become highly involved with craft by making a living off what they produce in their home, which is well suited for those in more traditional communities. Comparing these women with the ‘rebels’ of the

²³³ Amy Boyce Osaki, “A ‘Truly Feminine Employment’: Sewing and the Early Nineteenth-Century Woman,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 23, no. 4 (December 1, 1988): 225–41; Beverly Gordon, *The Saturated World: Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women’s Lives, 1890-1940* (University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 32.

²³⁴ For a complete analysis of women’s agency through domestic activities, see: Gordon, *The Saturated World*.

²³⁵ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 223.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

alternative, indie urbanites from prior chapters illustrates that crafting appeals and is accessible to a more diverse demographic than in previous decades.

Lastly, the physicality of contemporary crafts in America is as diverse as crafts' users. Although they all have the common theme of looking ideally imperfect due to their hand-touched qualities, the actual appearance can vary greatly. Take for example Me and Phoebe designs, which sells at a numerous east coast mid-Atlantic craft fairs as well as online at Etsy.²³⁷ The owner of this shop takes pieces of vintage furniture and upcycles them into new products; by painting the entire piece or a section of it then distressing the painted portion, she creates a newly consumable product for the marketplace (Figure 53). Sold under the label of "handmade" on Etsy, her products have a unique hand-touched look because of her paint color choice, occasional hardware upgrades, as well as the distressed appearance which insinuates previous usage (thus human manipulation), even if falsely so. Conversely, Fallen Made designs, based out of Brooklyn, New York, exhibits a very different aesthetic, these products are more simplistic in nature and although also upcycled, reclaimed (presumably "fallen") wood is utilized, rather than a salvaged piece of constructed furniture. According to creators Bri and husband Casey, a Fallen Made coffee table (Figure 54), is "crafted out of 200 year old wood from a barn in Pennsylvania, this table has nothing but love and... personal hard work built into it."²³⁸ This raw, perfectly imperfect method to designing furniture pieces and entire living rooms connects the assorted objects of the contemporary craft movement. It is also made

²³⁷ "Me and Phoebe by MeAndPhoebe on," *Etsy*, accessed February 28, 2014, <http://www.etsy.com/shop/MeAndPhoebe?ref=l2-shopheader-name>.

²³⁸ "Barn Wood Coffee Table," *Fallen Made*, accessed February 28, 2014, <http://www.fallenmade.com/product/barn-wood-coffee-table>.

apparent through highly popular books such as Deborah Needleman's *The Perfectly Imperfect Home: How to Decorate & Live Well*, published in 2011.²³⁹

Exploring the vendors at Brooklyn's Renegade Craft Fair, D.C.'s Crafty Bastards, or Portland's Crafty Wonderland yields an assortment of similar but clearly aesthetically different products for sale at these fairs, not to mention the diversity among the millions sold online. With sufficient handmade jewelry at almost every other table, there are also a plethora of ceramic bowls, dishes, cups and mugs, next to bags and totes of varied mediums such as felt, leather, woven cloth or knit yarn. Screen-printing abounds on t-shirts, sweatshirts and innumerable onesies, surrounded by various decorative accessories including leather watches, pressed paper technology cases, and eye-glass frames made from wood. Scarves alone, a hot item amongst female crafters, perfectly illustrates the degree of diversity that these craft products result in; knit, crocheted, block-printed, upcycled, light, heavy, long, short, or infinity—yet all handcrafted. It is this diversity in form, audience, and style of contemporary crafts which enable a viable movement to form around the redefinition of American domesticity.

Crafts, as powerful consumer commentary, have provided a unique voice to women in American society who are employing them as a means to connect with the past. In her chapters titled, "The Emergence of the 'Hipster Homemaker,'" and "Woman's (and Man's) Place is Home: Rise of Homesteading," Matchar charts the

²³⁹ Deborah Needleman, *The Perfectly Imperfect Home: How to Decorate and Live Well* (Random House LLC, 2011).

growth of female homesteaders, women who turned towards a “new kind of self-sufficient, home-focused, frugal, slowed-down lifestyle” that offered a means to bettering their current state of living and consumption.²⁴⁰ Some of these homesteaders, discontent with making small consumer choices, decided instead to “challenge the foundations of twenty-first century consumer culture itself” by revolutionizing all areas of their lives.²⁴¹ Although not all women have quit their high-paying day jobs for a life on the farm full of chickens and knit sweaters, a huge population of American women are indeed leading lives that are shaped by their daily choices about handmade objects. Self-sufficiency and frugality are two historical values in American culture which link crafting women today with females in the past.

Where homesteading usually involves raising livestock and living off the land, homemaking is understood more within the context of specific tasks such as producing homemade objects and food as an alternative to buying it.²⁴² Homesteading has been described as more of a long-term investment, where homemaking can produce direct money-saving results based on the project. Both sourced from the past, homesteading references an eighteenth century notion of the household as a productive unit, and homemaking an early twentieth century version of housework and efficiency.²⁴³ The title

²⁴⁰ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 187.

²⁴¹ Kelly Coyne and Knutzen Erik, *Making It: Radical Home Ec for a Post-Consumer World* (Rodale, 2011), 2.

²⁴² Amy Walker, “Homestead Revival: Don’t Participate In The Financial Crisis: Homestead Instead!,” *Homestead Revival*, September 9, 2010, <http://homesteadrevival.blogspot.com/2010/09/dont-participate-in-financial-crisis.html>; “Self-Sufficient Living | Apron Stringz,” accessed February 24, 2014, <http://apronstringz.wordpress.com/tag/self-sufficient-living/>.

²⁴³ For eighteenth century ideology of housework, see: Boydston, *Home and Work*; Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart*.

of Kate Payne's book concludes with "on a Budget!" and provides numerous low cost ideas to save money and spend less such as "the three r's: reclaim, repurpose, revamp."²⁴⁴ Karen, the author of the popular Art of Doing Stuff blog, explains that her goal is to get the reader to understand that "you can do it yourself, cheaper, faster and it will make your life simpler."²⁴⁵ Thrifting is also seen as an enjoyable way to save money and consume differently (Figure 55). Where buying a thrift good and then upcycling or reinventing it into a new product can involve a few simple steps (Figure 56) or vast transformations (Figure 57), it is crafting in the sense of creating, with your hands, a new product for use in your home. Curbside trash-pickups or Goodwill-hunting therefore, can also provide 'raw' materials for homemade craft projects either in the form of chairs to reupholster (Figure 58) or old sweaters that can be remade into cute sweater-dresses for little girls (Figure 59). Through the act of crafting, meaning is altered, and things like dumpster diving help shape a twenty-first century notion of domesticity.

Where some have delved into the financial pros and cons of living off this sort of lifestyle, the important message here is not whether one could, or should, live solely off the land or through the income generated by selling products on Etsy.²⁴⁶ Rather it is about the fact that "crafting has become a lifestyle choice," one that can affect not just the number of bills you have in your wallet, but how you approach consumption and production on a regular basis.²⁴⁷ Indeed, yarn can be fairly expensive to purchase, especially if knitting an entire sweater is the end goal. Crafting, therefore, is not meant to

²⁴⁴ Payne, *The Hip Girl's Guide to Homemaking*, 31.

²⁴⁵ Karen, "About- Art of Doing Stuff," blog, *Art of Doing Stuff*, n.d.

²⁴⁶ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 173–181.

²⁴⁷ Railla, *Get Crafty*, 11.

be haphazardly adopted, but rather enter into the female's life as a conscious decision, promoting cognizance about her own consumption. Empowerment is often found in the act of choosing; Naomi, a crafter from Pennsylvania states, "I love the craft ideas, but I don't always have the patience for that, so I'd rather spend six dollars locally to support a crafter than buy from the dollar-party-store."²⁴⁸ Women see handmade crafts as a liberation from sole dependence on outside forces, whether that be the department store supplying mass-produced unified goods or public opinion specifying that financial power is achieved only through non-traditionally-feminine means.

This personal empowerment that crafting supplies to women, is the means to forge a new version of domesticity. Women feel empowered to actively shape the world around them but also to modify and better their own individual lives. By acknowledging crafting as a personal pastime, and thus the emotional response it can enact, American woman have embraced the notion of a sentimentalized culture. The legacy of a nineteenth century sentimentalized nation is that Americans continuously utilize sentimentality, as seen with nostalgia, as an "operation or set of actions" by which to process the world.²⁴⁹ Manual skills which have become less and less necessary in this digital age, are suddenly revived as part of a "reskilling" movement.²⁵⁰ (Re)learning these skill and producing handmade crafts which harken emotional responses engenders positive feelings about one's own ability to create and provide. Twenty-first century crafters may provide

²⁴⁸ Lydia Wisler, Naomi Ermold, and Cristina Hostetter, Interview with Crafters- by Gina Guzzon, December 1, 2013.

²⁴⁹ Shirley Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment : Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th-Century America: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 6.

²⁵⁰ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 23.

themselves with knitted hats or a nicer looking bedroom dresser, but the essence of the task is still present. Cristina, a self-professed DIY-er from Pennsylvania, states “there is pride in ‘I brought this into my home.’”²⁵¹ Similarly, Lydia a fellow crafter, affirms that the act of creating provides a self-esteem boost so that, when she sees a potential craft, she thinks “oh, I can do that,” thus feeling capable, competent, and empowered.²⁵² Crafting, to these women and many of their fellow crafters, is seen as a creative outlet, as “my time,” and portrays the message to others, that “I want to make my home, not just buy my home.”²⁵³ Femininity in the twenty-first century includes fostering one’s own emotional interaction with material surroundings, leading to empowerment and fulfillment. As Betsy Greer, a leading craftivist, states in her book *Knitting for Good*, “finding and embracing the handmade can be an extremely personal and rewarding journey.”²⁵⁴

Laurie Furber was featured in a *Whole Living* magazine article (owned by Martha Stewart Living, recently absorbed and thus discontinued), titled “Second Life,” which chronicled her pursuit of a new life when “weary of the corporate grind, she launched a home-design business, focused on the vintage and repurposed, from her own bedroom.”²⁵⁵ Similarly, Kimberly Scola, creator behind Chez Sucre Chez, always had a passion for crafting. So when she found herself unfulfilled in a job which was not in an area she wanted to stay in, Scola started her now flourishing embroidered designs

²⁵¹ Wisler, Ermold, and Hostetter, Interview with Crafters- by Gina Guzzon.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Greer, *Knitting for Good!*, 9.

²⁵⁵ Sarah Engler, “Second Life,” *Whole Living*, December 2012.

business (Figure 60).²⁵⁶ Selling at local fairs, she has now been a showcased vendor at two Martha Stewart events and has been asked to lend her designs to retail stores. Scola stated “if you believe in something enough, you can make it happen.”²⁵⁷ Not quite a rags-to-riches story, both these women do, however, update that romance into an unsatisfied-to-fulfilled happy-ending. Not everyone can find the success they found through crafting, but the message is that crafting provides opportunities for growth and enrichment, whether tangibly or emotionally. These women utilize domesticity within a public realm, bridging the tension between the home and the outside work environment for themselves and fellow crafters.

Alla Myzelev addresses this idea of self-improvement via crafts in her article, “Whip Your Hobby into Shape: Knitting, Feminism, and Construction of Gender.” She states that domestic hobbies are undertaken by women to carve out time specifically separate from the tasks of the modern world: “it is about taking control of one’s time when it is almost impossible because of the pressures of multifaceted lives.”²⁵⁸ Longing for the “human element” of crafting by hand, in essence nostalgia, drives many women of varied backgrounds to craft.²⁵⁹ Ann Douglas, in *Feminization of American Culture*, states that sentimentalization “asserts that the values a society’s activity denies are precisely the ones it cherishes; it attempts to deal with the phenomenon of cultural bifurcation by the

²⁵⁶ Kimberly Scola, “About- Chez Sucre Chez,” accessed March 9, 2014, <http://chezsucrechez.com/about>.

²⁵⁷ Kimberly Scola, Interview with Chez Sucre Chez at American Made- by Gina Guzzon, October 2013.

²⁵⁸ Alla Myzelev, “Whip Your Hobby into Shape: Knitting, Feminism and Construction of Gender,” *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 7, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 153.

²⁵⁹ Sheri Boggs and Leah Sottile, “Eclectic Domestic,” *Inlander*, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www.inlander.com/spokane/eclectic-domestic/Content?oid=2137579>.

manipulation of nostalgia.”²⁶⁰ Aprons decked in ruffles, resurgence of knitting and crocheting, the embroidered aesthetic, the act of women crafting with renewed fervor, all point to the “denied” value of work and labor performed in the home and therefore the subsequent romanticization of the past. Women in the twenty-first century however, are not utilizing nostalgia without an agenda, but rather as a means to an end, as a tool to gain self-fulfillment and to fashion new understandings of femininity.

Modern Domestic Advice

Contemporary crafts themselves are successful marketers and visual advertisers, yet the adoption of the crafting ethos amongst women nation-wide is due in part to the blogs and books which promote them. Not only do these cultural arbitrators provide a space to applaud the power of handmade but by supplying tutorials and explanations, also the belief that everyone can handcraft, even if that belief is a mythical ideal. The most important aspect to these books and blogs, however, is the sense of community they provide, a quality which transformed them from having a reputation as alternative and rebellious into approachable and congenial. Once individual communities formed, employing various degrees of nostalgia, crafts suddenly appealed to a wider audience. Along the same vein as the accessibility of crafts and the qualities of achievability, the theme of these blogs (which for the most popular, result in a publication deal) is a communal sense of shared amateurishness in the best sense of the term.

²⁶⁰ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (Macmillan, 1977), 12.

The blog, whose name originally comes from “web log,” is an online diary of sorts, where the author can “log” their personal accounts and stories.²⁶¹ This means there is a raw, unpolished (or unpublished) underlying aspect to many of these writings, which provides the perfect platform for bloggers to write about everyday objects and non-professional upgrading of their homes thus allowing plenty of room for errors and artistic license. With the rise in popularity of blogs and social media, came a change in Americans’ perception of blogs as well; now acknowledged as more reputable sources of information, blogs still retain an amateur quality which connect the writer and reader in profoundly personal ways. This speaks to the social need for authenticity and for sources that can be trusted; an average Jane, unprofessional as she may be, provides a sense of camaraderie in her casual, journalistic blog posts.

Some of these are authored by recognized sources and therefore have a prior audience to garner their support, which include blogs like Martha Stewart’s The Crafts Dept. The majority of craft and DIY blogs, especially the most popular ones on the web, are actually those which have a self-professed ‘average’ female as its author. The story line is similar: an ordinary woman is simply DIY-ing her way (perhaps alongside her husband) through a new life (insert new role as wife, newly purchased home, new responsibility of parenthood, or all of the above). Some bios include, “Hi, I’m Kathy! I’m a mommy, wifey, and left-handed middle-aged Sagittarian. I... [share] ideas to inspire you...I want to help you find your happy!” or *Little Green Notebook’s* Jenny Komenda

²⁶¹ “Weblog,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d., <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/weblog>.

who states, “I like flea markets and power tools, parties and pillows. I’m a mommy and a decorator, and a diehard DIYer. Join me and my little family as we renovate our new (old) home with lots of love and plenty of elbow grease.”²⁶² Komenda is actually a professional interior designer and head of Jenny Komenda Interiors, but clearly she describes herself as simply a fellow “DIYer,” just one of the gals. *Young House Love* posts, “Wut up. We're Sherry & John. Just your average married couple with a lively three year old, a moody chihuahua, and a love of all things home. Here's where we chat about transforming our house, living in it, and all the random bits in between.”²⁶³ This is repeated countless times, with many of them sharing through their “about” tab, something similar to: we cannot believe we got a publishing deal—we are “holy-schnikies-excited-about-it.”²⁶⁴ Alongside the vernacular wording, are the fonts and graphics utilized in these sections (Figure 61) which assist in providing a feeling of informal approachability and neighborly kinship.

These and countless other authors make a point to explain they are not haughty professionals, but rather folks just like the readers who, with their unpretentiousness, can make a bigger connection to their audience thus growing their readership and blog subscriptions. Furthermore, many of these blogs have at least one if not more posts about the ‘real’ look of their homes, the non-professionalized photograph version, with cheerios

²⁶² “Bio- Crafty Chica,” *CraftyChica.com | Sparkly, Artful Inspirations by Artist and Author, Kathy Cano-Murillo.*, accessed March 4, 2014, <http://www.craftychica.com/site/bio/>; “Little Green Notebook: DIY Necklace Hanger,” *Little Green Notebook*, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://littlegreennotebook.blogspot.com/2014/01/diy-necklace-hanger.html>.

²⁶³ “Meet The Youngsters | Young House Love,” accessed March 6, 2014, <http://www.younghouselove.com/photo-gallery-2/about-2/>.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

on the couch and clothes on the bed. Ashley Mills of The Handmade Home posted one titled “Dream House,” where she shows unmade beds and clutter counters and points to “unrealistic expectations” that digital media can foster.²⁶⁵ This post garnered a substantial amount of positive feedback and over one hundred comments in two days, pointing to the sense of shared camaraderie that these women experience when reading these blogs.

Blogging has helped craft’s social perception evolve from acknowledgement as “product” to being recognized and celebrated as “process.”²⁶⁶ This is also Railla’s comment about crafting being a “lifestyle choice” and the craftivist point that power is harnessed through participation.²⁶⁷ Craft is still powerful if no one but yourself knows how much money you saved, how much recycling you achieved, or how much pleasure it brought, but sharing this information along with the finished product only helps to further crafts’ agenda. The creation of the narrative aids in the consumption of these ideas and helps to endorse and accredit the finished product with said power. Furthermore, vicarious consumption of these narratives represents a sense of inclusion within this congenial community.

A child of the late 1990s, a blog of today would appear deficient in some way if all it offered was the author’s prose. From over-exposed photographs of gooey cookies neatly stacked, to steaming pot-pies oozing out of cracked crust and sizzling bacon frying in the cast-iron skillet, food blogs offer a visual account of recipes, ingredients, and

²⁶⁵ Ashley Mills, “Dream House,” blog, *The Handmade Home*, January 31, 2013, <http://www.thehandmadehome.net/2013/01/dream-house/>.

²⁶⁶ Buszek, “‘Labor Is My Medium’: Some Perspective(s) on Contemporary Craft,” 73.

²⁶⁷ Railla, *Get Crafty*, 11.

nutritional advice. Crafting blogs by comparison, offer dazzling visuals of a different sort. No longer a place to simply journal or record thoughts, blogs have recently been reengineered into spaces which provide more than the authors' contemplations. The majority now provide the reader with incredibly close-up images showcasing magnified versions of the texture of materials and placement of tools. Although often beneficial for explaining the particulars of a difficult step, many snapshots of these crafts are works of art themselves. Between blurred out edges, hyper-magnified zoom, and dramatic lighting (Figure 62), the image of an oscillating needle, edge of a zipper, or the surface of a button (Figure 63) suddenly appears beautifully enticing, adding a heightened appeal to the idea of crafting. The visual component of blog posts, particularly with crafting, DIY, and design related subjects, is incredibly important to the promotion of crafting and the viewer's mental conception needed for eventual actualization of the craft project. The physicality of crafting is a huge characteristic of why it is so popular, visually stimulating blog posts fulfill that need for a concrete connection.

Nowhere is the visual appeal of crafting and DIY-ing more acknowledged than through the website, Pinterest. Women, who are five times more likely to use Pinterest than men, make up eighty percent of the website's demographic.²⁶⁸ Pinterest only started in March of 2010, but was one of the fastest rising social media tools to climb to the 70

²⁶⁸ "Social Media in 2013: User Demographics For Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest And Instagram - - The Buffer Blog," *The Buffer Blog: Productivity, Life Hacks, Writing, User Experience, Customer Happiness and Business.*, accessed March 8, 2014, <http://blog.bufferapp.com/social-media-in-2013-user-demographics-for-twitter-facebook-pinterest-and-instagram>; Craig Smith, "(March 2014) By the Numbers: 59 Amazing Pinterest Stats," *DMR*, accessed March 8, 2014, <http://expandedramblings.com/index.php/pinterest-stats/>.

million-users mark, which it maintains today.²⁶⁹ With one in three women in the U.S. utilizing Pinterest, its impact on American visual and material culture and promotion of crafting is monumental.²⁷⁰ Pinterest, aptly labeled by commentators as “a female-interested-in-crafts domain,” is a virtual bulletin board where users have pinned visuals of things they would like to make, eat, or see.²⁷¹ Pictorially presenting the crafts generates a graphic representation of the possibilities of what one can craft; the act of “pinning” allows the user to virtually curate boards such as “Crafts,” “Home Décor,” or “DIY.”²⁷² As of 2013, fifty-three percent of the types of items pinned were “craft ideas,” pointing to how notable the virtual component of crafting has become.²⁷³ Communal participation on blogs and sites like Pinterest continues to circulate crafting jargon, ideas, and examples, as well as the belief that there are fellow crafters with whom the viewer is in connection. The idea that “you are what you curate” and that Pinterest is in essence “about the concept of curation,” fosters this idea that by cherry-picking objects to consume (virtually or physically) you can alter and improve your life, but also that it is meant to be done within a public realm, for others to see.²⁷⁴ Pinterest, in essence, is a craft; even if a crafting by-product, it functions as a means to identity formation through creation or as a compilation of disparate materiality. Books, blogs, magazines, and sites

²⁶⁹ Smith, “(March 2014) By the Numbers.”

²⁷⁰ “Social Media in 2013”; Seth Fiegerman, “Study: 1/3 of Women in U.S. Use Pinterest,” *Mashable*, December 30, 2013, <http://mashable.com/2013/12/30/social-network-demographics-2013/>.

²⁷¹ “Pinterest: USA vs UK,” accessed March 8, 2014, <http://visual.ly/pinterest-usa-vs-uk>.

²⁷² “Basics- Pinterest,” *Pinterest*, 2013, <http://about.pinterest.com/basics/>.

²⁷³ wanderguides, “The Pinterest Effect,” May 28, 2013, <http://visual.ly/pinterest-effect>.

²⁷⁴ Om Malik, “You Are What You Curate: Why Pinterest Is Hawt,” *Gigaom*, January 4, 2012, <http://gigaom.com/2012/01/04/you-are-what-you-curate-why-pinterest-is-hawt/>; this idea of virtual curation is similar to the definition of collection in: Susan Stewart, *On Longing*.

like Pinterest act as the domestic advisors and aesthetic arbiters of the twenty-first century, greatly influential and key players in the promotion of handmade crafts and the act of crafting as an antidote to challenges facing American women today, including redefining domesticity.

Re-inscribing New Meanings on an Old Apron

Within the twenty-first century, New Environmentalism, Colonial Re-revival, New Domesticity, and now neo-feminism have emerged. Each movement bases itself on established beliefs, linking its objectives to past movements or social beliefs, yet firmly asserting a fresh approach, marking themselves as ‘new.’ Neo-feminism, is understood to be the celebration of the traditional definition of femininity as a means to empowerment rather than detriment. It is an embrace of a woman’s femaleness, as opposed to the pursuit of equality, in an overwhelmingly masculinized world.²⁷⁵ Third wave feminism, under which neo-feminism is grouped, is the latest surge of feminist enthusiasm which aims to be an all-encompassing movement encouraging women to choose their own individual path, whatever that may be.²⁷⁶ Third wave feminism, with all its varied participants, has come to be a key player in the unearthing of women’s needs and in the quest to fulfill them.

Whether women are looking for financial empowerment, individual growth, or personal fulfillment, they listen to the domestic advice coming from today’s media and

²⁷⁵ For a history of American feminism and definitions of neo-feminism, see the essays in: Dawn Keetley and John Pettegrew, *Public Women, Public Words: A Documentary History of American Feminism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

²⁷⁶ Railla, *Get Crafty*; Payne, *The Hip Girl’s Guide to Homemaking*.

turn to crafts and crafting as the means to improvement. Sequentially, contemporary crafts are efficiently addressing not only political thought, but are also proving capable to embody modern beliefs about the current state of feminism; the apron now participates in contemporary debates about the state of feminism and the relationship between women and the domestic environment. Consumed and created in such large quantities by women in America, these handmade objects bring up long-standing topics within a fresh light. Where other crafts activate newly tackled issues of sustainability, a fairer marketplace, and encouragement of low-tech engagement, handmade objects speak to women's attempt to breach already established and tightly woven object-meaning relationships. Crafts, in their ability to unionize the past and present, are well-suited to accommodate the societal need for established security and embrace of modernism.

A new form such as the tree-stump side table is newly infused with beliefs about self-sustainability, the value of raw materials, and the importance of upcycling rather than purchasing new. What was once simply a fragment of a tree is now transformed by hand, via visible knots and polished, yet imperfect grain, into a socially desirable household object; social values are absorbed and melded with the physical appearance of the object when it is transformed into a consumable item. Objects which are previously established as consumable items however, already have a degree of social value placed upon them, which is essentially the definition of 'design.' This is understood through the context of creation, for "the capacity of design to create form occurs only through the conjunction between ideology and material factors: if either is absent, the union cannot take place."²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Forty, *Objects of Desire*, 221.

Products are made to mean something, to appeal to someone, or to evoke desire somewhere.

Where the handmade ‘look’ conjoins environmental activism with raw wood to create a new form (a side table), products of new domesticity endeavor to create new *meaning* rather than new form. The task is a large one for women—re-inscribe a meaning onto such socially-charged objects as household products. These are things which have a long history of potent meanings and values. Peeling off engrained beliefs from window treatments, picture frames, dish towels, and of course aprons, is what these women face. Not all objects, especially those of new forms, are previously politicized, but most pre-existing cultural objects today are in some way pre-gendered. Take for example, A Beautiful Mess’s tutorial titled “D.I.Y. Lace Briefcase” (Figure 64), which states that “Every workin’ lady needs a fancy little briefcase covered in lace!...I picked this boring brown briefcase up at a thrift shop recently and couldn’t wait to dress it up!”²⁷⁸ A briefcase, seemingly “boring brown,” is an object gendered masculine, despite the fact that women have utilized such items in the public workforce for decades.²⁷⁹ Nevertheless a briefcase evokes a suited man, where a tote, bag, or purse conjures up the image of a suited female. This simple connotation, which is a socially accepted association of gender, is at the root of what New Domestics are attempting to do with crafted goods. Employing the established relationships of gender, many are applying lace (by hand) to countless objects to make their point: not that feminizing downgrades a gendered object,

²⁷⁸ “D.I.Y. Lace Briefcase - A Beautiful Mess,” accessed March 8, 2014, <http://www.abeautifulmess.com/2011/08/diy-lace-briefcase-.html>.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

but rather that it elevates, enhances, and is therefore improved by being handmade and sporting a crafted aesthetic. Irony is almost always present; a lace-covered briefcase says: yes, I will do the same job as you, but look better while doing it. Endeavoring to mock gendered assumptions in a similar way, aprons are dutifully covered with ruffles, flowers, and copious amounts of lace.

It is a challenge to be sure, to re-inscribe new, positive meanings onto objects which were laden with a fierce social meaning a century, decades, or even just a dozen years ago. Second-wave feminism spotlighted what the apron symbolized, what frilly lace curtains could insinuate, and what knitting rather than buying could imply about priorities in life.²⁸⁰ New Domesticity similarly highlights those objects, but has the arduous task of reinventing, through the act of hand-creation, how they are viewed by society. How is this momentous task to be successfully accomplished? How can women, still marginalized in many ways, use their seventy-seven cents against the male-dominated world of the dollar to reclaim objects and actions that are not known for aiding in the climb of the corporate ladder? How then are fears *not* justified when they involve reservations about the potential tightening of apron strings, that picture-perfect blogs may “raise the standards of homemaking” to an extreme level, or that DIY-ing may lead to gender essentialism or discourage women from “going all-out in their careers?”²⁸¹ The answer, is that yes, these fears *are* justified; doubts and concerns simply prove the power that objects possess to influence and affect how individuals digest not just the

²⁸⁰ For a third-wave take on what second-wave feminism established, see: Greer, *Knitting for Good!*, 18; Hayes, *Radical Homemakers*, 2010.

²⁸¹ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 8.

consumable object, but the social meaning placed upon them as well. Only through the questioning of such anxieties, has gender equality ever truly been strengthened. From Elizabeth Caddy Stanton and Susan B. Anthony to Gloria Steinman and Betty Friedan, it was the fear of repression and socially accepted theories of inferiority that fueled a nation-wide re-comprehension of a woman's abilities and value. Assessing those fears is healthy, so is a thorough understanding of what it means to *reassess* the value of women and gendered objects.

With assertions that “this ‘new domesticity’ [could] start to look like old-fashioned obligation,” women like Matchar, author of *Homeward Bound*, Britt Peterson of the webzine *Slate*, and Jamie Stiehm of *U.S. News & World Report* have emerged as opposing voices to the overwhelming wide-spread support for the handmade lifestyle.²⁸² Without women like these making provocative statements such as, “a retreat to privileged domesticity may not be all it's cracked up to be,” movements as impactful as the handmade revolution would never have the friction required to yield success.²⁸³ Scrutiny is necessary for transformation and a critical eye is helpful to assess where action can be altered. Furthermore, there will always be varying opinions in society when subcultural viewpoints begin to gain a voice and make headway into the mainstream culture. This acknowledged, rebuttals to these disapprovals of New Domesticity are both bountiful and voluble. New Domesticity leaders such as Kate Payne pointed out that within these anti-

²⁸² Britt Peterson, “Farmer Groupies and Chicken Coddlers,” *Slate*, January 24, 2012, http://www.slate.com/articles/life/culturebox/2012/01/the_foxfire_books_are_modern_diyers_just_play_acting_.html; “‘New Domesticity’ Is a Step Backwards for Women - US News,” *US News & World Report*, accessed February 6, 2014, [//www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/Jamie-Stiehm/2011/12/05/new-domesticity-is-a-step-backwards-for-women](http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/Jamie-Stiehm/2011/12/05/new-domesticity-is-a-step-backwards-for-women).

²⁸³ “‘New Domesticity’ Is a Step Backwards for Women - US News.”

new-domesticity reactions is an “unfair portrayal of those making an active choice to reclaim domesticity, and a genuine lack of analysis for the myriad of reasons behind such a choice.”²⁸⁴

A thorough understanding of how feminism is emerging in the twenty-first century invokes a productive discussion which incorporates these “myriad of reasons” and the endorsement that reclaiming domesticity is “a choice.”²⁸⁵ To discount the thousands of women across the nation who pursue a life with handmade goods as merely “making a fetish out of female domesticity,” is unduly disregarding the impact this movement has made on American women.²⁸⁶ Those who choose to craft objects as a hobby, who pursue a DIY lifestyle for the varied reasons Payne points out, and who have helped promote websites like Pinterest and Etsy to the popularity they’ve acquired, are all players in the handmade movement, greatly impacting the understanding of material culture in America. The point of New Domesticity is to reclaim, and thus convert from ‘bad’ to ‘good,’ how domestic work is viewed by society. Insisting that practicing domestic activities is simply retreating from ambitious pursuits or is leading back to obligation, is following the value system in place and forgetting that ‘reclaiming’ means to re-declare, reform, and therefore *transform* the meaning of domesticity and its by-products.²⁸⁷ The reframing of the value system placed on the idea of ‘work’ is essentially the heart of the debate.

²⁸⁴ Kate Payne, “Inside the Movement to Reclaim Domesticity,” *Rustik Magazine*, accessed February 6, 2014, <http://rustikmagazine.com/kate-payne-reclaiming-domesticity/>.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ “‘New Domesticity’ Is a Step Backwards for Women - US News.”

²⁸⁷ Notion of transformation: the physical transformation is paralleled by the ideological change, allowing items like the apron to be reappropriated and thus transformed.

Those who justifiably point to the uncertainties surrounding the outcome of a national resolve to practice domestic activities, noticeably separate the public and the private spheres. Linda Hirshman, author of the 2006 book, *Get to Work: ...And Get a Life Before It's Too Late*, explains that “whether they leave the workplace altogether or just cut back their commitment, their talent and education are lost from the public world to the private world of laundry and kissing boo-boos.”²⁸⁸ This divide of spheres is not new, but the fight for which sphere is more valuable and worthy of participation, is what defines the New Domesticity discussion. More specifically, the definition of ‘valuable’ is fluid and fluctuating, making the debate more complex and complicated. With comments such as, “childcare and housekeeping have satisfying moments but are not occupations likely to produce a flourishing life,” the question raised is what does flourishing (or rather, *valuable*) mean and how can a statement be made that excludes those that have indeed found it to be flourishing?²⁸⁹ Furthermore, with domestic activities such as crafting and DIY-ing increasing the time women spend in the home, broad assumptions have been made that group those that DIY as a hobby in with those that have left public careers to full-time homestead or live off a self-employed crafting business.

This has allowed assumptions to be made, on both sides, about the rise of DIY-ing and home-making activities. For example, Leslie Bennetts, author of *The Feminine Mistake*, remarked that “there are aspects of the New Domesticity that are lovely, but it is no substitute for being able to support your family.”²⁹⁰ Similarly, trying to understand the

²⁸⁸ Linda R Hirshman, *Get to Work: And Get a Life, before It's Too Late* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 2.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Quoted in: Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 28.

decision to focus more time on the domestic arena, critic Elizabeth Badinter posed the question that if outside work “provides neither social status nor financial independence, then why give it priority?”²⁹¹ What this implies, is that the definition of ‘value’ for these women is based on monetary worth and social status, as per the earlier discussion about the traditional definition of work. The meaning of ‘value’ for *pro*-new-domesticity advocates, is entirely different, they pursue tasks which result not in a physical paycheck, but rather in the enhancement of their lives and their families in numerous, yet intangible ways.²⁹² New Domesticity is a sub-movement of the Handmade Revolution involving food consumption, alternative parenting, and a general home-based focus; hand-crafting, an even narrower focus, is one way to see that the re-valuing of gender roles, domestic work, and thus the by-products of the home, are newly meaningful for many American women.

Kate Payne, pro-New-Domesticity sums up a general sentiment amongst women who have pursued home-based work in the past decade or two:

I can honestly say I still don’t enjoy the majority of domestic chores. I do them anyway, because I don’t have the money to farm them out to other people. I enjoy working for myself, and in order to do so, I have to make trade-offs. If this means I have to take the time to really know my kitchen or to clean without introducing toxic chemicals into my home, it’s worth it to me.²⁹³

Payne is speaking to a broader scope of women than just crafters and DIY-ers, but her response is relevant and helpful in understanding the larger issues. The idea that there are indeed trade-offs, that there are down-sides to putting in extra time and extra effort into

²⁹¹ Ibid., 177.

²⁹² See the discussion earlier in this chapter on the non-market value of work and the “social capital” of household labor.

²⁹³ Payne, “Inside the Movement to Reclaim Domesticity.”

New Domesticity is shared by most women who practice it. This though, is why contemporary crafts have impacted American society in the way they have—they stand in opposition to easier, simpler, and quicker ways to practice consumption, making them all the more powerful when chosen for use. It is more difficult to make something by hand than to purchase one already made, harder to devote energy to options often with a physically high-input/low-output result, and more time consuming to make products by hand rather than buy manufactured items. According to new domestics, the results gained however, outweigh the trade-offs, which include learned skills, healthier lifestyle choices, pleasure and enjoyment, economic consciousness, environmental awareness, and empowerment from personal choices made. Contemporary crafts promise a better life by improving your personal, financial, and eco-consciousness because consideration and mindfulness is demanded through the act of choosing to consume ‘handmade.’ The sentiment repeated is: we know we can ‘have it all,’ but we really do not want it all, our definition of ‘all’ these days involves some trade-offs but the results, well, you cannot put a price on everything.²⁹⁴

Value therefore, is measured by this mindfulness and these intangible benefits rather than a monetary worth or position in society. Because these opposing viewpoints have separate goals, they are difficult to contrast and compare in that the desired outcome is different for each. For the women who are pro-new-domesticity, contemporary crafts, in all their physicality and tactility, are praised for the immaterial qualities they supply.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.; “I Can Bring Home the Bacon, but the Rest Is On You.,” *An Exercise in Narcissism*, accessed February 3, 2014, <http://jillsorr.com/2012/02/27/i-can-bring-home-the-bacon-but-the-rest-is-on-you/>; Jennifer Ludden, “Can Working Moms ‘Have It All’? Ha!,” *NPR.org*, accessed February 3, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124616719>.

Amanda Blake Soule of the blog, Soule Mama, writes in the introduction of her book, *Handmade Home*, that:

Through the act of making I find solace and peace in the small moments of my everyday life. When I am at work making things, I am fully present in the moment as I breathe new life into something, while at the very same time, I am fulfilling a need or a desire for my family. I am reminded rather symbolically that we can only do one stitch at a time, and therefore one step at a time and one breath at a time in this life.²⁹⁵

Ashley Mills' blog, The Handmade Home has the subtext, "creating a haven for the every day," Kathy Cano-Murillo states on her blog, Crafty Chica, "my mission is to spread positivity through crafting," and Elsie and Emma of the blog A Beautiful Mess exclaim "we share simple ways to create an inspired lifestyle. We believe in taking time each day to make something pretty. We believe in lifelong learning. Most of all, we believe that life doesn't need to be perfect to be beautiful."²⁹⁶ Even Etsy chimes in with weekly emails that inquire if one's New Year's resolution includes the "goal of bringing more meaningful objects into your life," with the email's subject line simply stating, "It's Good for You."²⁹⁷

If women in the twenty-first century are in pursuit of empowerment, growth, and fulfillment, as exemplified through both their fears and the reasons why handmade has risen in popularity, then crafts represent a more complete encompassment of both 'spheres.' Through the use of irony and wit, public and private are more fully integrated

²⁹⁵ Amanda Blake Soule, *Handmade Home: Simple Ways to Repurpose Old Materials into New Family Treasures* (Boston: Trumpeter, 2009), xi.

²⁹⁶ Ashley Mills and Jamin Mills, "About- The Handmade Home," blog, *The Handmade Home: Creating a Haven for the Every Day*, n.d., <http://www.thehandmadehome.net/about/>; "Bio- Crafty Chica"; Elsie Larson and Emma Chapman, "About- A Beautiful Mess," blog, *A Beautiful Mess*, n.d., <http://abeautifulmess.com/about-elsie.html>.

²⁹⁷ Etsy to Gina Guzzon, "It's Good for You," February 21, 2013.

in the digital age, utilizing crafts as a creative outlet and source of self-actualization for women. These new domestic advisors spin a very different sentiment than the one that was being shared in the 1980s and 1990s—that domestic work was in opposition to outside work and therefore a hindrance in the pursuit of female equality. New Domesticity of today see domestic work, i.e. crafts, as fulfilling and aiding in helping women gain peace, pleasure, and personal empowerment back into their lives, maintaining that female choice is present and obtainable. By publicizing the seemingly private tasks of domestic activities, such as publishing blogs online for anyone to read, selling the products of domestic work online and nationwide at shops and fairs, and sharing thoughts and ideas through public forums like Pinterest, New Domesticity defines itself as markedly different than previous understandings of American domesticity. Some of these public spaces have grown into areas for discussions on women’s issues of autonomy, equality, sexuality, childcare, and workplace rights, pointing yet again, to the empowerment found in this new version of domesticity. Domesticity will no longer be seen as a limited sphere for women’s actions and voices if it increasingly connects with more public, vocal, and communal avenues of social discussion.

If Etsy shop, Creative Chics: Handmade Aprons- a modern twist on vintage style, was simply devoid of its “modern twist,” then perhaps it would too closely ride the line between creating cheeky products for females and creating renewed ‘obligation’ for women.²⁹⁸ Most creators and owners of these companies, as well as the women who DIY

²⁹⁸ “CreativeChics,” *Etsy*, accessed March 8, 2014, https://www.etsy.com/shop/CreativeChics?utm_source=OpenGraph&utm_medium=PageTools&utm_campaign=Share.

their own aprons, would be quick to state: I am making this apron represent something different than it did decades ago, so do *not* think otherwise. Caitlin Flanagan, author of *To Hell with That: Loving and Loathing Our Inner Housewife*, charted her findings in the preface of her 2006 book,

Over and over I found myself writing about a paradox that became more obvious with each assignment I took: as women have achieved ever more power in the world—power of a kind my mother and her friends from nursing school could never have imagined—they have become increasingly attracted to the privileges and niceties of traditional womanhood. Because they buck the obligations and restraints that gave those privileges meaning, they have become obsessed with a drag queen ethos, in which femininity must be communicated by exaggeration and cartoon.²⁹⁹

This perhaps, is why items such as the ruffled apron and advertisements for these items have more fully embraced the aesthetics of femininity; by challenging and resisting the obligations associated with these visual representations of womanhood, females are free to fully pursue such aesthetics.

With the resurgence in popularity of such aprons however, brings more aprons, apron companies, and thus a higher chance of miss-interpretation. Aprons from *Carolyn's Kitchen*, tag-lined as “glamor girl retro aprons,” have been showcased in *Women's World* magazine, *Curve* magazine, and on NBC's “The Today Show.”³⁰⁰ Carolyn writes on her site, “I wanted to bring back the glamour, sexiness, and cuteness of a bygone innocent era” which insinuates that the retro aspect to be revived is the ‘innocence’ of the 1940s.³⁰¹ She follows this with: ““Suzy Homefaker™,’ slaves over a hot microwave for

²⁹⁹ Caitlin Flanagan, *To Hell with All That: Loving and Loathing Our Inner Housewife* (New York: Little, Brown, 2007), xix.

³⁰⁰ Carolyn West, “About- Carolyn's Kitchen,” *Carolyn's Kitchen*, n.d., http://carolynskitchen.com/About_Us_History.php.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

minutes at a time, constant hostess to all, in and around her kitchen, enticing temptress to you know who, you know where.”³⁰² With clever remarks about slaving over a microwave, this comment appears humorous, but a broader consideration reveals slippery phrasing and expression of a suspicious sentiment. The gallery of women on the site (both professional advertising and customer’s photos) reveals some pin-up-style images of women seemingly clothed *only* in aprons. This is either a highly-feminist nod to second-wave’s embrace of female sexuality or a lack of reappropriation of a gendered object, thus upholding its previously-laden social meaning. The tension between these two sparks the New Domesticity debate. When a false nostalgia trumps historic accuracy, how does the absence of the ‘authentic,’ so prized in handmade crafts, affect the social acceptance of such items? If provenance is more important than ever before, does the new meaning of the twenty-first century apron have to be hand-stitched into existence? While some crafting women point to the downsides of the resurgence of female crafting, such as the emergence of blog envy or “Pinterest stress,” others embrace the popularity of crafts with the praises and criticisms it provokes.³⁰³ Re-inscribing meaning is the primary goal, whether all female crafters reinforce this or not.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Discussed in the following chapter, Pinterest envy points to the idea that a competition amongst women exists, plotting woman against woman, increasing the social sense of a requirement to be domestic. Rebecca Dube TODAY, “‘Pinterest Stress’ Afflicts Nearly Half of Moms, Survey Says - TODAY.com,” *TODAY*, May 9, 2013, <http://www.today.com/moms/pinterest-stress-afflicts-nearly-half-moms-survey-says-1C9850275>.

The point therefore, is not to determine if the vintage apron is a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ aspect of the twenty-first century’s material culture, or even how it might be viewed or socially digested in the years or decades to come, but rather that the retro apron *is*, even at all, a socially important facet of today’s material culture. Most New Domestics would say: “I will bring home the bacon (if I so desire), craft and create with my hands on weekends (and look good doing it), “but the rest is on you.”³⁰⁴ They are looking for personal empowerment and fulfillment in all areas (or spheres) of their lives, most of whom support and inspire other women, and also the men of America, to do the same. By connecting with notions of femininity from the past, they forge new definitions of domesticity in the present, creating a lively discussion about the state of feminism in the twenty-first century. The illuminates upon how change is enacted in American culture through material objects and females’ relationship with those goods. Through diverse media, both digital and print, a communal participation and encouragement to better one’s life is expressed through the call to craft. Living a life surrounded by handmade objects is the goal, consuming newly-symbolic craft in all its varied forms is the means to that end.

³⁰⁴ “I Can Bring Home the Bacon, but the Rest Is On You.”

Chapter Three: Figures



Figure 46: *Kitchen Cherry Courtney Apron*, c. 2014. Jesse Steele (image in the public domain), <http://www.jessiesteele.com/kitchen-cherry-courtney-apron.html>.



Figure 47: *DIY Retro Apron*, 18 May 2012. Image by Warehouse Fabrics, Inc. Nicole Guzzardi, "Craft of the Day: A Retro Cute Reversible Apron," Huffington Post (image in the public domain), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/17/craft-of-the-day-apron_n_1525622.html.



Figure 48: *Ruffle Apron*, 9 February 2007. Morgan Moore, "Valentine Tree & Apron 101," One More Moore blog (image in the public domain), http://morganmoore.typepad.com/one_more_moore/2007/02/valentine_tree__1.html.



Figure 49: Publicity photograph of Jessie Steele Inc. new Spring/Summer apron collection, 21 January 2009. Image from "A New Year, New Jessie Steele Aprons," Brentwood Kitchen (image in the public domain), <http://brentwoodkitchen.blogspot.com/2009/01/new-year-new-jessie-steele-aprons.html>.



Figure 50: "Crafts" section, 29 October 2013. Barnes & Noble, Washington, DC, image by author.



Figure 51: *Sweater Pillow*, 12 January 2013. Yvonne Pratt, "Sweater Pillow Tutorial," Stone Gable blog, <http://www.stonegableblog.com/2013/01/sweater-pillow-tutorial.html>.



Figure 52: *DIY vintage button and pin necklace*, June 2013. Cristina Hostetter, Pottstown, PA image by author.



Figure 53: *Vintage Lyre Table and Detail*, c. 2013. MeandPhoebe, Etsy (image in the public domain), https://www.etsy.com/shop/MeAndPhoebe?ref=exp_listing.



Figure 54: *Barn Wood Coffee Table*, c. 2014. Fallen Made (image in the public domain), <http://www.fallenmade.com/product/barn-wood-coffee-table>.



Figure 55: *I'd Rather Be Thrifting*, c. 2014, velvet stock and ink. By Ashley Goldberg, Buy Olympia (image in the public domain), <http://www.buyolympia.com/q/Item=ashley-g-id-rather-be-thrifting-print>.



Figure 56: *DIY Nautical Rope Ottoman*, c. 2013. “DIY Tire Ottoman,” DIY & Crafts Tutorials blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.diy-craft.com/2013/03/diy-tire-ottoman.html>.



Figure 57: *Cast Iron Bathtub Couch*, c. 2013. RuffHouseArt, Etsy. Image from Julia Brenner, "Upcycling Chic: The Bathtub Sofa," Apartment Therapy blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/upcycling-chic-the-bathtub-sof-158346>.



Figure 58: *Upcycled Hepplewhite Chair*, 4 May 2011. Catherine Klepac, “15 steps: No. 5 – give something a fresh coat of paint,” *Your Modern Couple* blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.yourmoderncouple.com/blog/2011/05/04/15-steps-no-5-give-something-a-fresh-coat-of-paint/>.



Figure 59: *Upcycled Sweater Dress Tutorial*, 17 January 2011. Jamie Smith, “Up-cycled Sweater Dress Tutorial,” *Everyday Art* blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.our-everyday-art.com/2011/01/up-cycled-sweater-dress-tutorial.html>.



Figure 60: *Creative Clutter*, c. 2013. Pattern/Piece created for Mollie Makes magazine Issue #20. Kimberly Scola, Chez Sucre Chez (image in the public domain), <http://chezsucrechez.com/portfolioxstitch>.

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Figure 61: *Screen Shot from "About Us,"* c. 2014. Taken from The Handmade Home blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.thehandmadehome.net/about/>.



Figure 62: *Blurred edges of "DIY jewelry drawer,"* 4 November 2013. "DIY Jewelry Drawer Liner," Little Green Notebook blog (image in the public domain), <http://littlegreennotebook.blogspot.com/2013/11/diy-jewelry-drawer-liner.html>; *Magnified view of "DIY tags,"* 7 June 2013. "DIY Number Tags," The Handmade Home blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.thehandmadehome.net/2013/06/diy-number-tags/>; *Lighting effect on "Doily Covered Lamp Shade,"* 8 March 2012. "Doily Covered Lamp Shade Project," A Beautiful Mess blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.abeautifulmess.com/2012/03/doily-covered-lamp-shade-project.html>.



Figure 63: *Detail of "Sketchbook Project,"* 5 February 2012. Danielle Sayer, "The Sketchbook Project: 2012," Behance blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.behance.net/gallery/The-Sketchbook-Project-2012/3068367>; *Detail of "fold-over clutch,"* 5 May 2011. "Fold-Over Clutch, Metal Zipper," Ecab blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.ecabonline.com/2011/05/fold-over-clutch-metal-zipper.html>; *Detail of "Upholstery Button,"* 21 August 2013. Kelsey Elaine, "{Tutorial} How to Make Custom Upholstery Button," White Cottage Boutique blog (image in the public domain), <http://whitecottageboutique.com/how-to-make-custom-upholstery-buttons/>.



Figure 64: *Lace Briefcase*, 18 August 2011. "D.I.Y. Lace Briefcase," A Beautiful Mess blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.abeautifulmess.com/2011/08/diy-lace-briefcase-.html>.

CHAPTER FOUR: Mainstreaming of Craft- *mechanizing handmade*

Reds meld into salmons, into yellows, chartreuse, turquoise, kelly greens, sky blues, down to deep denims. It is a touchable rainbow of cottons and linen, complete with ruffles, smocking, ribbon adornments and patterned strings. Just shy of one hundred in total, the rack is packed with colorful textiles each suspended on its own wooden hanger (Figure 65). Of these aprons for sale at Anthropologie, the cheapest is \$32 with the most expensive coming in at \$98.³⁰⁵ For a mere \$199, a West Elm tree stump side table “brings the outdoors in” with its unique depth of wooden tones, natural curvature, and primitive form.³⁰⁶ Made from “naturally fallen cyprus trees,” these tables harbor a raw allure, unmatched by most tables priced three or four times its cost. This perfectly-imperfect aesthetic is shared by Target’s FEED USA line as evident in their screen-printed denim tote, a perfect blend of utility and panache.³⁰⁷ Each follows the current and popular ‘crafted’ aesthetic, yet not one of these products is handmade.

Anthropologie’s “Sewing Basket Apron” (Figure 66) is the cousin-by-appearances of Morgan Moore’s DIY apron; West Elm’s tree stump (Figure 67) is the

³⁰⁵ “Tea-And-Crumpets Apron,” *Anthropologie*, accessed March 11, 2014, http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/home-linens/983503.jsp?cm_sp=Grid-_-983503-_-Regular_25; “Linen Utility Apron,” *Anthropologie*, accessed March 11, 2014, http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/home-linens/30342356.jsp?cm_sp=Grid-_-30342356-_-Large_6.

³⁰⁶ “Natural Tree Stump Side Table,” *West Elm*, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.westelm.com/products/natural-tree-stump-side-table-f655/>.

³⁰⁷ Chi Diem Chau, “FEED the World: Celebrate Target’s 10 Millionth Meal by Shopping the Collaboration Now!,” *POPSUGAR Fashion*, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://www.fabsugar.com/Target-FEED-Projects-Collection-Pictures-28591074>.

next of kin to Bradley and Leena’s tree stump side table; Target’s FEED USA tote (Figure 68) appears a distant relative of the RIGG bag hanging in the New York shop, Brklyn Curated. The handmade products illustrate the rise of the crafted object. The machine-made products by comparison demonstrate the rise in the popularity of crafted *looking* objects. Although not always tracing a handmade to machine-made trajectory, American design certainly reflects a general mass-market trend to what can be labeled the crafty look. Crafty, or “craft-like,” objects are those “characterized or inclined to” the physical appearance of a crafted item, such as with visible stitching, imperfections created through hand production, raw or unfinished edges, or use of materials emblematic of a crafted item.³⁰⁸ The term “crafty” is used here to signify objects which appear to be handcrafted but in fact were not produced by hand. This chapter will chart how crafting’s evolution into a mainstream “craze” or “mania” impacted the price and production of handmade goods.³⁰⁹ It will further examine this commercialization of the movement, the complexity of the modern definition of handmade, and ultimately what the flourishing of consumable crafty items means for the handmade craft revolution.³¹⁰

Craft’s Evolution Out of a Subculture

What started out as a grass-roots crusade of alternative thinkers and activists has gradually evolved into a powerful, contemporary craft movement. Ironically, it still bears the label of alternative craft or indie craft, which distinguishes between the studio craft

³⁰⁸ Sorkin, “Craft-like: The Illusion of Authenticity”; “The Definition of -Y,” *Dictionary.com*, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/-y>.

³⁰⁹ Matchar, “The New Domesticity.”

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

present in the art market and the alternative products of this movement. Alternative though it began, contemporary craft has become more and more acceptable to greater numbers of consumers as the economic state of the nation has steadied. Through local pop-ups of fairs, boutiques, and knitting circles, to the equally welcoming digital community established around handmade crafts, the initial subcultural proclamations about the power of crafting have surfaced in mainstream American culture. The movement, which “encourages us to think about the origins of the clothing that we wear, the products we use and the objects that fill our homes,” is no longer only centered on a revolution with die-hard crafting and DIY-ing followers.³¹¹

With the ethos of crafting spreading across the nation via objects and crafters, the movement has quickly inspired and influenced American popular culture. Writing about the nature of subculture, Dick Hebdige explains that once a visual definition or style is associated with a subculture it is then recognized as such, and this “invariably ends with the simultaneous diffusion and defusion of the subcultural style.”³¹² This “process of recuperation” takes two forms, either the subculture is taken in and adopted through mass-consumption of the style or the unorthodox and alternative, nonphysical characteristics are ideologically re-defined as appropriate, conventional, and thus acceptable.³¹³ This latter, horizontal integration is prevalent in the current discussion of New Domesticity; the vertical integration was started by companies like Etsy in 2005, but has reached new heights in recent years. Although both progress the social impact of the

³¹¹ Spencer, *The Crafter Culture Handbook*, 9.

³¹² Hebdige, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, 93.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 94.

craft movement, this diffusion of product through eventual commodification has emerged in tension with the ideological dissemination of contemporary crafts. A growing community of crafters who seek one another out to promote the handmade ethos, as well as those manufacturers who alter and modify the initial ideals of handmade through co-option of the aesthetic, both emerge as important components to understanding the new state of contemporary American material culture.

In January 2011, ABC newscaster Brian Williams remarked on the ‘newly’ discovered borough of Brooklyn, New York, “riffing on the ironic glasses frames, homemade beads, shared apartments and gourmet grilled cheeses.”³¹⁴ It was a humorous remark, but by 2011 also a bit outdated to those living amongst the cultural changes sweeping that borough.³¹⁵ Brooklyn, NY, had already undergone its “portlandification,” making it the east coast hipster metropolis comparable to Portland, Oregon, known as the alternative-focused, “greenest” city.³¹⁶ Although the newest words and phrases to emerge describing this phenomenon stress the east or west coast through, “portlandification,” “Portlandy Brooklynites,” and “Brooklandia” (a reference to the satirical television show *Portlandia*), this conscious-consumerism trend has actually spread locally and nationally.³¹⁷ Author Emily Matchar describes this proliferation in her work *Homeward*

³¹⁴ Adrienne Jeffries, “A Twee Grows In Brooklyn,” *The New York Observer*, accessed March 13, 2014, <http://observer.com/2011/07/brooklandia-the-portlandification-of-the-better-borough/>.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ “The Portlandification of Brooklyn,” accessed February 5, 2014, http://www.wweek.com/portland/article-17831-the_portlandification_of_brooklyn.html; Jeffries, “A Twee Grows In Brooklyn”; “Brooklandia? « Here Is New York,” accessed March 13, 2014, <http://www.paullarosa.com/2011/01/brooklandia/>; Melissa Maerz, “For the Birds? ‘Portlandia’ Lovingly

Bound, “though it’s easy to make fun of this stuff as a silly hipster trend, it’s much larger and more widespread than that...[it] isn’t just in Portland, and it isn’t just for hipsters anymore.”³¹⁸

The Pacific Northwest certainly had an important role in the output and spread of the underground DIY ethos, with its punk rock scene and embrace of alternative lifestyles. In a *New York Times* interview with Faythe Levine, a popular proponent of the DIY movement, author Penelope Green stated that this punk rock scene, with its

plywood punk houses, its handmade record covers and hand-lettered, stapled newsletters, and its network of fans connected by old-world skills like letter writing, was a Luddite’s paradise of 21st-century homemakers and do-it-yourselfers.³¹⁹

In her own book, *Handmade Nation*, Levine chronicles the spread of crafting and DIY nation-wide, including major players across the country such as the Austin Craft Mafia in Texas, the Renegade Craft Fair in Chicago, Illinois, the Church of Craft groups in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and the Bizarre Bazaar in Boston. With events popping up in the early 2000s in urban centers across the nation, cities began adopting aspects and features of the movement. Brooklyn emerges post-revolt however, as a concentrated manifestation of the new hipster lifestyle, a place where indie craft and a DIY ethos could be easily practiced and fostered. The difference between Brooklyn and Portland, is that Brooklyn is by one account “Portland-plus-money-and-ambition” and described by another as “doing it on a sort of almost Manhattan kind of scale. When they

Pokes Fun at Portland, Ore.,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jan/30/entertainment/la-ca-portlandia-20110130>.

³¹⁸ Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 194.

³¹⁹ Penelope Green, “The Ambassador of Handmade,” *The New York Times*, September 4, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/04/garden/04craft.html>.

do D.I.Y., they have the giant building and press releases and marketing opportunities.”³²⁰ It is the large scale events described here, combined with Levine’s nation-wide pop-ups of craft fairs, circles, and local galleries which put crafting and DIY on the map for those who had not already entered a virtual community online. American cities such as Brooklyn were ripe for a reformation and revitalization, energized by the sentiment of the younger twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings migrating to these areas.

With the mentality spreading throughout the country, craftivists and craft bloggers established national events such as conferences and conventions. Out of the growth of the contemporary crafting movement, the crafting community held a shared desire to assemble key players and promoters to improve and foster the viable movement. The “Craft Conference” first met in Pittsburg in 2007 and the annual “Craftcation Conference” in Ventura, California most recently convened in early April 2014.³²¹ In the past three years alone, across the entire country, events have been held including the “Midwest Craft Caucus” in Columbus, Ohio, the “School House Craft Conference” in Seattle, Washington, the “Summit of Awesome” held in various cities, the “Altitude Design Summit” also at different locations nationwide, the “Maker’s Summit” in Greenville, South Carolina, and “CAMP” in Big Bear, California.³²² For those

³²⁰ Maerz, “For the Birds?”; Jeffries, “A Twee Grows In Brooklyn.”

³²¹ “Home: Craft Congress,” *Craft Congress*, n.d., <http://craftcongress.webs.com/>; Walker, “Handmade 2.0”; “Frequently Asked Questions,” *Craftcation Conference*, accessed March 13, 2014, <http://craftcationconference.com/frequently-asked-questions/>.

³²² Rosalie Gale, “Events: Conference,” *Unanimous Craft*, n.d., <http://unanimouscraft.com/category/event-type/conference>.

particularly interested in the textile arts, there is Chicago's "Vogue Knitting Live" or "YarnCon," Austin's "QuiltCon," or Philadelphia's "SewDown."³²³

In addition to these events, there are the blogging conferences which present individual crafting sessions and talks centered around the DIY resurgence. Some of the most popular include the "BlogHer" conference and "Mom Summit 2.0," both of which are highly responsible for helping fund popular women's blogs through promotional ads. "Haven: because there's no place like home" is aptly described as a conference that allows "people to learn from and gather with some of the most notable DIY/Home bloggers in blogland."³²⁴ Crafters have been quick to express statements similar to, "I met so many inspiring people and put faces to blogs I'd been reading for ages."³²⁵ The motif here is simple: DIY and crafting has the power to reform, conferences are the venues to promote, spread, and encourage that belief and are therefore strategic players in the growth of the movement. These events do more than simply impact the conference or event goer, but rather they help foster new language, visual connections through marketing and advertising, and cultivate discussion about crafting and DIY in local communities and in the thickly woven network of blogs and online forums. Many of these conferences and events furthered, through cultural mollification, a more conventional understanding of how indie crafts could positively affect individuals and communities.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ "About: Haven," *Haven: Because There's No Place like Home*, n.d., <http://www.havenconference.com/about/>.

³²⁵ Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008, 124.

While conferences of crafters bring crafts into the limelight in a unique way, retailers nation-wide have also raised public interest in craft objects in a more consumer-focused, diffusive approach. Besides West Elm's "Handcrafted" line of products, discussed in an earlier chapter, West Elm's site also includes, under their "Collaborations" tab of their websites, partnerships with various design studios, companies, organizations, and independent designers. Besides partnering with *Kinfolk*, an entertainment and lifestyle magazine (based out of Portland, Oregon), the "Forest Stewardship Council" to ensure a series of "green" products, and Sherwin Williams to promote a stylish "seasonal palette," one of their highest promoted partnerships in their catalogue includes Etsy.³²⁶ As "longtime fans of the handmade movement," West Elm has partnered with Etsy to showcase emerging artists and their wares.³²⁷ Much of the aesthetic promoted by West Elm is quite synonymous with the handmade craft look; a combination of modern and traditional, new-age and rustic, clean lines and raw imperfections. West Elm has risen in popularity recently and as the fastest-growing brand of the parent company, Williams-Sonoma, is finding great success with its pop-up stores and West Elm "Markets," not to mention its line of available products online.³²⁸ Major manufacturers therefore, are both co-opting the style and yet literally adopting and promoting proponents of the handmade aesthetic. This contributes, not to a straightforward entrance of the style into the mainstream, but rather a complexly interwoven and warped appearance of the hand-touched look.

³²⁶ "Collaborations- West Elm," *West Elm*, n.d., <http://www.westelm.com/shop/collaborations/>.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ "Williams-Sonoma's Next Big Thing," *The Street*, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.thestreet.com/story/12022418/1/williams-sonomas-next-big-thing.html>.

Anthropologie arose in popularity at the same time American cities were pursuing a Main Street vibe and turning towards the ‘local’ trend. As suburban shopping malls declined in the heat of the Recession, customers preferred small, open-air downtown-type shopping experiences, riding the same wave as those calling for a turn from corporate or big-business companies.³²⁹ Walking through Anthropologie’s store, a complete atmosphere is created, quite opposite from one a shopper would encounter at Macy’s or JCPenney department stores; rather than the predictability and volume that department stores supplied Americans in recent decades, consumers prize a new aesthetic in their shopping experience just as they do in the individual products they consume. Places like Anthropologie therefore, are “selling experiences, not just a product,” and proving that there is a demand for the unique, the hand-touched, the vintage, all seemingly opposite of the sterile mall environment popular a decade or two ago.³³⁰

Anthropologie has been described as an atmosphere which “evokes hole-in-the-wall antique stores, Parisian boutiques, flea markets and Grandma’s kitchen in one fell swoop,” which therefore “taps into our psyches and subconscious desires, our sense of wanderlust and nostalgia.”³³¹ It is known not only for its bohemian fashion, which is vintage-looking (but entirely new), but also for its array of housewares like pottery, coffee table books, bedding, linens, kitchen and dining goods, décor, and an assortment of furniture. With a higher price point than the average retail store, Anthropologie

³²⁹ Kris Hudson and Vanessa O’Connell, “Recession Turns Malls Into Ghost Towns,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB124294047987244803>.

³³⁰ Laura Compton, “Seducing Us Softly / Why Women Love Anthropologie,” *SFGate*, September 12, 2004, <http://www.sfgate.com/magazine/article/Seducing-Us-Softly-Why-women-love-Anthropologie-2694481.php#src=fb>.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

certainly caters to a middle-to-upper class American. Despite this, its popularity continues to increase, perhaps due to collaborations with various craft artists, thereby bringing the latest trends to their store shelves. Kim of Chez Sucre Chez was approached by the store and now sells her hand-embroidered “Enjoy” napkins (Figure 69) at select store and online.³³² Julie Nolan was also contacted by the store as they were interested in her constellation-inspired gold jewelry (Figure 70), which was also sold online at Anthropologie for a limited time.³³³ Rachel Faucett of the DIY blog, Handmade Charlotte, similarly collaborated with the store to create children’s clothing designs, some with hand-stitched peacock appliques (Figure 71).³³⁴

Urban Outfitters, under the same parent company as Anthropologie, Urban Inc., offers similar vintage and retro designs, with a slightly more kitschy appeal to their fashions and household products. Promoting the ‘unique’ quality in high demand, Urban Inc. states on its website that their goal is to “offer a product assortment and an environment so compelling and distinctive that the customer feels an empathetic connection to the brand and is persuaded to buy.”³³⁵ Urban Outfitters retail store has also partnered with various designers creating products like Magical Thinking’s “One-Of-A-Kind Handmade Elephant Stamp Quilt” (Figure 72), a “handwoven cotton rug finished with a mesmerizing chevron motif” (Figure 73), or from Mountain Boy Sledworks, a

³³² “Enjoy Napkin,” *Anthropologie*, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/home-new2/30027361.jsp>.

³³³ “Zodiac Calendar Cuff,” *Anthropologie*, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/jewelry-bracelets/26273110.jsp>.

³³⁴ “Handmade Charlotte at Anthropologie,” *Handmade Charlotte*, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.handmadecharlotte.com/handmade-charlotte-anthropologie/>.

³³⁵ “Company Profile- Urban Outfitters Inc.,” *Urbn*, n.d., <http://urbn.com/profile/>.

“handmade 6’ Mountain Boggan Sled” for \$300.³³⁶ Urban also offers at some of its store locations, various events such as a “DIY Night” where you can “customize your new denim with bleach, studs, beads & more!”³³⁷

Target, the most mainstream of these mass-market companies, is also adopting the aesthetic of the subcultural style by partnering with creatively independent individuals as seen in the unveiling of their collaboration with top Pinterest pinners. Target posts that it’s an “industry first that celebrates a new era of tastemakers,” pointing to the influence that Pinterest pins and pinners can have on everyday design.³³⁸ The top pinners chosen were Joy Cho of “Oh Joy!,” Jan Halvarson of “Poppytalk” and Kate Arends of “Wit & Delight” who are teaming with Target to make décor and dining products to be designed in each designer’s “signature aesthetic.”³³⁹ Cho, with the highest number of Pinterest followers at over 13.6 million, runs her own blog as do the others, all of which have Pinterest boards devoted to various home décor, DIY ideas, and crafty things to make.³⁴⁰ This truly is a first for the retail world; Pinterest’s impact on the contemporary notion of design is significant. Target is materializing that influence, both by creating consumable

³³⁶ “Magical Thinking One-Of-A-Kind Handmade Elephant Stamp Quilt,” *Urban Outfitters*, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.urbanoutfitters.com/urban/catalog/productdetail.jsp?id=32028813&parentid=SEARCH+RESULTS>; “Magical Thinking Chevron Handmade Rug,” *Urban Outfitters*, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.urbanoutfitters.com/urban/catalog/productdetail.jsp?id=28890168&color=004&parentid=MORE%20IDEAS>; “Handmade 6 Mountain Boggan Sled,” *Urban Outfitters*, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.urbanoutfitters.com/urban/catalog/productdetail.jsp?id=27105881&parentid=SEARCH+RESULTS>.

³³⁷ UrbanOutfitters.com to Gina Guzzon (email), “DIY Night @ UO King of Prussia!,” September 24, 2013.

³³⁸ “From Pinterest to Partying: Target Taps Top Pinners as Latest Design Partners,” blog, *A Bullseye View: Behind the Scenes at Target*, February 10, 2014, <http://www.abullseyeview.com/2014/02/target-pinterest-party-design-partnership/>.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Kurt Wagner, “Target Taps Top Pinterest Influencers for Design Collaboration,” *Mashable*, February 10, 2014, <http://mashable.com/2014/02/10/target-pinterest-party/>.

products and marketing the Pinterest-interest. Most significant, is that actions like this by Target make the distinction between commodification of the handmade aesthetic and dissemination of the handmade ethos less consequential. With contemporary crafts and crafters benefiting in some ways from the adoption by big business, the movement alters not only in aesthetic, but in ideology as well.

On a smaller scale, feeding off the call to ‘go local,’ are the shops, and events that are both mimicking and encouraging similar unique experiences as these larger retail stores. Events held in cities and towns help to promote handmade crafts and encourage DIY on a regional level. From the west coast to the east, for-profit spaces opened for those interested in complex or educational experiences. As one example, 3rd Ward was established, offering art space, studio classes, and tools such as firing kilns. The original 3rd Ward opened in Brooklyn, New York in 2006 but was closed in October 2013, not because of any lack of interest in the hundreds of classes, studios or coworking spaces, but apparently because of poor management.³⁴¹ This subsequently closed the 3rd Ward artist community in Philadelphia as well. Known as a “DIY utopia,” it held workshops in various media as well as access, with a fee, to “wood and metal shops, photo studios, media labs and other spaces.”³⁴² Although 3rd Ward is no longer a community presence, its seven year run both encouraged the maker movement and spoke to the expansion and impact it has reached in the past decade.

³⁴¹ Drew Grant, “What Happened to 3rd Ward?,” *The New York Observer*, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://observer.com/2013/10/what-happened-to-3rd-ward/>.

³⁴² Melena Ryzik, “The Arts Collective 3rd Ward Thrives in Bushwick, Brooklyn,” *The New York Times*, July 2, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/03/arts/design/03third.html>.

In cities across the country, local organizations and cultural sites have created spaces to foster the crafting movement. Seattle’s “Handmade Happy Hour” gathers various artists who then “pitch their product lines in a mere two minutes to twenty local, regional and national wholesale buyers of handmade goods.”³⁴³ The Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis, Missouri hosts a fair-plus-libations event quarterly, selling “handmade, locally sourced and ethically imported goods.”³⁴⁴ The Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum hosts “Handi-hour,” which similarly combines craft beer with handmade crafts, although this event provides the materials for the participant to create crafts while attending, making such DIY crafts as a duct tape wallet (Figure 75), a t-shirt necklace, and embroidered, buttoned designs (Figure 76).³⁴⁵ Once a month in Brooklyn, Etsy hosts a “Craft Night” at their Etsy Labs providing the attendee a different craft each month.³⁴⁶ Or at various cities across America, Etsy Teams host “Meet & Make” or “Hands-On” crafting and DIY events.³⁴⁷ Illustrated again, is the merger of contemporary crafts with for-profit companies, showing the exchange of aesthetics and ideas.

³⁴³ Andrea Porter, “Handmade Happy Hour- Seattle,” blog, *Unanimous Craft*, June 23, 2012, <http://unanimouscraft.com/events/handmade-happy-hour-event>.

³⁴⁴ “Handmade Happy Hour - Sweetheart Edition,” *Eventbrite*, accessed March 16, 2014, <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/handmade-happy-hour-sweetheart-edition-tickets-9814787293>.

³⁴⁵ “Handi-Hour: Let’s Make Duct Tape Wallets and T-Shirt Necklaces,” *Eye Level*, accessed January 20, 2014, <http://eyelevel.si.edu/2012/05/handi-hour-lets-make-duct-tape-wallets-and-t-shirt-necklaces-.html>.

³⁴⁶ “Etsy Labs in Brooklyn, NY - Etsy Teams,” *Etsy*, accessed March 16, 2014, <https://www.etsy.com/teams/7/etsy-labs-in-brooklyn-ny>.

³⁴⁷ “Craft Night,” *The Etsy Blog*, accessed March 16, 2014, <https://www.etsy.com/blog/en/tag/craft-night/>.

Marketing Craft as Pop Culture

Other events have taken the national stage as well, allowing a wider audience to visualize crafting and understand crafts as objects of consumerism. Martha Stewart, already a well-established proponent of DIY-ing and a successful retailer in her own regard, held her inaugural “American Made” in October 2012. Stewart says the event “spotlights the maker, supports the local, and celebrates the handmade...it’s a movement made up of people and communities who have turned their passion for quality craftsmanship and well-designed goods into a way of life.”³⁴⁸ This idea that Martha Stewart’s “American Made” is “not just as an event, but ...part of a larger movement,” helps to illustrate the significant marketing potential that crafting has now gained.³⁴⁹ Held at Grand Central Station in New York City, with appearances by celebrities and politicians, free silk-screened tote bags, and a chance to purchase goods from American Makers, this event blends the world of indie craft fairs with mass-marketing tactics. Where Crafty Bastards Arts & Craft fair in Washington, D.C. or the Renegade Craft Fair in Austin, Texas pull in thousands of visitors each year, Martha Stewart’s “American Made” is a means of grouping small-business owners and handmade craftspeople under a recognizable name and for longer than one weekend. Partnering with eBay for the first time in 2013, “American Made” is now sold online, making these handmade products

³⁴⁸ “About American Made,” *Martha Stewart*, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.marthastewart.com/1004449/about-american-made>.

³⁴⁹ Lena Katz and JustLuxe.com via Good Morning America, “Martha Stewart Honors ‘American Made,’” *ABC News*, October 18, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/Travel/martha-stewart-honors-11-american-made-entrepreneurs/story?id=17501898>.

available on a continuum.³⁵⁰ As one vendor remarked at Brooklyn's Renegade Craft Fair, "I feel like if Martha Stewart is marketing it...its trendy."³⁵¹

Trendy indeed, as Martha Stewart reestablishes herself, this time climbing the ladder of popularity and including a younger generation, her name is increasingly connected with various mainstream projects and events. Stewart was the guest speaker at the Smithsonian Craft Show's 2013 event, bringing her discussion of American-made products to what is known as "the country's most prestigious juried show and sale of fine American craft."³⁵² The aesthetic at this show was significantly different than Stewart's "American Made" or popular indie craft shows across the US, coming closer in physicality to studio craft (Figure 77) than the kitschy-look of embroidered hoops or hand-stitched, vintage-fabric clutches (Figure 78). Martha Stewart's prestige and marketing power has allowed her to adopt all versions of craft, the well-established 'fine' crafts of museums and juried craft shows as well as the now-popular, indie crafts of Generation Y.

With DIY events and craft marketplaces, virtual and concrete, popping up across the country, contemporary crafting has emerged, seeping into daily life and becoming a facet of American culture as a result. As DIY-ing's popularity rose, so did the number of

³⁵⁰ Martha Stewart, "Visit Our American Made Market On eBay!," blog, *The Martha Blog: Up Close & Personal*, December 19, 2013, <http://www.themarthablog.com/2013/12/visit-our-american-made-market-on-ebay.html>.

³⁵¹ Sandra Bonazoli and Jim Dowd, Interview with Beehive at American Made- by Gina Guzzon, November 23, 2013.

³⁵² "Smithsonian Craft Show - Juried Show and Sale of Fine American Craft," *Smithsonian Craft Show*, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://smithsoniancraftshow.org/>; "Martha Stewart Lecture," *Smithsonian Craft Show*, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://smithsoniancraftshow.org/martha-stewart-lecture/>.

ideas and tutorials on how and what to craft, affecting the handmade scene with post-alternative handmade goods. Likewise, new crafts inspired the fascination with the crafted-look and assisted in the ascent of contemporary craft's popularity. Emerging out of the new DIY market, are several companies who have recognized the national interest to craft with their hands, as well as the limitations that sometimes surround event attendance or feasibility of DIY-ing in one's home. Drawing on these needs, DIY kits are the latest creations to emerge in the craft market, allowing the consumer to experience the act of creating, the joy of obtaining a crafted object they individually crafted, and satisfaction of participating in the crafty style. "For The Makers," based in New York City, have successfully marketed the crafty bohemian aesthetic popular among twenty and thirty-something women, with their monthly kits creatively titled, "Champagne Hangover Collection," "Block Party Collection," and "Sedona Sunset Collection."³⁵³ There are also Lullubee, Whimseybox, Brit & Co., and Darby Smart, all companies who sell individual kits and monthly subscriptions, not to mention the thousands of DIY kits available on Etsy.³⁵⁴ The common theme among them all is, as Whimseybox states: "believe that everyone can make something beautiful. (Yes, even you Ms. I'm Not Creative!)."³⁵⁵ With a membership fee of \$29 a month, kits from "For The Makers" offer an assortment of craft projects, each kit comes with all the supplies needed to complete

³⁵³ "Shop- For the Makers," *For the Makers*, accessed March 20, 2014, <https://www.forthemakers.com>.

³⁵⁴ "About Us- Lullubee," *Lullubee*, n.d., <http://www.lullubee.com/pages/about>; "About Us- WhimseyBox," *Whimsey Box*, n.d., <https://whimseybox.com/about>; "Darby Smart," *Darby Smart*, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://www.darbysmart.com/about>; "Diy Kit on Etsy, a Global Handmade and Vintage Marketplace.," *Etsy*, accessed March 16, 2014, https://www.etsy.com/search/handmade?q=diy%20kit&order=most_relevant&ship_to=ZZ&ref=auto2&explicit_scope=1.

³⁵⁵ "About Us- WhimseyBox."

the projects. These range in media, from jewelry, to sunglass pouches, key fobs, and market totes (Figure 79). Darby Smart, whose motto is “don’t buy style, make it,” offers similar décor, jewelry, and fashion boxes each month which range from about \$19 to \$49 per kit. These kits allow women in particular, to participate in this DIY trend on a more simplistic scale; not everyone has all the tools needed nor the diversity in materials offered to amass such a range of handmade goods.

The DIY “craze” has led to an assortment of crafts in everyday life.³⁵⁶ Individuals are increasingly coming in contact with items that are made by hand and often skillfully crafted. Television shows and an actual “DIY Network” (from the makers of HGTV and Food Network), also help spread this ideology on a national level.³⁵⁷ As a result, there is a higher degree of appreciation for items that are handcrafted in 2014, with more individuals acknowledging the cost of materials and time required to make that craft. Although not all crafts may be worth the price tag they are assigned, as the Recession turns upwards, more money is spent on items which follow the quality-over-quantity proverb with many “renouncing accumulation and embracing cultivation.”³⁵⁸ Simultaneously, the trendiness of crafting has also created a proliferation of lower quality, yet fashionably up-to-date items with an intrigue of irony, which are equally impacting today’s status of material culture. To start with, there are cardboard chandeliers

³⁵⁶ Matchar, “The New Domesticity.”

³⁵⁷ “About Us- DIY Network,” *DIY Network*, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.diynetwork.com/about-us/about-us/index.html?soc=sharingfb>.

³⁵⁸ Although published in 2000, Brooks’ scholarship charts the early years of the same trend which was slowed by an economic recession: Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise*, 85.

(Figure 80) and faux deer head mounts made of recycled maps complete with antlers

(Figure 81). A conversation between two Generation Y-ers went as follows:

A: How was your weekend?

B: It was great! We took the dog to the dog park. How was yours?

A: It was good, we got some of our Christmas decorations up.

B: Yeah, we did too. And we actually DIY-ed our Christmas tree...out of cardboard!

A: ...Wow, really? That's so neat!

B: Yup, its 3D and we even hung all our ornaments on it.³⁵⁹

Not everyone is crossing over to cardboard Christmas trees nor are they all making ceiling lights from paper products. Yet DIY-ing as a lifestyle, has created new standards for many twenty and thirty-somethings in regards to the physicality of their lives.

Lighting fixtures in particular, have become a popular household object which has undergone DIY renovations. One of the most popular is the lighting fixture made from mason jars. There are mason jar chandeliers and pendant lights (Figure 82), and globe strands of mini jelly jars and encased strings of lights (Figure 83). There are also mason jars made into lanterns, luminaries, and illuminated by solar lights (Figure 84). There are countless tutorials online, and many finished mason jar craft projects available for purchase in one of these modified forms at craft fairs and small shops across the country (Figure 85). The question arises: what makes this object so desired that there are countless tutorials on how to alter it into a new form, changing it from a simple kitchen vessel into a trend-following home décor item? Or is it that the mason jar is sought after once it undergoes some sort of modification by hand, turning it into a product of crafting? If mass-consumption of the style is what allows it to enter mainstream culture, then the

³⁵⁹ Amy Rice, Interview with Amy- by Gina Guzzon, December 3, 2012.

movement has succeeded in reaching beyond its independent boarders.³⁶⁰ Yet with entrance into the mainstream, also comes a degree of dissipation of the original style itself.

Not only utilized as the ‘raw’ material for crafting new ways to light the American home, mason jars are now employed in a myriad of ways, creating an innumerable quantity of ideas for mason jar crafts and mason-jar-themed products. Jarden Home Brands, which licenses Ball Home Canning, has been around since 1913 yet recently reported that “2012 was far and away our best sales year ever.”³⁶¹ Un-crafted mason jars are now common centerpiece vases at weddings, used as drink-ware at bars and restaurants, or simply purchased by the case to stock the kitchen cabinets, evidenced by Kate, a twenty-something from Washington, D.C. and Kari, a thirty-something from Pottstown, PA, who both purchased mason jars to utilize as drinking glasses.³⁶² With the mason jar transcending its function as a preservational object for canning purposes, meaning and societal value emerge as the driving force behind its popularity; interest in canning has also arisen as a subsection of the larger handmade movement, but does not address its implementation as a craft material or as a symbol of a larger social value. Rather, the mason jar aesthetic is utilized in unconventional ways (Figure 86) in the twenty-first century because it has come to signify the extent to which contemporary crafting has permeated American culture as well as the intangible pursuits of the culture

³⁶⁰ Hebdige, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, 94.

³⁶¹ Rupal Parekh, “Ball and Its Mason Jars Get Better With Age -- Thanks to Pinterest, DIY,” *Advertising Age*, April 15, 2013, <http://adage.com/article/news/ball-mason-jars-age/240841/>.

³⁶² Kate Cogswell, Interview in Washington, DC- by Gina Guzzon, June 8, 2013; Wisler, Ermold, and Hostetter, Interview with Crafters- by Gina Guzzon.

as a whole. Just as during the Colonial Revival period of the early twentieth century fixtures such as candlesticks, spinning wheels, and colonial-style architecture represented a tie to more simplistic and uncomplicated times, mason jars of today symbolize values which Americans covet.³⁶³

Much of today's material culture evokes authenticity and integrity, but as the proliferation of crafts increase, actual authenticity is replaced with what Americans' see as a representation of authenticity—something which is entirely suitable and appropriate for many. Although some have proclaimed that “this mason jar plague isn't just distracting women from potentially more important endeavors, its demeaning the very idea of expertise.”³⁶⁴ Many others, as evidenced in the crafts and increase in sales, accept and appreciate what mason jars embody recognizing that the era of canning and preserving will not return as an authentic entity, but as a nostalgic aspiration of a means to improving life in the twenty-first century. The Colonial Revival was not authentic, nor was it intended to be; Chippendale chairs and spinning wheels were meant to be symbolically, rather than genuinely tied to “noble colonial virtues—honesty, sincerity, strength, and courage.”³⁶⁵ If there is an American tradition followed today through the contemporary craft movement, it is that Americans generate authenticity as a means to feel truth and experience reality by attaching it to material products of culture. They do not necessarily pursue authenticity, but rather ‘authenticity.’

³⁶³ See “Introduction”: Wilson, Eyring, and Marotta, *Re-Creating the American Past*.

³⁶⁴ “Lookout: Online,” *Express*, August 8, 2013.

³⁶⁵ Mary Miley Theobald, “The Past That Never Dies,” *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* Summer 02, no. The Colonial Revival (2002), <http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/summer02/revival.cfm>; Also see: *Ibid*.

This is also evident in the popularity of the chalkboard aesthetic. This includes the use of actual chalkboards, but also newly created chalkboard fonts and digital graphics as well as chalkboard contact paper and actual chalkboard paint. There are plenty of DIY chalkboard paint ideas and an abundance of images online showcasing individual chalkboard paint projects, such as the kitchen backsplash, vertical risers of the stairs, and coffee table (Figure 87), or various décor items like old wine bottles, reusable banners, and tags or labels (Figure 88).³⁶⁶ The chalkboard fonts and printable sayings can be used for various holidays or year-round, perhaps mounted in antique frames (Figure 89). That there is a demand for such items, which with their imperfect scratched letters and hand-written aesthetic generate a connection (for old and young) to a pre-digitized world (Figure 90), illustrates the same themes as do aprons and mason jars. Americans are looking to the past to influence their future, not in a perfectly mirrored approach, but rather as a means of inspiration.

No longer relegated to classrooms or to slabs of slate, those in the twenty-first century are creating chalkboards out of things as modern as the kitchen refrigerator (Figure 91). Connecting to the future while pulling meaning from symbolic material of the past, coffee tables, placemats, and ball-and-claw foot dressers (Figure 92) are made to embody the mock-authentic qualities of wholesome school teachers, simplistic life on the frugal farm, and the honesty that comes from work made by hand. These contemporary crafts are not meant to *be* implements of teachers or school children, replacing their iPads

³⁶⁶ “20 Best: DIY Chalkboard Ideas,” *The Shabby Creek Cottage*, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://www.theshabbycreekcottage.com/2013/10/chalkboard-ideas.html>.

and classroom Smartboards, but rather harken to times and ideas of values surrounding chalkboards' original use. By sentimentalizing things like chalkboards and mason jars, contemporary crafts help to reinforce a nostalgic aesthetic, building on and expanding the visual vocabulary of what is seen as American 'tradition.' With chalkboards spouting strikingly calligraphic phrases such as "the lost art of hand lettering" (Figure 93), the *act* of participating in "lost," manual production is the underlying common theme to these objects and therefore shapes the hand-touched look of crafty products.³⁶⁷ That it is made by hand (or appears as such), is the most vital component to these products.

As much as DIY products shape the marketing and creation of both new craft ideas and crafty objects, inspiration also reverses at times, illustrating the extent to which it has diffused into mainstream culture. "Knock-offs" are a relatively recent DIY trend, which involves taking manufactured goods and DIY-ing them at a cheaper cost.³⁶⁸ Pottery Barn, Restoration Hardware, and West Elm are popular brands to make a DIY version of, but Anthropologie knock-offs are certainly the most in-demand. From lamps, to tables, vases, mugs, shirts, bracelets, earrings, necklaces, and hairpins, crafters have created DIY versions of these mechanized products, turning them into handmade goods and showcasing them on blogs, Pinterest, and whole sites devoted to "Knock Off Décor."³⁶⁹ One site compares a \$998 dresser (Figure 94) with a DIY counterpart (Figure 95), stating, "with about \$30 and some tools, you can create an authentically rustic

³⁶⁷ "The Lost Art of Hand Lettering," *Behance*, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://www.behance.net/gallery/The-Lost-Art-of-Hand-Lettering/2716969>.

³⁶⁸ "About- Knock Off Decor," blog, *Knock Off Decor*, n.d., <http://knockoffdecor.com/about/>.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

dresser.”³⁷⁰ Authentically rustic, perhaps not, but *appearing* authentically rustic, absolutely. Although these products are varied in size and appearance, knock-offs theoretically make expensive products available for those with a smaller budget which, keeping with the premise of doing-it-yourself, widens the availability for more individuals to obtain such goods. In some ways crafters are imitating the mass commoditization of their aesthetic, in other ways they are helping to disseminate the original style more clearly because these are handmade goods—both bring crafting into the mainstream.

This blending of aesthetics, of the handmade look such as rope-wrapped chandeliers, burlap-stenciled holiday décor, and necklaces made from miss-matched, hand-picked brooches (Figure 96), with their manufactured counterparts (Figure 97), makes for a market with a hand-touched aesthetic. A market such as this will inevitably have manufactured, crafty products which are not DIY-ed, not handcrafted for sale, and not made by hand. Does that dilute the ‘authenticity’ of handmade products or add to the growing symbiosis of the handmade look? If DIY is meant to encourage accessibility and achievability for the average American, make participation in the handmade movement attainable to masses, then is not the mass-production of this craft aesthetic appropriately suited to the moral spirit DIY-ing? Or, is it stripping the object of its ideological meaning if the act of hand-making is removed? Major manufacturers of furniture, kitchen products, and home-focused decorative arts are producing items that follow the style

³⁷⁰ “38 Anthropologie Hacks,” *BuzzFeed*, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/gabbynoone/anthropologie-hacks>.

carved out by the contemporary craft movement, proving once again, that nostalgia trumps accuracy and that ideological meaning is sourced from those aesthetics.

The Impact of Craft's Popularity

At the Smithsonian Craft Show in April 2013, after the conclusion of her lecture on her upcoming event, “American Made,” Martha Stewart took questions. When asked about the crafting revolution and whether she thought it was centered on the objects themselves or a pursuit of a lifestyle, she replied:

Well I think it's a combination. I think people like to work for themselves or work with other people who have like-minded talents, and I think that many of us want the handcrafted objects around us. I mean I would rather sleep with...something that somebody wove with love and care, out of a really natural fiber, than any other kind of covering. And it's the same thing with pretty much everything...³⁷¹

While this sounds fairly predictable and accurate for what Stewart may reply, she then continued with, “I would rather eat off of a dish that somebody made by hand than something mass-produced...and here I am, I sell all those things by the way...”³⁷² This last comment sums up the state of American consumption—handmade products (which are apparently so much more preferred) are being mass-produced and commodified (bringing the aesthetic, not the act, to the mainstream). With housewares and craft product lines at Home Depot, Walmart, Kmart, Staples, Michael's, Macy's, Target, and JCPenney's, Stewart simultaneously differentiates and minimizes the importance of the distinction between handmade and handmade-looking, the crafted and the crafty.

³⁷¹ Stewart, “‘American Made’ with Martha Stewart.”

³⁷² Ibid.

This documentation of the shift in the handmade craft movement is not to classify handmade as better than machine made nor to demean the products and producers who mass-produce crafty items. Rather it is to better understand how it affects the contemporary craft movement and impacts the pursuit of a handmade lifestyle. Since Veblen's introduction of "conspicuous consumption" in 1899, compounded with comments about "waste among an overcivilized elite," scholars have been analyzing the moral implications behind American tendencies towards increased consumption.³⁷³ The contemporary craft movement is an opportunity to recognize that beliefs about the ethics of consumption are not only shared by Americans scholars, but that a grass-roots effort has the potential to shape corporate behavior and buying practices. It also has major implications for the way we understand the objects coming out of the handmade craft movement.

The handmade movement rides alongside the turn toward environmentally friendly living and economic re-evaluations, so it does not influence mass-market merchandizers as a sole or individual entity. It does however, promote a discussion in this newly communicative digital age, as well as flood American homes with handmade objects. In fact, the grass-roots efforts were in one sense, so productively successful, that a nation of manufacturers are beginning to adopting the visuals created by them, even if for aesthetic reasons. The re-birth of the celebration of the vernacular was practiced with the Arts and Crafts movement of the nineteenth century, the turn towards Colonial

³⁷³ This references Thorstein Veblen's "The Theory of the Leisure Class" in: Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 26.

Revival furniture and design in the early twentieth, and again with the “back-to-the-landers” of the 1960s counter-culturists.³⁷⁴ We are as a nation, a culture of consumption; industrial production therefore, is never going to be erased from the mechanics of American society, nor is it a goal of the contemporary craft movement.³⁷⁵ Consumer goods are the means by which we create identity, both personal and social, and voice and establish values which creates a physicality to our many and varied beliefs. The contemporary craft revolution would never have been started if this were not already fully established as a practice in American society. The industrial manufacturing of crafty items and the push to make crafty goods available to the masses therefore, is quite natural and inevitable in the twenty-first century.

According to Ann Smart Martin, author of “Makers, Buyers, & Users,” there are three requirements for something to become acquired, it must be: affordable, available, and desirable.³⁷⁶ This reiterates that objects can be popular and fashionable, acknowledging a shared desire for what the product provides, but that its *ability* to be procured is a necessity for the progression from product to consumer item. Capitalizing on the selling power (or rather, aesthetic likeability) of today’s contemporary crafts, manufacturers are providing availability and affordability to Americans who want a product that meets popular social styles but at a financial level other than the one of handmade products. The rise in prices of handmade items on Etsy was well-documented

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 95.

³⁷⁵ Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

³⁷⁶ Martin, “Makers, Buyers, and Users,” 156.

as the demand increased after the first few years of the company's creation.³⁷⁷ Gustav Stickley and Wallace Nutting are best known for the Colonial Revival style of the early twentieth century, creating dining room tables and seating furniture through a factory, using the machine as a tool, and disseminating the aesthetic to countless Americans who could not purchase antiques or who supplemented their vintage finds with new products. Speaking about Stickley's use of plain form and corbels and tenons, author Kevin Tucker explained,

these visual and material clues are but reminders of his and the Arts and Crafts movement's other, more elemental contribution—a desire, in the face of tumultuous times, to pursue simplicity, forthrightness, and stability—and in doing so, to enjoy a better way of life.³⁷⁸

Similarly, in the 1960s and 1970s, patchwork skirts, tie-dye shirts, macramé and crocheted cropped tops, all underwent industrial production, improving accessibility to the masses.³⁷⁹ By increasing the ability of procurement of crafty consumer items in the twenty-first century, the aesthetic is further embraced and promoted by new consumer-creator relationships.

One way that this design is reaching a larger audience, is through the creation of sub-companies that offer a more vernacular aesthetic with more affordable prices. All introduced in the twenty-first century, places like Crate and Barrel's CB2 offers a more modern, young, urban-loft vibe stating they have a design that is “clever and in the moment, that's spare and simple but with great attention to details, that's priced smart so

³⁷⁷ “Selling on Etsy - Weather Report Stats Analysed,” *CraftProfessional.com*, accessed April 12, 2014, <http://www.craftprofessional.com/selling-on-etsy.html>.

³⁷⁸ Tucker, *Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement*, 16.

³⁷⁹ James Laver, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History*, 4th edition (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 266–269.

we can all have it all (and feel smart doing so).”³⁸⁰ CB2 recently partnered with Renegade Craft Fair to offer “original goods of six independent makers and crafters” for a limited time.³⁸¹ Prior to, and after this partnership, CB2 has offered product such as their “blox” dining table (Figure 98); with its raw wood finish and construction out of “sustainable, plantation grown solid mango wood,” this product which is manufactured in India, appears incredibly appropriate for the handmade lifestyle.³⁸² West Elm, founded by Williams-Sonoma Inc. in 2002, provides products that continue the same aesthetic such as the rope-wrapped hooks, wire-mesh laundry caddy, and the milk-glass jar pendant lamp inspired by antique glass jars (Figure 99)—all of which are not “handcrafted,” but imported products.³⁸³ Their Metal + Wood Console Table (Figure 100) is manufactured in India and is made from wood with a “metal frame [which] gives... a rustic industrial vibe.”³⁸⁴ Another two-drawer side table (Figure 101) which “features a warm, distressed-look engineered wood base and antiqued black metal trim which evoke the charm of a well-loved antique,” is offered by the Better Homes & Gardens line at Walmart and was made in China.³⁸⁵ H&M, known for their affordable mass-produced items, just recently

³⁸⁰ “CB2 - About Us Overview,” *CB2*, 2, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.cb2.com/About-Us/>.

³⁸¹ Arianne, “Renegade Craft + CB2 Exclusive Collection,” *Renegade Craft Fair*, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.renegadecraft.com/renegade-craft-cb2-exclusive-collection>.

³⁸² “Blox 35x63 Dining Table,” *CB2*, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.cb2.com/blox-35x63-dining-table/f6247>.

³⁸³ “Rope Hooks - White,” *West Elm*, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.westelm.com/products/rope-hooks-white-d2102/>; “Wire Mesh Storage - Laundry Caddy,” *West Elm*, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.westelm.com/products/mrk-wire-mesh-storage-laundry-caddy-d716/>; “Glass Jar Pendant - Milk,” *West Elm*, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.westelm.com/products/glass-jar-pendant-milk-w1072/>.

³⁸⁴ “Metal + Wood Bookcase,” *West Elm*, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.westelm.com/products/metal-wood-bookcase-h381/>.

³⁸⁵ “Walmart: Better Homes and Gardens Rustic Country Antiqued Black/Pine Panel TV Stand for TVs up to 52”,” *Walmart.com*, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.walmart.com/ip/20526179>.

brought their “Home” line to the US in 2013 offering, “at the best possible prices,” manufactured goods such as retro and vintage looking items and an entire section aesthetically themed, “Simple Living.”³⁸⁶

Target by far, has most successfully adopted the look of the handmade movement for a wide audience, as evidenced by the FEED campaign as well as their recently introduced Threshold line which came out in May 2012.³⁸⁷ Target, whose mission statement about design reads,

It’s our belief that great design is fun, energetic, surprising and smart—and it should be accessible and affordable for everyone. When we talk about our dedication to good design, we don’t just mean how something looks, but also how it satisfies a need, how it simplifies your life, and how it makes you feel.³⁸⁸

Threshold’s “fresh trend-forward feel” centers around both quality and design as motivating factors behind an incredibly well-received product line.³⁸⁹ The “brand of the moment” offers products such as a wooden accent table with a rope handle and a multicolored woven jute bench with wooden legs (Figure 102), and stoneware chalkboard canisters for the kitchen or bath, embroidered bird pillows, and artisan glass jug lamps (Figure 103). There are over a hundred Ikat patterned items for sale at Target including pillows (Figure 104), linens, chairs, drapes, and shower curtains, even an Ikat-design

³⁸⁶ “H&M Announces Home Collection Will Launch In U.S. This Fall,” *Forbes*, accessed April 7, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/bluecarreon/2013/08/08/hm-home-to-launch-in-the-us-this-fall/>.

³⁸⁷ “Target Owned & Exclusive Brands,” accessed March 18, 2014, <http://corporate.target.com/about/design-innovation/owned-brands/>.

³⁸⁸ “Target Mission, Values & Stories Behind Them | Target Corporate,” accessed March 18, 2014, <http://corporate.target.com/about/mission-values>.

³⁸⁹ “Five Questions with a Product Engineer,” accessed March 18, 2014, <http://corporate.target.com/discover/article/five-questions-with-a-product-engineer>; Sponsored Post, “Inspired by Design: Dining with Threshold Threshold: New and Only at Target®,” *Apartment Therapy*, April 9, 2013, <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/inspired-by-design-dining-with-threshold-target-threshold-184509>.

bathing suit. The Ikat pattern has made a resurgence in popularity as the imperfect and blurred edges, from the original dying and weaving methods of the fabric, combine both tradition and current aesthetics into a simplistically geometric and modern design.³⁹⁰ The overall “casual” aesthetic of the Threshold line points to its vernacular qualities which raise its appeal and characteristic of accessibility.³⁹¹

Target has successfully capitalized on the current trends while procuring praises for the affordability and accessibility of popular design. Target’s Vice President of Production Design and Development commented on their products, saying Target’s goal is to create goods that are “designed well, trend-right, and relevant.”³⁹² If Target is the twenty-first century Gustav Stickley, then is their subtext of “quality + design” enough to raise the degree of artistry that Stickley so adamantly proclaimed was absent from industrially produced goods?³⁹³ Stickley harnessed the machine to promote the handmade look, encouraging an atmosphere of artistic and social reform generated by aesthetics.³⁹⁴ Perhaps today’s acceptance of facsimiles is because society is currently post post-modern, meaning post-modernism is a part of our history, we evolve with and beyond that history, keeping a *notion* of the “real thing” as the most vital part of the story.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁰ “Trend Alert: Ikat,” *ELLE DECOR*, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.elledecor.com/design-decorate/trend-alert-ikat-a-64123>; “Ikat Invasion,” *The Morning Call*, accessed March 18, 2014, http://articles.mcall.com/2012-04-08/business/mc-real4-8-ikat-20120408_1_ikat-big-pattern-dyeing.

³⁹¹ “Behind the Bullseye: Julie Guggemos Talks the Research of Design.”

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ “Target Owned & Exclusive Brands.”

³⁹⁴ Stephen Sennott, *Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Architecture* (Taylor & Francis, 2004), 77.

³⁹⁵ Orvell, *The Real Thing*, xxvi.

Stickley hailed the idea of a simple life, shaped and created from good quality consumer products—Target’s message is the same today.³⁹⁶

The question remains, what then is the impact of contemporary craft’s rise to its status as popular culture? Can the demand for handmade goods be satisfied simply with more individuals DIY-ing on their weekends free? On October 1, 2013, Etsy announced that they were making changes to their policy regarding the outside help that artisans could obtain regarding the creation of the goods they sold on the website.³⁹⁷ While a frenzy of media responses made claims that the new policy to allow “manufacturing partners” may in fact “undermine” what made Etsy successful or point to whether Etsy is “selling out,” Etsy headquarters meanwhile, made strong attempts to clarify their decision. They did in fact remove the word “handmade” from their mission statement, they did acknowledge that some sellers were bending the rules towards outside help, and they did acknowledge that products such as vintage goods were changing the face of the Etsy site.³⁹⁸ However, their decisions were based on the fact that in the twenty-first century, technological advancements never before available to craftsman are both available and valuable. Standing behind their introduction of “Authorship, Responsibility, and Transparency” as a means of measurement, Etsy explained that the sellers need to openly express their own role in the production of handmade products in order to

³⁹⁶ Tucker, *Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement*.

³⁹⁷ “New Guidelines For Shops,” *Etsy*, accessed October 10, 2013, http://www.etsy.com/new-guidelines?utm_source=OpenGraph&utm_medium=PageTools&utm_campaign=Share.

³⁹⁸ Chad Dickerson Published on Oct 01 and 2013 in Product Announcements, “Notes From Chad,” *Etsy News Blog*, accessed October 10, 2013, <http://www.etsy.com/blog/news/2013/notes-from-chad-11/>; “New Guidelines For Shops.”

continue selling on the site.³⁹⁹ In order for jewelers to utilize 3D printers, crafters to employ “computer-assisted design,” and for many artists to keep up with the demands of the growing contemporary craft movement, policies needed to be rewritten.⁴⁰⁰ These demands may require employing outside help sewing sections, punching metal, or packaging any finished products into boxes on the artist’s own kitchen table. Rather than take away or remove new remarkable technology of the twenty-first century from contemporary crafters hands, it is believed that an embrace of technological advancements can only help promote the reform ideas fueling the handmade movement. Stickley’s “factory craft” as he called it, is updated today using twenty-first century ‘factory’ equipment; “transparency” therefore, is openly saying: I used a 3D printer to make your necklace, yet my artistry still lies in the design and complete finishing of the production process.⁴⁰¹

Arts and Crafts proponents in American during the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries, did not necessarily propose the removal of industrial technology, but rather to rethink, via “new industrialism,” the state of the nation and *how* products were made in America.⁴⁰² If Nike is seen (as per Cat Mazza’s Nike revolt blanket and discoveries about global sweatshops) as a 1990s “Captain of Industry” like

³⁹⁹ 01 and Announcements, “Notes From Chad.”

⁴⁰⁰ Stinson, “Why Etsy’s Future Depends on Redefining ‘Handmade’ | Design.”

⁴⁰¹ Tucker, *Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement*, 23; 01 and Announcements, “Notes From Chad.”

⁴⁰² Wendy Kaplan, Kaplan, *The Art That Is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920* (A Bulfinch Press Book, 1998), 211.

the robber barons, Carnegie and Rockefeller were in the 1890s, then rather than remove the use of machines, the idea is to reform *how* it is used.⁴⁰³ This includes introducing fair-labor practices and creating a more holistic environment to the entire production process. Companies like Stickley and Hubbard “reinterpreted the ‘new industrialism,’” perhaps “democratiz[ing] even as it diminish[ed]” the original goals of Morris and Ruskin; Target may be doing the same with some of the alternative crafters’ ethos and objectives, but democratize they are.⁴⁰⁴ Eating apple pie and drinking tea out of a simple, white mug which is enveloped in a light blue, chunky-knit ‘sweater’ (Figure 105) while your dishtowel of rosy-toned, ric-rac ribbon and hand-stitched, patchwork-cutouts of layered cakes (Figure 106) hangs on a hook nearby, *is* curating an environment of pleasant, vernacular simplicity. These mugs and dishtowels from Target and similar retailers are part and parcel of the handmade movement, even if the only thing made by hand, was the sweet smelling apple pie.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 212.

Chapter Four: Figures



Figure 65: *Rack of Aprons*, 7 January 2014. Anthropologie, Washington, DC, image by author.



Figure 66: *Sewing Basket Apron*, c. 2014. Anthropologie (image in the public domain), http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/home-linens/77711.jsp?cm_sp=Grid_-_77711_-_Regular_29;RuffleApron, 9 February 2007. Morgan Moore, “Valentine Tree & Apron 101,” One More Moore blog (image in the public domain), http://morganmoore.typepad.com/one_more_moore/2007/02/valentine_tree__1.html.



Figure 67: *Natural Tree Stump Side Table*, c. 2014. West Elm (image in the public domain), http://www.westelm.com/products/natural-tree-stump-side-table-f655/?pkey=ccoffee-side-tables&cm_src=coffee-side-tables||NoFacet_-_NoFacet_-_; *DIY Tree Stump*, 30 July 2012. “DIY Tree Stump Side Tables,” Bye Bye, Brooklyn blog (image in the public domain), <http://byebyebrooklyn.wordpress.com/2012/07/30/diy-tree-stump-side-tables/>.



Figure 68: *FEED USA + Target bag*, 30 May 2013. “Modern Americana: The Full FEED USA + Target Look Book,” Target (image in the public domain), <http://www.abullseyeview.com/2013/05/photos-feed-usa-target-look-book-lauren-bush-lauren/>; *Vintage Thai Cloth Bag*, c. 2013. RIGG, Brklyn Curated, Brooklyn, NY, image by author.



Figure 69: "Enjoy Napkin" at Anthropologie, c. 2013. Kimberly Scola, Chez Sucre Chez (image in the public domain), <http://chezsucrechez.com/portfolioxstitch>.



Figure 70: *Astrological Maps Bracelet*, c. 2013. By Julie Nolan, Anthropologie (image in the public domain), <http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/product/23701956.jsp>



Figure 71: *Children's Clothing*, 26 October 2011. Rachel Faucett, "Handmade Charlotte at Anthropologie," Handmade Charlotte blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.handmadecharlotte.com/handmade-charlotte-anthropologie/>



Figure 72: *Magical Thinking One-Of-A-Kind Handmade Elephant Stamp Quilt*, c. 2013. By Magical Thinking, Urban Outfitters (image in the public domain), <http://www.urbanoutfitters.com/urban/catalog/productdetail.jsp?id=32028854&parentid=BRANDS>.



Figure 73: *Magical Thinking Chevron Handmade Rug*, c. 2014. By Magical Thinking, Urban Outfitters (image in the public domain), <http://www.urbanoutfitters.com/urban/catalog/productdetail.jsp?id=28890168>.



Figure 74: *Handmade 6' Mountain Boggan Sled*, c. 2014. By Mountain Boy Sledworks, Urban Outfitters (image in the public domain), <http://www.urbanoutfitters.com/urban/catalog/productdetail.jsp?id=27105881&parentid=SEARCH+RESULTS>



Figure 75: *Duck Tape Wallet*, 10 May 2012. “Handi-Hour,” Smithsonian American Art Museum photostream, Flickr (image in the public domain), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/americanartmuseum/7256376402/>.



Figure 76: *“40 Under 40” Embroidery*, 29 November 2012. “Handi-Hour,” Smithsonian American Art Museum photostream, Flickr (image in the public domain), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/americanartmuseum/8232587747/>.



Figure 77: *Hokanson-Dix vendor stall, 25 April 2013. Hokanson Dix Glass Studio, Smithsonian Craft Show, Washington, DC, image by author.*



Figure 78: *Gathered Goods- Indian Clutches- Akash*, c. 2014. Nonperishable Goods (image in the public domain), <http://www.nonperishablegoods.bigcartel.com/product/gathered-goods-india-clutches-akash>.



Figure 79: *Aiden Sunglass Pouch*, c. 2013. "Rising Tides Collection," For The Makers (image in the public domain), <https://www.forthemakers.com/shop/products/123>; *Luxe Orchid Key Fob*, c. 2013. "First Bloom Collection," For The Makers (image in the public domain), <https://www.forthemakers.com/shop/products/144>; *Rye Market Tote*, c. 2013. "Hudson Collection," For The Makers (image in the public domain), <https://www.forthemakers.com/shop/products/26>.



Figure 80: *Cardboard Chandelier*, 17 April 2012. Kayte Terry, “How-Tuesday: Cardboard Chandelier,” The Etsy Blog (image in the public domain), <https://blog.etsy.com/en/2012/how-tuesday-cardboard-chandelier/>.



Figure 81: *Cardboard Deer Head*, 31 August, 2011. By Cardboard Safari, image from “25 Map-Inspired Crafts to Make,” Babble blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.babble.com/crafts-activities/25-map-inspired-crafts-to-make/>.



Figure 82: *Waterfall Spiral Mason Jar Chandelier*, c. 2014. BootsNGus, Etsy (image in the public domain), <https://www.etsy.com/listing/75972685/waterfall-spiral-mason-jar-chandelier>; *Mason Jar Pendant Light*, 18 April 2011. Kate Payne, "Mason Jar Pendant Light Chandelier," Hip Girl's Guide to Homemaking blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.hipgirlshome.com/blog/2011/4/18/mason-jar-pendant-light-chandelier.html>.



Figure 83: *Jelly Jar Lights*, 20 February 2012. Kate Payne, "Jelly Jar Globe String Light," Hip Girl's Guide to Homemaking blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.hipgirlshome.com/blog/2012/2/20/jelly-jar-globe-string-lights.html>; *Mason Jar Light*, c. 2013. "Holiday Lights as Night Light," Real Simple magazine (image in the public domain), <http://www.realsimple.com/home-organizing/decorating/bedroom/diy-night-light-00100000093496/>.



Figure 84: *DIY Mason Jar Lantern*, 4 September 2012. "Create More Outdoor Lighting with a DIY Mason Jar Lantern," Make & Takes blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.makeandtakes.com/create-more-outdoor-lighting-with-a-diy-mason-jar-lantern>; *Doily Luminaries*, 4 January 2011. Amanda Formaro, "Burlap and Doily Luminaries: Rustic Meets Romance," Crafts by Amanda blog (image in the public domain), <http://craftsbyamanda.com/2011/01/burlap-doily-luminaries-rustic-meets.html>; *Mason Jar Solar Light*, 24 June 2013. Johnnie Collier, "Easy Mason Jar Solar Lights," Saved by Love Creations blog (image in the public domain), <http://savedbylovecreations.com/2013/06/easy-mason-jar-solar-lights.html>.



Figure 85: *Mason Jar Shaker*, 27 June 2013. Circa Dee designs, West End Garage, Cape May, NJ, image by author.



Figure 86: *Blue Ball Glass Mason Jar iPhone Case*, c. 2014. RedOakImages, Etsy (image in the public domain), <https://www.etsy.com/listing/158108176/blue-ball-glass-mason-jar-iphone-44s?ref=related-0>.



Figure 87: *Chalkboard Back-splash*, 13 October 2012. “Chalkboard Backsplash,” Hayan Café blog (image in the public domain), <http://hayancafe.blogspot.com/2012/10/chalkboard-backsplash.html>; *Chalkboard Painted Stairs*, 2 April 2012. Image from “Stairs and More Stairs,” Solve My Space Blog (image in the public domain), <http://blog.solvemyspace.com/2012/04/stairs-and-more-stairs/>; *Chalkboard Coffee Table*, 29 May 2013. Image from “Two Story Cottage: Chalkboard Coffee Table,” The Handmade Home blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.thehandmadehome.net/2013/05/two-story-cottage-chalkboard-coffee-table/>.



Figure 88: *Chalkboard Wine Bottles*, 24 March 2009. “Newport: French Kitchen,” Ruthi Auda blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.ruthiauda.com/blog/newport-french-household/>; *Chalkboard Garland*, 30 September 2013. “How To Make a Chalkboard Garland (The Lazy Girl’s Guide),” Charming Zebra blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.charmingzebra.com/2013/09/how-to-make-a-chalkboard-garland-the-lazy-girls-guide.html>; *Chalkboard Place Cards*, 9 November 2011. Gina Luker, “How to make Chalkboard Place Cards,” The Shabby Creek Cottage blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.theshabbycreekcottage.com/2012/11/creating-beautiful-chalkboard-placecards.html>.



Figure 89: *Chalkboard Fonts*, 24 February 2010. “{Favorite Chalkboard Fonts + Making Your Own Printables},” Simple Kierste blog (image in the public domain), <http://simplykierste.com/2014/02/favorite-chalkboard-fonts.html>; *Chalkboard Printable*, 7 August 2013. “Free Kitchen Art Printable,” I Heart Nap Time blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.iheartnaptime.net/free-kitchen-art-printable/>; *Antique Framed Chalkboard Print*, 19 February 2013. “...What a Wonderful World Chalkboard Print & Download,” Dear Lillie The Blog (image in the public domain), <http://dearlillieblog.blogspot.jp/2013/02/what-wonderful-world-chalkboard-print.html>.



Figure 90: *iWoody Chalkboard “iPhone,”* c. 2012. “29 Cool Gifts for Kids,” Real Simple magazine (image in the public domain), <http://www.realsimple.com/holidays-entertaining/gifts/cool-gifts-kids-0010000090582/page12.html>.



Figure 91: *Chalkboard Paint Refrigerator*, 2 March 2011. "DIY: Painting Your Fridge With Chalkboard Paint," The Handmade Home blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.thehandmadehome.net/2011/03/diy-painting-your-fridge-with-chalkboard-paint/>.



Figure 92: *Chalkboard Cabinet*, 13 March 2012. "DIY Tutorial- Chalkboard Painted Furniture," Hello There House blog (image in the public domain), <http://hellotherehouse.blogspot.com.au/2012/03/diy-tutorial-chalkboard-painted.html>.

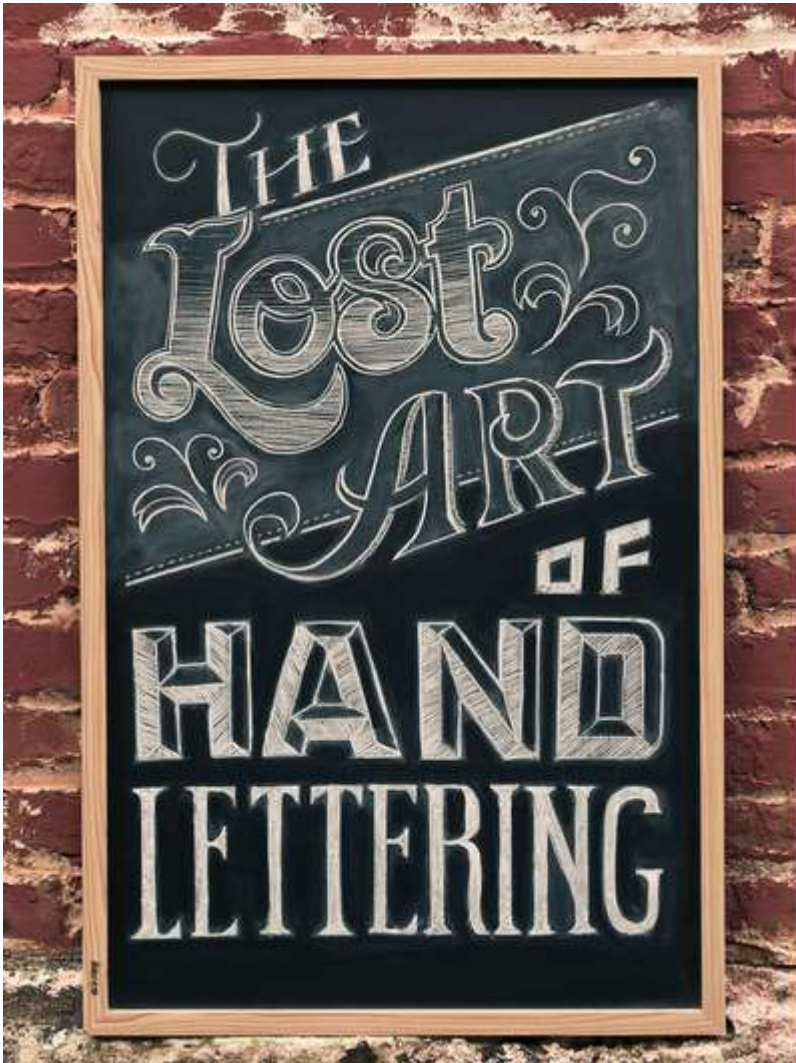


Figure 93: *Lost Art of Hand Lettering*, 20 December 2011. Chris Yoon, “The Lost Art of Hand Lettering,” Behance blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.behance.net/gallery/The-Lost-Art-of-Hand-Lettering/2716969>.



Figure 94: *Anthropologie Ordinal Dresser*, 8 October 2011. “Anthro Ordinal Dresser {Knock Off Style},” image from East Coast Creative blog (image in the public domain), <http://eastcoastcreativeblog.com/2011/10/anthro-ordinal-dresser-knock-off-style.html>.



Figure 95: *Anthro Knock-Off Before & After*, 8 October 2011. “Anthro Ordinal Dresser {Knock Off Style},” image from East Coast Creative blog (image in the public domain), <http://eastcoastcreativeblog.com/2011/10/anthro-ordinal-dresser-knock-off-style.html>.



Figure 96: *Burlap Bunny Banner*, 19 March 2014. “Pottery Barn Inspired Burlap Bunny Banner,” Confession of a Plate Addict blog (image in the public domain), <http://confessionsofaplateaddict.blogspot.com/2014/03/pottery-barn-inspired-burlap-bunny.html>; *DIY crystal flower lattice necklace*, 24 October 2013. “My DIY J. Crew crystal flower lattice necklace,” Bromeliad blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.bromeliadliving.com/2013/10/my-diy-j-crew-crystal-flower-lattice.html>; *DIY rope chandelier*, 22 August 2013. “Pottery Barn and West Elm Inspired DIY Rope Chandelier,” From Our Hiding Place blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.fromourhidingplace.com/2013/08/pottery-barn-and-west-elm-inspired-diy-rope-chandelier.html>.



Figure 97: *Outdoor Happy Easter Flag*, c. 2014. Pottery Barn (image in the public domain), <http://www.potterybarn.com/products/easter-outdoor-burlap-flag/>; *Crystal Necklace*, 24 October 2013. J Crew, image from “My DIY J. Crew crystal flower lattice necklace,” Bromeliad blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.bromeliadliving.com/2013/10/my-diy-j-crew-crystal-flower-lattice.html>; *Rope Chandelier*, c. 2013. West Elm (image in the public domain), <http://www.westelm.com/products/rope-chandelier-w712/>.



Figure 98: *Blox 35x63 dining table*, c. 2014. CB2 (image in the public domain), <http://www.cb2.com/blox-35x63-dining-table/f6247>.



Figure 99: *Rope Hooks- White*, c. 2014. West Elm (image in the public domain), http://www.westelm.com/products/rope-hooks-white-d2102/?cm_src=PIPRecentView; *Wire Mesh Storage-Laundry Caddy*, c. 2014. West Elm (image in the public domain), http://www.westelm.com/products/mrk-wire-mesh-storage-laundry-caddy-d716/?pkey=cbaskets&cm_src=baskets%7C%7CNoFacet_-_NoFacet_-_; *Glass Jar Pendant- Milk*, c. 2014. West Elm (image in the public domain), http://www.westelm.com/products/glass-jar-pendant-milk-w1072/?pkey=call-lighting&cm_src=all-lighting%7C%7CNoFacet_-_NoFacet_-_.



Figure 100: *Metal + Wood Console Table*, c. 2014. West Elm (image in the public domain), <http://www.westelm.com/products/metal-and-wood-console-table-h240>.



Figure 101: *Better Homes and Gardens Rustic Country Antiqued Black/Pine Panel TV Stand*, c. 2014. Walmart (image in the public domain), <http://www.walmart.com/ip/Better-Homes-and-Gardens-Rustic-Country-Antiqued-Black-Pine-Panel-TV-Stand-for-TVs-up-to-52/20526179?adid=150000000000027727770>.



Figure 102: *Accent Table With Rope Handle - Natural*, c. 2014. Target (image in the public domain), http://www.target.com/p/threshold-accent-table-with-rope-handle-natural/-/A-14986449#prodSlot=medium_1_17; *Woven Jute Bench – Multicolored*, c. 2014. Target (image in the public domain), http://www.target.com/p/threshold-woven-jute-bench-multicolored-28x15x17h/-/A-14715837#?lnk=sc_qi_detailink.



Figure 103: *Stoneware Chalk Canister Collection*, c. 2014. Target (image in the public domain), <http://www.target.com/p/threshold-stoneware-chalk-canister-collection/-/A-14702252>; *Embroidered Bird Toss Pillow*, c. 2014. Target (image in the public domain), http://www.target.com/p/threshold-embroidered-bird-toss-pillow-18x18/-/A-14840338#prodSlot=medium_2_36; *Artisan Glass Jug Lamp Base Small - Ancient Aqua*, c. 2014. Target (image in the public domain), http://www.target.com/p/threshold-artisan-glass-jug-lamp-base-small-ancient-aqua/-/A-14846481#prodSlot=medium_3_1.



Figure 104: *Ikat Toss Pillow*, c. 2014. Target (image in the public domain), http://www.target.com/p/threshold-ikat-toss-pillow-18x18/-/A-14533600#prodSlot=medium_1_1&term=ikat pillow.



Figure 105: *Threshold Mug- Holiday Light Blue*, 30 November 2013. Target, Collegeville, PA, image by author.



Figure 106: *Flour Sack Cake Towel Set*, c. 2013. Target (image in the public domain), <http://www.target.com/p/threshold-flour-sack-cake-towel-set-of-6/-/A-14317568>.

CONCLUSION

“What a sad little tote bag. I know, I’ll put a bird on it. Did you see this bag before? I didn’t. Now there’s a bird! It’s flying, it’s free.....Put a bird on it! (Figure 107).”⁴⁰⁵ *Portlandia*, the satirical television show from which this witty mockery on the overpopulation of bird motifs originates, signifies a shift in the contemporary craft movement. From just a few button-eyed felt birds carefully hand-stitched onto bags or scarves, the image of a bird has since reproduced as a pinned, stamped, sewn, block-printed, stenciled, etched, pasted, painted, carved, and engraved motif on countless crafts and crafty objects. *Portlandia* parodies the “tribal-tattooed hipsteropolis” of Portland, Oregon, but is in production of its fifth season with rave reviews, because the show’s satire remains remarkably poignant and ironical to viewers across the nation.⁴⁰⁶ Sue Bradbury who owns the Etsy shop, Ellaina Boutique, remarked, “When I moved to Portland from California, the first thing I did was put a bird appliqué on everything I made...When I saw 'Portlandia,' I thought, 'Oh crap. That's over.'”⁴⁰⁷

With bird cage chandeliers fashioned out of chicken-wire-esque shades, wooden perches, and fifteen multi-color mini birds (Figure 108) offered to consumers through retail stores like Anthropologie for no less than \$750, bird-themed designs and the accompanying craft aesthetic are made fixtures in American society through the process

⁴⁰⁵ Jonathan Krisel, “Portlandia,” *A Song for Portland* (IFC, January 28, 2011).

⁴⁰⁶ Maerz, “For the Birds?”.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

of mass-production. Walking through Washington, D.C.'s Craft Bastards Arts & Crafts fair, the attendee passes an array of small and large bird silhouettes, some perched on the edge of ceramic bowls others transformed by lace onto the faces of wooden clocks (Figure 109). The owl motif is its sister-in-crime, materializing on bags, hats, t-shirts and on an unending list of popular crafting receptacles of today. The visual impact of these feathered friends is realized in both hand-crafted and crafty consumer objects; the bird silhouette is just one tangible manifestation of this movement's physical emergence into mainstream culture. Visible stitches are equally representative of the craft movement aesthetic, as seen on Target dishtowels (Figure 110) and Ikea lamps (Figure 111), as embroidery inside wooden frames or hoops (Figure 112), as a knotted t-shirt turned necklace (Figure 113), and as the all-common, knit scarf both handmade and machine-made (Figure 114). Just as visible joints in wooden furniture and green, unfiltered glass were sought-after appearances of decorative arts in the spread of the Arts and Crafts movement in the turn of the twentieth century, they have equivalents in the contemporary movement today.⁴⁰⁸ Through traceable aesthetics and à la mode semantics like 'artisan,' 'small-batch,' and of course 'handmade,' contemporary crafting has well surpassed its rebellious roots and revolutionary fervor. No longer composed of only fledgling craft fairs and quirky, eclectic handmade objects, this reformation has grown, morphed, and ballooned through the physicality of consumer goods into a movement which considerably impacts the state of material culture of the twenty-first century.

⁴⁰⁸ See entire chapter on "Arts and Crafts" and 292 in: Riley, *The Elements of Design*, 292.

Parodies, such as *Portlandia*'s "Put a bird on it," can, in one sense, be viewed as predictable outcomes of the movement's expansion, with bird motifs now fluttering across countless consumable decorative arts. Other parodies have joined in, reiterating crafting's rise to fame and popular attention through humorous sarcastic exaggerations. Even the car company, Honda, mocked some Americans' level of DIY enthusiasm with a 2014 April Fool's ad; the company 'interviewed' a die-hard DIY couple (played by actors) who were so immersed in the crafting lifestyle that, with the help of shipped parts from Honda, they were DIY-ing their own car.⁴⁰⁹ The inherent humor and quirkiness of craft easily lends itself to jests, but perhaps there is also something about crafters' gushing enthusiasm that makes it an easy target for comedic commentators. When crafters like Tina are showcased on Etsy's homepage professing, "I remember the first time I made a ring, something quickened in my soul," their sentimentality may strike some as overly enthusiastic.⁴¹⁰ Therefore, it is not surprising that Etsy and its utopian arts and crafts community were the subject of a mock crafting site, aptly titled Regretsy.com. The site closed down in February 2013, but was a well-known staple of the crafting parodies to emerge in the past decade and was even published into a book in 2010.⁴¹¹ With the site's motto, "where DIY meets WTF," Regretsy hoisted the majority of its comedic material from Etsy itself, poking fun at actual items such as a "charming pond

⁴⁰⁹ A. J. McCarthy, "Honda Salvages April Fools' Day While Skewering DIY Ridiculousness," *Slate*, April 2, 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2014/04/02/honda_april_fools_day_ad_honda_homemade_series_spoof_mocks_the_diy_fad.html.

⁴¹⁰ Tina Dee, "Quit Your Day Job: Tinahdee," *The Etsy Blog*, April 17, 2012, <https://blog.etsy.com/en/2012/quit-your-day-job-tinahdee/>.

⁴¹¹ "Regretsy Closes, the World Mourns the End of DIY Meets WTF (Wired UK)," *Wired UK*, accessed March 23, 2014, <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-02/01/regretsy-closure>.

scum amoeba” necklace (Figure 115) and a “chicken poncho” (Figure 116).⁴¹² Like Etsy, Pinterest has also been the subject of humorous jests, with numerous sites creating “The 33 Most Painful Pinterest Fails Ever,” or “Pinterest Projects Gone Wrong” from CraftFail.com.⁴¹³ There are entire sites devoted to the average crafter’s attempts at recreating Pinterest projects such as PinterestFail.com, EpicPinterestFail.com, and Pinterosity.com which showcase wreaths gone amiss (Figure 117), yarn egg projects gone awry (Figure 118), and flawed attempts at crayon art (Figure 119).

Actress and comedian Amy Sedaris highlighted the irony of DIY’s anyone-can-do-it decree, in her book, *Simple Times: Crafts for Poor People*, where she overtly pokes fun at crafting’s money-saving benefits. In her parody, she covers many facets of the crafting mania, advising readers to

remember which kind of glue to use with which material (Tacky with Furry, Gummy with Gritty, Paste with Prickly, and always Gloppy with Sandy); create your own craft room and avoid the most common crafting accidents (sawdust fires, feather asphyxia, pine cone lodged in throat).⁴¹⁴

Published during the economic recession, Sedaris’s humor, as with other crafting parodies, highlights the limitations of DIY-ing by bringing its egalitarian idealism under analysis. Where advocates of the handmade lifestyle genuinely believe in the plebian virtue of DIY, that it is an approachable and performable activity and therefore a procurable way to live one’s life, its accessibility is not as extensive as some may wish.

⁴¹² April Winchell, *Regreetsy: Where DIY Meets WTF* (New York: Villard Books, 2010).

⁴¹³ “The 33 Most Painful Pinterest Fails Ever,” *Distractify*, accessed March 23, 2014, <http://distractify.com/fun/fails/the-most-embarrassing-craft-fails-ever-i-feel-bad-but-these-are-so-funny/>; “Pinterest Projects Gone Wrong | CraftFail,” accessed March 23, 2014, <http://craftfail.com/category/pinterest-projects-gone-wrong/>.

⁴¹⁴ Amy Sedaris, *Simple Times: Crafts for Poor People*. (Grand Central Pub, 2011).

The popularity of crating is a cultural movement and a national trend but it also unites those who share a group of characteristic values and beliefs. Despite its ideological underpinnings of inclusiveness, the contemporary craft movement has not reached all Americans nor has it appealed equally to the diversity of cultures present in America in the twenty-first century; facets of the movement have unfurled into mainstream culture, but not every American citizen has, will, or cares to craft a handmade good.

As evidenced in each of the previous chapters, contemporary craft is most popular among a specific demographic: Caucasian, young (twenty and thirty-something), largely female, and middle-to-upper class. Recycling and upcycling are of course frugal actions, but to purchase materials, take the time to make things by hand, and to buy handmade, designates crafting as an activity for those who have some sort of hobby time available. To be sure, aspects of crafting absolutely fall under the definition of household (and in some cases outside) labor, but the contemporary craft movement is now *also* practiced as a leisurely activity. While crafting has gained importance for large groups of Americans these limitations of time and materials has meant that it is not able to become meaningful to others. Crafting parodies point to both the shared ideological importance of crafting by imitating held beliefs through satire, as well as point out the contradiction between crafters' tone of universal social transmission and its inherent restraints.

The limitations of contemporary craft do not reduce the impact it has on Americans' pursuit of a handmade life nor the physically altered environment that surrounds them. In 2013, the Craft & Hobby Association reported that 62.5 million

people in America participated in some sort of crafting activity.⁴¹⁵ The sheer number of media sources spouting things like, “making things makes good,” evidences that bric-a-bracs from indie fairs and DIY-ed tables or chairs are fully incorporated into American culture.⁴¹⁶ Contemporary crafting has emerged as a dynamic cultural force only because the object, *a* craft, and the action, *to* craft, have simultaneously undergone revitalization, energizing and reviving the act of creating by hand and embedding those virtues of empowerment within the finished product.

With both the object and the action admired in this modern movement, the historiographical trend of circumventing any definite definition or classification of “craft” is consequently extended, as craft has previously been viewed through different lenses, institutional frameworks, and by scholars of diverse fields. The only true commonality among these historiographies is that “craft often defines itself not so much as what it is but what it is not, in opposition to other endeavors,” as Edward S. Cooke Jr. argued in “Modern Craft and the American Experience.”⁴¹⁷ Rather, it is crafts inability to transcend specific classification which enables it to continuously adapt and conform, affect and reform. Cooke alludes to the lack of broad perspective by pointing out that “describing narratives and stylistic contrasts rather than interpretive analysis and attention to cumulative layering have characterized much of the balkanized literature on modern

⁴¹⁵ *The Craft & Hobby Association Announces 2012 Craft Industry Statistics*, press release (Elmwood Park, New Jersey: Craft & Hobby Association, July 19, 2013), <http://www2.craftandhobby.org/cgi-bin/pressrelease.cgi?func=ShowRelease&releaseid=438>.

⁴¹⁶ Tapper and Zucker, *Craft Activism*, 5.

⁴¹⁷ Edward S. Cooke Jr., “Modern Craft and the American Experience,” *American Art* 21, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 2.

American craft.”⁴¹⁸ Through an interdisciplinary approach towards contemporary culture, this thesis uses such underlying themes and concepts as “labor, consumerism, value, gender, class, identity, and politics,” to broaden the ideological and material understanding of today’s physical world.⁴¹⁹

For networks, both community generated and virtually fashioned, have illustrated how craft knits rural and urban makers and designers; stay-at-home moms in Iowa and Martha-Stewart-tattooed Brooklynites alike have picked up knitting needles and hot glue guns.⁴²⁰ These networks help to foster ideas such as “DIY is not only a term we use, but a lifestyle we live by,” encouraging fellow crafters to act out the ethos.⁴²¹ Despite repeated Pinterest fails, crafters continue to upcycle objects into newly consumable products or purchase DIY kits to share in the esteemed act of crafting. This points to the cultural construction of craft as a *process*, that handmade goods are prized for their physical qualities because of the artistry and beauty they possess, but more importantly because those tangible elements allude to the process of hand-making that went into the object’s creation. Through this process, contemporary craft is, as a product of society, embedded with certain values, yet it not only passively imbibes established social beliefs, but is also an “active agent in articulating relationships or attitudes,” shaping the cultural landscape with more than its utilitarian objective.⁴²² In spite of the lace and pin-tucks, most of the

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴²⁰ “The Iowa Farmer’s Wife: About Me,” accessed March 23, 2014, <http://www.theiowafarmerswife.com/p/about-me.html>; Haughney, “For Martha Stewart’s New Fans, Tattoos Meet Appliqué.”

⁴²¹ Levine, *Handmade Nation*, 2008, xi.

⁴²² Cooke, “Modern Craft and the American Experience,” 7.

frilly aprons so closely tied to New Domesticity serve foremost as protective garments over one's clothes; the act of both making one by hand and wearing one that was handmade is a communicative expression about its functional purpose, but also that a ruffled apron has been reclaimed (by hand) as a symbol of a *chosen*, balanced, personalized, gratifying life.

Craft therefore, is an active agent in forming not only new symbiosis for previously understood representations, but also in forming a construct of culture as a whole. How the New Domestic apron, the upcycled t-shirt scarf, or the Anthropologie-knock-off wooden table are transmitted throughout society, either as ideas on virtual corkboards, as consumer products for sale at digital markets, or in use by Americans across the country, influences society's understanding of object movement and material interaction. Furthermore, craft's "roots in social interaction" allow it to proactively shape personal and social identity, pulling upon the past to provide substantiation and applying that to changing, modern constructs.⁴²³ This past and present quality to craft is what makes it relevant, enticing, and an eventual aspect of today's popular culture. Rather than an immediate backlash, as some may claim, to the previous generations' failures or seemingly unviable successes, this movement is instead an evolution of ideas and a means to processing the status quo of culture and materiality in American society.

Amid the uncertainties surrounding the twenty-first century, tradition, heritage, and ethical customs, even if nostalgically fabricated, are supplied by aesthetics which harken to pre-industrial workmanship such as hand-stitches, raw and unfinished wood,

⁴²³ Ibid., 5.

and imperfectly finished mediums. Yet these are combined or transformed into recognized, utilitarian forms such as tables, lighting fixtures, kitchen containers, and personal clothing through the melding of low-tech (past) with technological advancements (present) such as electric wiring, industrial steel beams, innovative paint, virtual tutorials, and digital media. That these newly merged creations enter, exit, and re-enter as consumer goods, consumed by the maker or another, broaden our understanding of how consumption is not antithetical to artistry, but rather powerfully effective in stimulating an art movement throughout the masses.

“Material culture,” as Cooke remarks, “plays a prominent role in the structuring and negotiation of everyday life, it is essential that craft as a subcategory of material culture be considered in this way.”⁴²⁴ Bringing the background of life to the foreground of discussion illuminates upon the impact of both artistic professionals and amateurs to shape aesthetic value in society. Producers and consumers alike impact the social value these objects obtain and maintain as they move throughout the culture from creation, to marketing, distribution, re-creation, consumption, and utilization. The creation of the hand-touched aesthetic therefore, is not traceable through one means of production nor one type of producer, but rather based off Americans’ understandings of what it means to generate uniqueness, authenticity, and integrity in a tangible form. Through this “finishing” of the object, the past is molded with the present, reflecting activist beliefs or affecting Americans’ understandings of gender in the twenty-first century. The

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 7.

contemporary movement stands amongst past efforts which illustrated the capacity of ordinary men and women to reform, the power present in consumer products, and the impact of communal action. These have all proven, as has the current reform movement, that though national and personal ‘anxieties’ may forever be extant in American society, citizens continuously seek out truth, security and fulfillment in objects and activities of our everyday lives.

Within the American home therefore, exists the production of personal meaning and consumption of national ideologies conveyed through both newly crafted tastes and ready-made values. Modified through its growth into the mainstream culture, both the hand-touched aesthetic and the use of crafting as a tool of reform have changed and adapted, proving crafts continuous capability to modify itself and transform its surroundings. This transformative power of contemporary craft to reform a lifestyle, situates it amongst other significant and momentous aesthetic and social reform movements in America. As part of this movement, plastic tablecloths which mimic raw wood (Figure 120), t-shirts turned into fashionable scarves (Figure 121), and mason jars made cozy with the help of hand-knitting (Figure 122) are liable to affect the next phase of design and culture. The contemporary pursuit of a handmade material life in America therefore, will undoubtedly be reevaluated as it impacts and influences both American art and our understandings of material culture in movements yet to come.

Conclusion: Figures



Figure 107: Screen Shot of "A Song for Portland," Portlandia, Season 1, Episode 2, January 28, 2011. Taken from IFC (image in the public domain), <http://www.ifc.com/portlandia/videos/portlandia-put-a-bird-on-it>.



Figure 108: *Songbird Chandelier*, c. 2009. Anthropologie, image from Reichel Broussard, “Anthropologie’s Songbird Chandelier,” Copy Cat Chic blog (image in the public domain), <http://www.copycatchic.com/2009/11/anthropologie-songbird-chandelier.html>.



Figure 109: *Bird Bowls*, 11 October 2012. Tasha Mckelvey, Crafty Bastards Arts & Crafts Fair, Washington, DC, image by author; *Lace Bird Clock*, 11 October 2012. Garbella. Crafty Bastards Arts & Crafts Fair, Washington, DC, image by author.



Figure 110: *Flour Sack Plate Towel Set, Flour Sack Bowl Towel Set, Flour Sack Cake Towel Set*, 30 August 2013. Target, Collegeville, PA, image by author.



Figure 111: *Alvine Flora Cushion Pillow Cover + Duck Feather Insert*, c. 2013. Ikea (image in the public domain), image from <http://images.ikea.com/assetbank-ikea/action/viewAsset;jsessionid=DB36559EEE2B51C5301E08C23A11524F?id=2640&index=6&total=269&categoryId=6&categoryId=1&collection=Textiles&sortAttributeId=0&sortDescending=false>.



Figure 112: *Stars in my beard - mambo sun/trex embroidery*, c. 2014. Kimberly Scola, Chez Sucre Chez (image in the public domain), <http://chezsucreachez.com/portfolioxstitch>.



Figure 113: *Upcycled T Shirt Statement Necklace*, c. 2013. Pinkpoppyseed, Etsy (image in the public domain), <https://www.etsy.com/shop/pinkpoppyseed>.



Figure 114: *The Chunky Cowl Scarf*,” c. 2014. CThandmade, Etsy (image in the public domain), <https://www.etsy.com/shop/CThandmade>; *Open Netted Eternity Scarf*, c. 2014. Urban Outfitters (image in the public domain), <http://www.urbanoutfitters.com/urban/catalog/productdetail.jsp?id=30502884&parentid=SEARCH+RESULTS>.



Figure 115: *Pond Scum Amoeba Necklace*, c. 2010. Image from Regretsy: Where DIY Meets WTF, 18.



Figure 116: *Chicken Poncho*, c. 2010. Image from Regretsy: Where DIY Meets WTF, 28.



Figure 117: *Wreath Pinstrosity*, c. 2013. Image from “Sucky Socks,” Pinstrosity blog (image in the public domain), <http://pinstrosity.blogspot.com/2012/11/sucky-socks.html>.



Figure 118: *Yarn Easter Eggs Craft Fail*, c. 2012. Image from “String Art- Nailed It,” Everything Funny (image in the public domain), <http://everythingfunny.org/nailed-it/string-art-nailed-it/>.



Figure 119: *Failed Melted Crayon Art*, c. 2012. Image from “20 Hilarious Pinterest Fails,” Bored Panda (image in the public domain), <http://www.boredpanda.com/funny-pinterest-fails/>.



Figure 120: *LISEL Plastic-coated fabric, wood effect, light brown*, c. 2014. Ikea (image in the public domain), <http://www.ikea.com/us/en/catalog/products/80268349/>.



Figure 121: *Scarf-making Machine*, c. 2011. By HelloHoneyNo, image from, “Shred Those T-Shirts,” One Fine Day blog (image in the public domain), <http://oonefineday.blogspot.com/2011/09/shred-those-t-shirts.html>.



Figure 122: *Upcycled Jar Candle Holder / Vase - Recycled Home Decor - Lace Knit - Yellow - Recycled Cotton*, c. 2013. MeganEsass, Etsy (image in the public domain), <https://www.etsy.com/shop/meganEsass>.

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