

The Politics of Contemporary Craft Culture.

Jen Anisef

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
(Media Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 2004

© Jen Anisef, 2004



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 0-612-90992-1
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 0-612-90992-1

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this dissertation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de ce manuscrit.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the dissertation.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

ABSTRACT**The Politics of Contemporary Craft Culture**
Jen Anisef

While once considered the domain of grandmothers and school children, crafts have become a trendy cultural practice among North American youth. The popularity of craft among young people has inspired on- and off-line communities in which craft is understood to have important social and political implications. Layering data from my ethnographic investigation of contemporary craft culture with Foucauldian and feminist theory I examine some of the ways in which young people employ craft as a tool of political resistance. After laying down a foundational model of politics rooted in Foucault's theory of power/knowledge I investigate crafters' contestation of dominant discourses connected to consumerism and gender roles. Crafters are producers in a culture of consumption, seeking fulfilling and ethical alternatives to the alienating life modes that surround them. They leverage craft's association with hegemonic femininity to negotiate and re-construct a progressive gender politics informed by third wave feminist theory and culture. For crafters resistance occurs at a cultural level, constituting what could be called a contemporary social movement in a postmodern context. Contemporary social movements require neither consistent membership nor commitment to a totalizing vision or ethics and therefore foster and produce alternative social formations and political tactics. In this thesis I demonstrate that contemporary craft is a meaningful social and political practice and that an analysis of this mode of resistance generates insights into the nature of the present-day political landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to the production of this thesis. Firstly I'd like to thank all of those who have acted as therapists and cheerleaders over the past couple of years: my supervisor, my family, my partner, and my friends. Thanks to Tom for encouraging me to investigate something close to me (i.e. pointing out the obvious), and high-fives to Nikki, my partner in thesis crime. Thanks again to my editors, Mom and Mike. I am grateful to Kim for her enthusiasm about this project, and for her many insights, which have helped me construct a thesis that I am proud of. I am forever indebted to the crafty kids who inspired this project; their perceptions are the building-blocks of my thesis. The glitterati deserve a special mention as they have provided me with consistent support and inspiration and helped me to name my chapter titles. Finally, I want to send out big love to my husband for always cooking me dinner and doing the dishes when it's my turn, telling me that I'm brilliant, enduring my insanity, and just generally for being a fabulous partner and friend.

Table of Contents

Introduction Materials and Gauge	1
Chapter One Casting On	31
Chapter Two Defying the Pattern: Challenging Consumerism	43
Chapter Three Increases and Decreases: Shaping and Reshaping Gender Norms	59
Chapter Four Loosely Knit: Contemporary Social Movements	79
Conclusion Casting Off	95
Works Cited	103

Appendix A Demographic Information for Face-to-Face Interviews	113
Appendix B Demographic Information for E-mail Interviews	116
Appendix C Conversation Probes for Face-to-Face interviews	117
Appendix D E-mail Interview Questions	117
Appendix E Letter of Introduction for Face-to-Face and Impromptu Interviews	118
Appendix F Participant Consent Form	119
Glossary Knitting Terms	120

Introduction

Materials and Gauge¹

Personal and social context

I discovered my love of craft at the age of seventeen. I had always felt an artistic energy brewing within, but my attempts at painting, drawing, and sculpture had fallen flat. After elaborate birthday cards, gift wrapping, and bedroom décor earned me praise from friends and family, I began to take my craftiness more seriously, pursuing it as an art form. However, while my friends appreciated the final products, the suggestion that we “craft” together elicited sneers and giggles. For them, the very word “craft” carried with it associations with Popsicle stick and macaroni art, macramé plant holders, and most of all, grandmothers. Times have changed.

Over the past few years I have observed the emergence of craft as a popular cultural phenomenon among youth in North America. I have visited websites and read magazines devoted to the art of craft, most of them produced by women and men in their twenties and thirties.² Online communities have developed around the basis of a shared interest in all things crafty.³ The “stitch ‘n’ bitch”⁴ has become a popular activity among

¹ I have incorporated knitting terminology into my chapter titles. For a descriptive definition of the terms, refer to the glossary.

² Examples include [Readymade Magazine](#), [Getcrafty.com](#), [craftygal.com](#), [SheMadeThis.com](#), and the [Not Martha](#) webzine.

³ See [Craftster.org](#), the “Glitter” discussion boards on [Getcrafty.com](#), and the [Digsmagazine.com](#) boards.

young people, especially women. Knitting is a trendy pastime; urban hipsters can be seen knitting in cafes and bars, and fashion magazines celebrate “Celebrities Who Knit.”⁵ Mainstream teen magazines such as YM and Seventeen Magazine run regular craft columns that feature instructions on simple craft projects. Craft techniques have even infiltrated the largely digital world of graphic design, where magazines such as i-D, The Face, and Elle incorporate embroidery into their design layout. One could easily dismiss this phenomenon as merely a trend, if there was not something more substantial at play here.

For contemporary youth, craft functions not only as a source of creative expression or a means of relaxation, but as a venue for political engagement. Discussions at stitch ‘n’ bitches and on online discussion boards⁶ often turn to the political connotations of craft, such as its importance in a culture of consumption or its role in the history of feminism. Many young women who knit are not oblivious to the political connotations of embracing a pastime that has traditionally been associated with domestic labour and the feminine, private domain, while young men deliberately challenge conventional conceptions about gender by engaging in craft practices. Moreover, groups such as the Revolutionary Knitting Circle and the Church of Craft recognise the spiritual and political potential of craft, where the former uses knitting as a form of political

⁴ Stitch ‘n’ bitch is a popular term for a casual craft session where individuals work on their own projects and chat.

⁵ In an article on the Home and Garden Television website, Cindy Wolff lists Julia Roberts, Cameron Diaz, and Daryl Hannah as avid knitters.

⁶ Internet users converge on discussion boards to discuss a given topic. They can “post” a comment and others will reply with a response, inciting a written dialogue between two or more people.

protest and the latter celebrates the empowering nature of creation and its potential to encourage community-formation. In light of these and other congruent developments in contemporary craft culture⁷, craft can be understood as a practice that has rich social and political implications.

In recognising the socio-political potential of craft, my own relationship with this practice has evolved over the years. Though my affiliation with craft has long bolstered my sense of identity and self-confidence, recently it has facilitated my engagement with political issues. While I had always felt compelled to become involved in counter-cultural struggles concerned with gender politics and global corporatism, in the past I found myself intimidated by conventional social activism. I felt uncomfortable chanting in unison at street protests, and I also kept quiet at the few organizational meetings that I attended, fearing reproach for expressing an uninformed opinion. Eventually, I discovered that craft, something accessible and familiar to me, could function as a point of entry into the political realm. My own craft-related activism has ranged from making a commitment to act as a producer rather than a consumer whenever possible (such as making my own gifts, cards, and clothing), to initiating and organizing group projects such as the creation of a multimedia textile and politics zine⁸ or the establishment of the Montreal chapter of the Church of Craft. These practices and projects have enabled me to participate in oppositional politics in a manner that I find stimulating and productive.

⁷ Throughout this analysis I use the term “culture” with an understanding that craft, consumer, feminist and Western culture are not unitary, consistent entities but house a multiplicity of cultures within them.

My engagement with craft has also led me to connect with a network of people who share my creative interests and in many cases my political orientation. I have discovered rich craft communities both online and off. Historically, crafts and community have intersected in multiple fashions. Meeting in living rooms, kitchens, and church basements, Western women participated in knitting and sewing circles, quilting bees, and canning groups. Though craft communities were (and still are) primarily female, as early as the fourteenth century men who engaged in crafts such as cabinetry or leather work formed guilds in order to improve their skills, aid and protect each other in business, and maintain craft standards (Licht 48). Furthermore, products of community-based craft practices served not only as a means of subsistence for the community, but also as a source of local identity and pride⁹.

These community forms continue to exist today though traditional practices have, in many cases, changed form in a contemporary context. For example, knitting circles are no longer restricted to elderly women and housewives meeting in domestic settings. An increasing number of young women trade knitting tips, share their trials and tribulations (both knitting-related and otherwise) and post pictures of their projects in various stages of completion on knitting “blogs.”¹⁰ Not only are young women transgressing boundaries of “private” and “public” by crafting together in public spaces (such as cafes and bars), crafty males are embracing activities and community forms that

⁸ Zines are independently produced and distributed publications, often reproduced by photocopier.

⁹ For example, unique colour combinations and patterns used in a community’s tapestries may have been known and celebrated outside of their region.

¹⁰ Blogs are web diaries.

have historically been associated with the feminine realm. Contemporary craft communities inspire new forms of networking and political action.

Literature Review

My attempts to locate literature in which the political and social dimensions of contemporary craft are investigated revealed that there has not been a lot of work done in this area. Most studies of craft are historical accounts and aesthetic analyses of the decorative arts. Others profile handicrafts from a specific geographical region, sometimes describing the cultural context in which these crafts are produced. However socio-political dimensions of craft are examined in several books that investigate historical phenomena such as the concurrent evolution of embroidery and femininity (The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine by Rozsika Parker) and artisans' response to the machine-made production of the Industrial Revolution (The Social Philosophy of William Morris by Anna A. von Helmholtz-Phelan).

In The Subversive Stitch, Parker charts fluctuating notions of femininity and gender roles through her investigation of embroidery from medieval times until the early 1980s. She claims that embroidery played an instrumental role in the inculcation of femininity in women, who simultaneously employed embroidery to contest and transgress gender norms. Parker uncovers points of resistance through her examination of household accounts, women's magazines, letters, novels, and craft products. Examples of this resistance are evident in sixteenth and seventeenth century embroidery sampler

inscriptions through which women expressed resentment regarding the drudgery of women's labour and the contradictory place of women in discourses of marriage. While Parker's profile of embroidery as a subversive practice encompasses contemporary and international embroidery practice, the primary focus of her investigation is in medieval and Victorian Europe. Moreover, The Subversive Stitch was written in 1984, and therefore does not address present-day craft practices.

von Helmholtz-Phelan's work is similarly concerned with craft in Victorian England, as this was the historical period in which William Morris lived and developed his socialist philosophy. Morris was one of the primary founders of the Arts and Crafts Movement, a social and aesthetic movement that honoured holistic, handmade production over the shoddiness of industrialized manufacturing. He was also a designer of wallpaper and patterned fabrics, a writer of poetry and fiction, and an early founder of the socialist movement in Britain. von Helmholtz-Phelan describes how Morris became attracted to socialism through his exposure to decorative art, which he believed could bring happiness to human kind. However he felt that true art could not be produced by machine or through the division of labour, only by an autonomous craftsman who conceives of a piece and executes it from beginning to end. Morris exercised his philosophical beliefs through the creation of a guild in which work was reorganized within a single workshop, where manager, designer, and executor of design did not work apart, separated by class, education or hostility to one another. While many of the issues raised by Morris (as described by von Helmholtz-Phelan) intersect with those broached by contemporary crafters, The Social Philosophy of William Morris nonetheless depicts a period of

resistance that occurred in the past, under cultural circumstances different from those of the present-day crafters.

I was able to identify several texts that address the political dimensions of more contemporary artistic production. Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter (by Jo Anna Issak), Material Matters: The Art and Culture of Contemporary Textiles (edited by Ingrid Bachmann and Ruth Scheuing) , and Art and Feminism (edited by Helena Reckitt) contain essays about and works by (mainly) women who have produced art over the past few decades. Despite variations in format and scope, these texts are congruent in that they all investigate intersections between art and gender politics. In Feminism and Contemporary Art, Issak profiles a number of artists, identifying ways in which they rework conventional approaches to art theory and art history. Many of the essays that appear in Material Matters also focus on the work of specific Canadian artists, employing feminist perspectives in locating the artists' works in debates around textile art as production, consumption, and reception. Art and Feminism showcases the work of 155 artists alongside excerpts from the texts of many artists and theorists in which links between the private and the public are politicized, identity politics in art are explored, and assumptions about gender are exposed.

Aspects of each of these texts intersect with my interest in the political and social dimensions of contemporary craft. Some of the artists profiled (especially those featured in Material Matters) challenge art/craft and high/low culture binaries (to be discussed further below) in their use of craft techniques and materials. However most of these

artists exhibit in art galleries and identify as artists rather than craftspeople. Furthermore, few of these texts address artistic production at the popular level or as a sub-cultural or community-based practice, instead examining the works of individual, professional artists.

The popular press was in fact the only realm in which I was able to locate multiple texts that are pertinent to my area of interest. As indicated above, craft is currently an extremely fashionable practice, and it is therefore a popular topic among newspaper and magazine writers. While the political aspect of contemporary craft practice escapes most journalists, some bring to light its subversive implications. In “Do It Yourself” Janelle Brown explores both the attractiveness of the material aspect of craft in a digital age and the feminist implications of embracing “domestic arts” in a contemporary context. Kirsten Hudson identifies connections between craft and community and celebrates the importance of making things in “Sew Hip: A New Generation is Finding Creative Outlets in its Grandmothers’ Crafts.” Stephanie Shapiro describes how young men and women are “Crafting a New Culture” in their attempts to regain independence within consumer culture and to negotiate a contemporary feminist sensibility. The culture of craft examined by Shapiro and the other journalists discussed here intersects with the social phenomenon that I investigate in my thesis. While they address the political importance of craft in this cultural moment, they do not engage in a substantial critical analysis of this phenomenon.

In this thesis I demonstrate how craft constitutes a meaningful political practice. I reveal how young people living in North America employ craft as a medium through which they interrogate a culture over-determined by consumerism and engage in progressive gender politics. There is not a politics that operates through conventional means; they resist through cultural production and alternative life modes rather than political lobbying or street protests. Through an examination of the culture that has formed around contemporary craft and the individuals who participate in this culture I explore this alternative form of political engagement and the social relationships that it inspires.

Methodology

In order to develop a layered understanding of contemporary craft culture I have employed a variety of research methods. In their Handbook of Qualitative Research, Denzin and Lincoln describe the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur or quilt maker. “The interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage...that changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques of representation are added to the puzzle” (4). They go on to describe the use of montage in research, where, through layering methods and representations, the researcher can produce texts which “move from the personal to the political, the local to the historical and the cultural” (Ibid. 5). The bricoleur does not attempt to capture a single, objective reality, but instead “display[s] multiple, refracted realities simultaneously” (Ibid. 6).

The concept of researcher as *bricoleur*, a French word whose definition approximates “craftsperson,” is compatible with both my approach and topic. In addition to theoretical research I have engaged in a multi-layered ethnographic investigation which has included face-to-face interviews, email interviews, impromptu interviews at a craft fair, and an analysis of online discussion threads. Moreover, I have been casually observing, producing, and consuming craft culture for years, and insights gleaned from engagement on this level has informed my research. I will discuss my methodological approach in detail below.

Face-to-face interviews

From the inception of this research project I have sought to give credence to the experiences and interpretations of the crafters themselves. Therefore the comments and insights collected through interviews feature prominently in my writing. The voices most often heard are those of the thirteen local crafters that participated in face-to-face interviews.¹¹ Nine are female and four male; their ages range from twenty-one to thirty-three. While many interviewees are Caucasian, there is some racial and cultural diversity.¹² About half are enrolled in university while the others are semi- or fully employed (primarily in the service sector) or receive government funding to pursue their

¹¹ Individuals interviewed include: Serene Daoud, Anna Friz, Dana DeKuyper, Karissa Cove, Jenny Lee Craig, Vanessa Yanow, Leila Douglas, Tracy Maurice, Alanna Lynch, Leon Lo, Jim Morris, Steve Simard, and Clayton Evans. I will refer to them by their first names throughout this paper, as they have all consented to the use of their real names.

¹² As I did not find that issues of race or ethnicity and their intersection with craft arose in my ethnographic investigation I do not address this topic in detail here.

art.¹³ I was careful to ensure that some respondents had never participated in the Church of Craft, in order to promote diversity in perspectives regarding activism and community.¹⁴ However all interviewees reside in Montreal, and thus their understanding of contemporary craft is informed by a particular cultural and political climate. It is worth investigating how this cultural specificity has affected their perceptions, though I do not do so in the context of this paper.

I am fortunate in that I am a member of the group that I investigated. As mentioned previously I played a central role in the founding of the Montreal chapter of the Church of Craft and continue to participate in craft fairs and other craft-related projects. I am recognised in my community as someone who is personally invested in contemporary craft. Therefore I did not encounter challenges raised by Fontana and Frey such as “getting in,” understanding the language and culture of respondents, gaining trust, and establishing rapport (366-67). While my personal relationship with respondents as a friend and fellow crafter no doubt facilitated my engagement with them, it may have compromised my analysis of the data that resulted from the interviews. As I identify closely with the group that I investigated, it is possible that this has affected the degree to which I was able to critically evaluate their statements. However it is difficult to gauge to what extent my connection to this group inhibited an incisive assessment of them.

¹³ The degree of diversity among respondents is a relatively accurate representation (in terms of age, gender, race, and income) of the composition of craft communities and craft culture I have been exposed to.

¹⁴ A listing of each respondent’s relationship to the Church of Craft appears in Appendix A along with their profiles.

Facilitated by my familiarity with the respondents, interviews were casual in tone, structure, and environmental context. For the most part they took place in informal settings such as the respondents' kitchens, living rooms, or workshops. While my letter of introduction outlined several of my areas of interest, and I employed probes related to these interests during conversation lags, the interviews were largely unstructured.¹⁵ Fontana and Frey explain that unstructured interviews are, "used in an attempt to explain the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing an a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry" (366). While some interview subjects required much probing and may have benefited from a more structured interview, others thrived on the lack of structure and pursued many fascinating tangents that opened up new lines of inquiry for my research.¹⁶

While traditional interview protocol prohibits the expression of emotion or opinion on the researcher's part, feminist researchers have argued that it is important that interviewers "show their human side and answer questions and express feelings" (Ibid.). This diminishes the hierarchical nature of the interview, as both interviewer and interviewee can take part in shaping the dialogue. I engaged in this approach and found that many respondents were most willing to reveal personal anecdotes, feelings, and opinions when I shared my own.

¹⁵ Conversation probes are listed in Appendix C and my letter of introduction appears in Appendix E.

¹⁶ The fact that interviews varied significantly in length (thirty-six minutes to an hour and forty-five minutes) illustrates the range in responses.

I allowed my own voice to become part of my research data initially in the interest of self-reflexivity. After having completed the thirteen interviews I had one of the respondents interview me, employing the same set of conversation probes. I did so in an attempt to engage in transparency about my own position, understandings and interpretations, such that I could “appear in the analysis not as an invisible, anonymous, disembodied voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests – and ones that are often in tension and conflict with one another” (Cole 195).¹⁷ I also found this process to be constructive in an unexpected way in that it helped me to synthesize ideas gleaned from my interviews, to realize how my own views had changed as a result of these conversations, and to understand my reactions to the interview data (on a personal and theoretical level). While I do employ this interview material in my writing I feel that it was especially useful outside of the text.

Impromptu interviews

In addition to the interviews I performed in Montreal, I engaged in several short conversations with crafters during the Renegade Craft Fair, an alternative craft fair that took place in Chicago in September of 2003. Attending this fair was productive on several levels. In addition to collecting data pertinent to my investigation I was able to attend an event in which online and offline connections intersected and crafters from a variety of geographic locations converged. The fair attracted independent crafters (nearly

¹⁷ As someone whose personal identity is tied up in craft, whose friends are primarily composed of crafters, and who has personal relationships with many of the interviewees I felt it was important to identify my position and investment in this topic.

all of them female) from all over North America. I was able to meet many of the women who actively participate in online craft culture through online stores, discussion boards and webzines.¹⁸ I approached several individual and group vendors and after obtaining their permission to interview them I asked if they saw any connections between craft and community.¹⁹ While some respondents provided succinct answers, others opened up the dialogue to a discussion of other topics, such as politics and gender.

Glitter

Many of the women I interviewed or spoke to at the Renegade Craft Fair are participants of the Glitter discussion board. Glitter is an online community affiliated with the GetCrafty website, which is concerned with “making art out of everyday life” (the GetCrafty slogan). Glitter has evolved from a supplementary discussion feature to a community in its own right. While one of the six discussion boards explicitly pertains to the process of making crafts, members sometimes make reference to the political and social dimensions of craft on the most popular board, “La Vida Crafty.”

I performed my analysis of the Glitter discussion threads before I conducted my interviews. While I knew that I was interested in the social and political dimensions of craft, I wanted to identify specific issues that contemporary crafters were concerned with

¹⁸ Webzines are online magazines.

¹⁹ While I found many of the Chicago respondents’ statements to be thought-provoking, most were not relevant to my discussion here. Of the eleven women I interviewed, I used data from Janina Bain, Lori Wilbois and Kim Holich. All consented to the use of their real names.

in order to develop my topic. In my four years as a Glitter participant I had observed the richness and complexity of the discussion boards and was certain that they would provide me with ample inspiration and guidance. Due to time constraints, I did not engage in a thorough content or textual analysis of discussion threads. Instead I identified several threads that were rich with data pertaining to my area of interest. I did so with the help of the site's search function, where I entered several combinations of the following keywords: craft, community, feminism, and political. I cut and pasted relevant statements into a document and then paraphrased them in the interest of confidentiality.²⁰ In so doing, I was able to identify a number of themes that were relevant to contemporary crafters, such as domesticity, the devaluation of craft, globalization politics, and the intersection between craft and feminist politics. Subsequent to this analysis I came across several discussion threads on different topics that I eventually integrated into this paper.

One of my motivations for choosing to investigate these discussion boards is that Glitter is a thriving online community.²¹ Moreover, it has been established for a number of years (since 1999, slightly before the start of the current craft craze). I hoped to gain some insight into the ways in which the glitterati²² experienced connections with others

²⁰ As I did not obtain their permission to use their statements in my writing and I wish to protect discussion participants' confidentiality, I will not cite their avatars or the URL of individual discussion threads. However the Glitter discussion board can be accessed at:
http://discuss.gromco.com/mwforum/forum_show.pl

²¹ In Stephanie Shapiro's article, "Crafting a New Culture", Get Crafty editor-in-chief Tsia Carson reports that when the site introduced the Glitter discussion boards, "that really made the site blossom... There was a huge change in terms of traffic." Carson estimates that the entire site receives about 250,000 "unique visitors" a month. I have been unable to determine the number of registered users on Glitter itself, though the magnitude of this figure (and Carson's attribution of traffic growth to Glitter) is indicative of the size of the Glitter network.

²² Glitter participants often affectionately refer to one another as "the glitterati."

through the boards, and if they saw craft as playing a role in that connection. I felt, however, that the topic of “community,” both online and off was not discussed adequately (for my research needs) in the discussion threads and decided to conduct individual interviews with Glitter members.

I solicited participants for interviews by posting an explanation of my research project and asking those who would be interested in taking part in it to contact me (promising confidentiality). Six people replied to my request, though only four ended up participating, perhaps due to the gap in time between posting my request and conducting the interviews. Respondents are between the ages of twenty-three and thirty-three, reside in Canada and the U.S., are employed in entry-level or low-paying jobs, and all identify as Caucasian.²³ I gave respondents the option to use their own or a pseudo-avatar, and all but one asked that a fake avatar be used. Podgirl, Raspgirl, Bigsister, and Miscreation responded to a short email questionnaire that included open ended as well as demographic questions²⁴. When the respondents replied, I identified several areas which I felt required elaboration. Three out of the four respondents completed the questionnaire to this final point.

Unfortunately the interviews did not produce data that was as rich as the discussion threads. I have attributed this outcome to several circumstances. The questionnaire-style interview hardly approximates the fluid dialogue that occurs in a

²³ Email respondents' profiles appear in Appendix B.

²⁴ Interview questions are listed in Appendix D.

Glitter discussion. As indicated above, I asked respondents to elaborate on certain aspects of their answers. However in the absence of conversation probes (such as a variety of opinions expressed by other members) the interviewees were likely less inspired to explore their answers in depth. Finally, it is possible that the interviewees were hesitant to express their opinion about Glitter to a fellow community member. While the glitterati are generally candid about most political and social issues, I have found that discussions on the board about the community itself tend to be fairly reserved (except in the case of exuberant celebrations of it). Perhaps this is another instance where my “insider” status worked to my disadvantage.

Methodological theory

The data collected through the various ethnographic methods described above have served as a basis for theory building. I demonstrate in the chapters to follow how Michel Foucault’s theory of power (and his critics’ response to it) is relevant to the perceptions of crafters gleaned through my ethnographic research. Foucault’s work also has implications for my methodological approach in that he proposes a way to understand the political nature of knowledge. In the initial stages of my ethnographic research I uncritically employed a feminist ethnographic approach. However, when I began my investigation of Foucauldian theory, I realized that his ideas about knowledge were incompatible with those of many feminist ethnographers. I explore these tensions and their implications for my methodological approach in the discussion to follow.

Prior to engaging in substantial theory building I performed a feminist ethnography. Feminist theory is often founded on an investigation of women's experiences. Sally Cole explains that, "Feminist research asks questions that originate in women's experiences...and uses women's experiences as a significant indicator of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested" (Cole 195). In line with this approach I allowed the voices and understandings of the crafters themselves to guide my research rather than imposing a predetermined theoretical framework on the ethnographic data.

The epistemological approach described by Cole is questioned by Ramazanoğlu: "Feminists are divided over what "truth" status should be accorded to feminist knowledge, as continuing debates over feminist methodology indicate. The simplest position is that a women's subjective knowledge is "true" because it directly articulates women's experience. This position is problematic because it poses no challenge to the dualisms of thought that western culture has inherited from the Enlightenment" (7). The dualisms referenced here include the liberal-essentialist conception of the subject which constructs a polarity between a knowing subject and a known-about world (Ransom 135). Foucault's theory of power/knowledge poses a challenge to this dualism in that it reveals the discursive construction of both "reality" and the human subject.²⁵ Therefore a feminist ethnographic approach which privileges human experience as "truth" is incompatible with a Foucauldian understanding of knowledge, presenting a conflict with regard to my methodological approach.

²⁵ See Foucault "Two Lectures."

While Foucault would have had difficulties with the treatment of experience as truth by some feminist ethnographers, feminist theorists problematize the absence of subjective experience in Foucault's theory. Janet Ransom claims that Foucault displaces the focus from the speaking subject to the neutral domain of subject positions and functions deployed by discourse (135). Along similar lines, Deveaux argues that he does not demonstrate a concern for the individual's subjective experience of empowerment, disempowerment, or their sense of freedom and agency. Freedom does not only refer to objective possibilities of resisting or manoeuvring within a power dynamic, but the feeling of empowerment. Foucault's work, Deveaux claims, is based solely on objective points of resistance (234).

I believe that there is no reason why Foucault's theory of knowledge cannot allow room for subjective experience. If it's true that he does not explicitly address individual perceptions in his work, this is one among many areas that feminist research can be used to enhance his method. A consideration of Joan W. Scott's discussion of "Experience" facilitates an understanding of how these seemingly conflicting epistemologies can and must be reconciled. While she regards experience as a concept that has been used to "essentialize identity and reify the subject," Scott recognizes that it is impossible to abandon a term that is so deeply embedded in everyday language (37). We must instead work with the term to "analyze its operations and to redefine its meaning. This entails focusing on processes of identity production, insisting on the discursive nature of 'experience' and on the politics of its construction" (Ibid.). Therefore, beyond simply recording ethnographic data as truth, "We have to interpret and conceptualize accounts of

[individuals'] disparate experiences" (Ramazanoğlu 8). As Penny Weiss describes, "By listening we live out the feminist belief that women have something important and distinctive to say; by listening critically we practice the honesty and intellectual searching essential to establishing and maintaining the relations of freedom and equality" (4). Consequently, my investigation of the social and political aspects of contemporary craft entails an open and honest conversation between my ethnographic research and theoretical understandings.

Defining Craft

Thus far I have employed the terms "craft" and "crafters" without precisely defining their parameters. "Craft" implies a multitude of practices and cultural niches and therefore it is important that I define the aspects of craft that I have examined in my analysis. Moreover, craft practitioners vary in age, gender, race, and class (among other characteristics) and therefore these variables must be determined as well. I will explore these variables below, specifying the people and practices that are the subjects of my investigation.

Interview respondents define craft quite broadly, some including sound art, computer design, woodwork, cooking, baking, canning, and even gardening when describing their own engagement in craft. Moreover, many respondents make links between craft and a D.I.Y. (do it yourself) ethic or culture which promotes self-sufficiency in all aspects of life. The origins of the contemporary incarnation of D.I.Y.

are popularly located in punk culture in the 1970s where punks produced their own records, independent publications, and clothing as a reaction against the corruption they saw at play in major record labels and out of a general dissatisfaction with hegemonic social values (Leblanc 35-40). Evidence of a D.I.Y. ethic extends further back in history to such as the homesteader movement pioneered by Scott and Helen Nearing in the 1930s that promoted the search for meaning and satisfaction in a self-sufficient lifestyle (Nearing). Regardless of the origins of this ethic, the contemporary conception of D.I.Y. includes a wide variety of activities (essentially any kind of independent production). Nonetheless, my respondents' observations about contemporary craft culture are sometimes contingent on conventional definitions of craft that designate knitting, sewing, and embroidery (the "soft crafts") customary craft practices. I respect the ambiguity of their definition of craft, while recognising that some practices such as knitting, sewing, screen printing, and bookbinding feature more prominently in contemporary craft culture.

Defining craft has become more complex in a contemporary context where textile work is being reconfigured as art and exhibited more frequently in fine art galleries. This phenomenon is evidenced in Material Matters, the essay collection described above, as well as in the recent addition of a "Fine Crafts" category within the Canada Council of the Arts.²⁶ The distinction between art and craft has largely be attributed to class and gender hierarchies, where historically-constructed feminine and working-class practices are designated "craft," while masculine, higher-class ones are

²⁶Vanessa brought this addition to my attention during her interview. She perceives the Council's decision to promote professionally-produced, concept-based crafts as an indication of the absorption of craft techniques into the art world.

considered “art” (Parker and Pollock). Class divisions are also at play within craft. Many individuals are forced by economic circumstance to perform low-paying craft-related labour such as garment construction, while others can choose to engage in craft as a leisure activity or as a political practice (as I will discuss in subsequent chapters). The young women and men who are the subjects of my ethnography fall into the latter category, where they can afford to engage in craft out of choice rather than economic necessity.²⁷ Moreover, though I am interested in work being produced by professional craftspeople (or “fine crafters”) with a political agenda, for the purposes of this paper I am primarily concerned with popular craft being practiced at the grassroots level.

Craft has increased in popularity among young people in Europe as well, evidenced by the participation of British and Scandinavian crafters on Glitter, the formation of a Church of Craft chapter in Stockholm, and British press coverage of the popularity of knitting among British youth (Cavendish; White). While much of my analysis in this paper could likely be applied to contemporary crafters in Europe, I have anchored my investigation in the context that I am most familiar with, North America.

Most of the subjects of my ethnography are women, who are the primary participants in contemporary craft culture and third wave feminist culture. However, I wanted to include the voices of male crafters, who are increasingly identifying themselves with craft communities and practices. Though I initially intended to compare

²⁷ Both Jim and Anna express an awareness of the distinction between craft as leisure and labour in their interviews. Jim notes that his position as a white male affords him the opportunity to pursue crafts as a

the experiences of male crafters with female crafters, I found that most of their perceptions (other than on the topic of gender relations) were compatible. Therefore male and female perspectives are integrated in the text.

I am interested in the culture of craft produced by young people, which I understand to include teenagers and individuals in their twenties and early thirties. Because I am using data gleaned from online discussion boards and on- and off-line publications, it is impossible to verify that all of the crafters involved fall within this age range. However, I can confidently assert that the cultural phenomenon examined throughout this thesis can be located within the context of youth culture (primarily craft subculture and popular third wave feminist culture).

Third wave feminism

While all of those who engage in contemporary crafts may not identify themselves as third wave feminists, craft has largely developed as a popular cultural practice within the third wave subculture. Craft is addressed and celebrated (in editorial content and advertisements for craft-related products) within third wave print magazines such as BUST, Venus and Bitch. Multiple third wave webzines such as GetCrafty, Disgruntled Housewife, and craftygal are largely orientated around craft or D.I.Y. culture. Independent craft business websites and products sometimes employ iconography associated with the third wave such as kitschy domestic images from 1950s

pastime and as a means of political expression. Anna notes several times that for many women (especially in the past), craft did not entail fun or politics but “work.”

advertisements. Because craft features prominently in it, I will discuss the complex entity that is third wave feminism. Defining the third wave is a difficult task as definitions offered by scholars, mass media, and self-proclaimed members are varied and contradictory. I will attempt to sketch the outlines of this movement/subculture/cultural phenomenon by addressing aspects that resonate with me (as someone who identifies as a third wave feminist), that I see at play in contemporary craft culture, and which inform my analysis of the political and social aspects of craft.

Third wave feminism is often represented in the popular press as fostering individualism and de-politicizing issues that are central to second wave feminism.²⁸ This oversimplified and, for the most part, flawed perception is due in part to the fact that third wave feminism is confused with reactionary feminism.²⁹ Moreover, popular (or subcultural) and academic manifestations of third wave ideas are often confounded in mainstream media. I will engage in a brief exploration of these aspects of third wave feminism as separate entities, though it is important to note that they are not entirely mutually exclusive spheres. For example third wave anthologies sometimes contain texts that originally appeared in zines alongside theoretical works, and issues addressed through cultural production are often theorized in academic writing.

²⁸ This association is exemplified in the Time Magazine issue entitled “Is feminism dead?” in which the cover suggests that Ally McBeal is a contemporary feminist icon, and the feature article is Ginia Bellafante’s “It’s All About Me?: Want to know what today’s chic young feminist thinkers care about? Their bodies! Themselves!”

²⁹ Many feminists do not classify reactionary feminism as feminism due to its conservative and antagonistic attitude towards this political orientation. Katie Roiphe, Camille Paglia, and Christina Hoff Sommers are examples of reactionary feminists.

Third wave feminism has not produced (or been produced through) a homogenous subculture. “Girlie” culture is one of the major trends in popular third wave feminism. It is defined by Baumgardner and Richards as, ”encompass[ing] the tabooed symbols of women's feminine enculturation - Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels - and say[ing] using makeup isn't shorthand for ‘we've been duped’ ” (136). Here empowerment is connected with female sexual pleasure, as evidenced in the pages of BUST which regularly features reviews for sex toys, sexual advice columns, and erotica. Claims that third wave feminism is apolitical, individualistic, and consumer-oriented are likely due to this feature of the movement. “Riot Grrrl” feminism has a distinctly political orientation in that it encourages independent cultural production on the part of women in typically male-dominated spheres such as music and zine production. Zines and music produced by third wave feminists often address political issues that include gender and sexuality, race and colonialism, and globalization politics. Craft could be understood as straddling Girlie and Riot Grrl tendencies within third wave feminism in that it is a typically feminine activity which promotes respect for women’s history and culture as well as embodying a D.I.Y. ethic. Girlie, Riot Grrrl and Crafty feminism are prominent components of third wave culture, though many other variations exist.

Amanda D. Lotz provides a concise summary of the theoretical aspects of third wave feminism in her summary of Ann Brooks’ description of postfeminism³⁰: “[Brooks] argues that postfeminism results from a breakdown in consensus during second-wave feminism in the areas of 1) the political effect of the critique by women-of-color, 2) the

³⁰ ‘Post-feminism’ is alternately understood as another term for third wave feminism and reactionary feminism. Here Lotz describes the former orientation.

way first and second-wave feminism insufficiently contemplated the issue of sexual difference, and 3) the intersection of feminist thinking with postmodernism, poststructuralism, and post-colonialism.” The first and third areas described here are relevant to my investigation of contemporary craft culture, as insights by Chela Sandoval (a woman-of-colour or third-world feminist), and theorists who adopt postmodern or poststructural perspectives (such as Foucauldian theory) will inform my analysis.

Brooks’ understanding of the third wave as a reaction against the second is indicative of a common tension in contemporary feminism. Young third wavers sometimes accuse their feminist foremothers of failing to address issues pertaining to race and sexuality (as Brooks describes), and older second wave women indict third wave feminists for failing to recognize continuities between the two movements. As Kim Sawchuk suggests, this results in an inter-generational conflict where of a cohesive set of shared values is attributed to a group operating at a given time, thereby homogenizing “the other.”³¹ Chela Sandoval’s concept of a “differential consciousness” can be employed in re-imagining these restrictive distinctions in that it eschews a temporally-bound conception of feminism (or any oppositional movement). Rather than distinguishing between generations or waves, Sandoval describes several modes of oppositional consciousness enacted by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s women’s movement. These include the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist ideological forms, modes that are at play not only in feminism but in other movements as

³¹ Personal communication. February 24, 2004.

well (44).³² Rather than aligning themselves with a single group (within which they were often marginalized), U.S. Third World or feminists of colour moved among these modes of consciousness, tactically and self-consciously deploying them at critical moments (54). Sandoval asserts that all feminists can learn from this “alternative topography of consciousness and action,” in that, “Unlike its previous and modernist hegemonic version...[it] is not historically or teleologically organized; no enactment is privileged over any other”(55) It therefore allows for a recognition of the potential effectiveness of each mode of consciousness-in-resistance. Sandoval warns that in conceiving of modes of consciousness as “self-contained and oppositional to one another, [we] rigidly circumscribe what is possible for social activists who want to work across their boundaries” (53). In homogenizing third and second wave feminism, both young and older feminists do just this. Sandoval asserts that the enactment of a differential consciousness (in which feminists can borrow from various aspects of feminist politics) is integral to the hailing of a third-wave, twenty-first century feminism (45).

Another source of conflict among feminists lies in the very concept of “waves,” in that they divide feminists along generational lines. In attempting to reconcile these tensions, some third wave theorists have endeavoured to reconfigure the “wave” concept. Referring to Jeannine DeLombard’s characterization of waves as curving alternately in

³² Sandoval distinguishes between these oppositional forms as follows: Equal rights activists demand civil rights, social recognition, and integration based on the notion that all humans are created equally. The revolutionary form insists on the recognition and legitimization of difference, which requires a restructuring of categories through which the dominant order is structured. Supremacists similarly insist on human differences, while claiming that their biological or social differences (as a subordinated group) have granted them access to a higher evolutionary consciousness unavailable to those who hold social power. The separatist form of political resistance sees a complete separation from the dominant social order as a means to nurture that which distinguishes its practitioners from the rest of society (Sandoval 56-57).

different directions, Siegel indicates that, “Many third wave themes and issues are fundamentally enmeshed in praxis established by earlier waves...the difference of the third wave may have been present in some moments and some places during earlier periods as well” (60). While third wave feminists are typically characterized as women (and sometimes men) currently in their teens to early thirties, Siegel suggests that perhaps coming of age as *a feminist* in the late twentieth century is a more productive indicator of what it means to belong to a wave.

While generational divides may be contested in the literature, one cannot deny that those who identify as third wave feminists tend to be younger. Age distinctions among theorists are often difficult to detect, though third wave anthologies such as Third Wave Agenda, Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism, and Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation feature young authors. Younger feminists are most prominent in third wave subculture; most third wave zines, bands, independent publications, and web content is produced by feminists in their teens, twenties and thirties. This is definitely true within the craft subculture that is the focus of my investigation, where the “youth factor” is part of what distinguishes it from craft as practiced by older women. Perhaps if theorists, activists, and cultural practitioners continue to promote diversity and recognize continuities and commonalities regarding political issues these generational distinctions will erode further.

Thesis outline

In this chapter I introduced contemporary craft as a social and political phenomenon worthy of analysis, especially in light of the lack of academic literature on this subject. I have laid out my methodological approach and grappled with some of the epistemological issues that it raised. In recognizing that contemporary craft politics have largely arisen out of third wave culture and thought, I felt it necessary to define third wave feminism; third wave politics and theory will feature prominently in my analysis of the politics of craft.

In the chapters to follow I investigate craft as a political practice. I lay down the foundations for this investigation in the first chapter in reviewing both Foucault's theory of power and knowledge and some feminist theorists' response to it. Issues explored within this discussion include the subject's capacity for resistance, the politicization of the private sphere and subjugated knowledge, ideas that thread through the chapters to follow. In Chapter Two I explore the development of a production/consumption binary within consumer culture which has resulted in an alienated consumption pattern and the subjugation of craft knowledges. I also address the deployment of craft as a medium of resistance against discourses in late capitalism. Gender politics are the focus of Chapter Three, in which Teresa de Lauretis provides a theory of gender construction and deconstruction. I again demonstrate how craft knowledges are subjugated, but this time in regards to gender. Tensions between feminism's second and third waves are further explored in this chapter, as are the ways in which craft functions as a venue for male and

female crafters to question their gender identity. In the fourth chapter I contemplate whether craft can be considered a social movement in light of the fact that contemporary movements are informed by a postmodern social context and poststructural politics. I explore the implications of this re-conception of social movements for political efficacy and social formations. I conclude my research by considering what my analysis has revealed about present-day political resistance. It is my hope that this ethnographic and theoretical investigation can serve as a window into a world that has yet to be adequately explored: the culture of contemporary craft.

Chapter One

Casting On: Establishing a political framework

Anyway that craft is made or taught or experienced has a political context.
(Vanessa)

Craft has long been associated with the domestic, private sphere. It is classified as a hobby, a pastime, or at best the production of objects that express a cultural heritage. Therefore, to deem craft a political practice would strike many as absurd. In her discussion of subaltern counterpublics,³³ Nancy Fraser explores multiple implications of the term “public”, one of them being “of concern to everyone” (“Rethinking,” 20). Fraser suggests that a single, unified “public” does not exist and it therefore follows that there be no shared understanding of what is of public concern. She explains that, “What will count as a matter of common concern will be decided precisely through discursive contestation. It follows that no topics should be ruled off-limits in advance of such contestations” (Ibid.). Issues that are important to minority groups are often labelled “private.” These groups must struggle to convince the general public that these issues are in fact “public” (i.e. of common concern) (Ibid.).

I have observed that many crafters do understand craft, an activity that most consider to be a “private” activity, to have political or “public” implications. As I will illustrate in the chapters to follow, my ethnographic research reveals intersections between craft and over-consumption, globalization politics, environmentalism, feminist

³³ Fraser defines subaltern counterpublics as, “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their

politics, gender roles, and contemporary social movements, among other political topics. This chapter will primarily serve as an investigation of the theoretical issues that are pertinent to the political dimensions of contemporary craft. Themes examined in this chapter will run through the chapters to follow, sometimes acting as foundations for further theoretical development. However, prior to commencing my theoretical discussion I will explore some of the ways in which my interview respondents conceive of craft as political, thereby providing an ethnographic context for my theoretical investigation.

Craft as a political practice

Some crafters view craft as an alternative to dominant modes of thought and behaviour that they find unfulfilling. In regards to crafting, Leon remarks: “It’s about creating alternatives...knowing that you don’t have to rely on a predetermined set of channels to live or to enjoy life. It’s also knowing that you can make things, that you don’t just have to absorb everything...in that sense it’s very political.” Moreover, the process of making allows time for reflection regarding your relationships, yourself, and life in general. Leila perceives that this aspect of craft renders it integral to social change: “I really feel that the things you do when you’re involved in any kind of craft, whether its just to relax or to de-stress, or if its even more political stuff, you’re really thinking about things in a way you haven’t before, and probably haven’t challenged

identities, interests and needs” (14). In non-egalitarian societies these groups have always been in conflict with the bourgeois public (7).

yourself before, you never actually tried to sit down and make something...just the kind of feelings and thoughts that it produces I think are really important to social change.”

Though the very act of crafting itself holds political connotations for many, some individuals and groups employ craft as a medium for their activism. In response to the increasing development of craft-related projects with political intentions, one Glitter discussion participant created a website to discuss and provide links to these projects.³⁴ Craftivism.com poses the question, “why craftivism?” and responds as follows: “Because we create to connect beyond ourselves. Whether it's next door or across the globe. Craft and activism both take and inspire passion. When used as a joint force, they can quite possibly begin to slowly challenge and change things” (Greer).

Nonetheless, according to many crafters, a lack of political intent regarding one’s engagement in craft does not mean that there are no political consequences to one’s actions. While most recognize that many individuals are not politically motivated in their crafting, they nonetheless understand craft to be a political act in the context of contemporary North American culture. Both Jim and Serene remark that even if craft is simply a pastime for someone, their behaviour nonetheless has positive social and political implications. Jim explains that, “one doesn’t have to come into it with any sort of political conviction, but having the capacity to make things for yourself in a way discourages you from buying them. Even for someone who isn’t really politically conscious in that way, they are still able to take pride in being able to make things for

³⁴ “Craftivism” is a term that has been adopted by some in recent years to denote activism through craft.

themselves. And from that pride might arise concrete political convictions.” Jim further speculates that if someone makes crafts as a means of earning their livelihood (and not because of a political commitment) they are likely to inspire other people to craft through the promotion of handmade objects. These craft converts may become politically motivated as a result, thus moving the D.I.Y. movement forward. Moreover, Serene believes that if elderly women who have been knitting for years discovered that others are knitting for political reasons, they would likely be “thrilled to learn that they are part of something beyond themselves.” Implicit in the conception of craft as political irregardless of the crafter’s intent is an understanding that crafts (and all practices, for that matter) are enmeshed in a complex political context. Serene expresses this most fluently: “I think every action that a person does, whether positive or negative, is political, ultimately, because we have gotten to a point where human society is so complex that everything you do has an impact in the end. That’s why it is imperative that people know how they can be a part of it, or that they *are* a part of it, even if they don’t know.”

Throughout the development of this thesis I understood craft to have “political” implications. Absent from this understanding, however, was a theoretical framework within which to locate my ideas about the politics of craft, and politics in general. My understanding of politics has been that it operates through relations of power. Some interview respondents have expressed a view of power as pervasive and at play in all human actions and relationships. Moreover, their observations often reflect a conception of power as a productive (of meanings and relationships) rather than a purely negative

force. These concepts are central to Michel Foucault's poststructural theory of power. I have found his writings on the subject of power, discourse, and subjugated knowledges extremely useful in the development of a theory of politics as it pertains to contemporary craft as a political practice. In the discussion to follow I describe elements of his theory that will serve as a foundation for understanding the way in which craft operates as a political practice. However, rather than employing Foucault's political framework uncritically, I will set up a dialogue between his work and that of (primarily) feminist theorists who employ or criticize his approach to power, following up on my discussion of methodological theory in the Introduction.

Foucault's theory of power

I will begin with a brief description of Foucault's approach to power. For Foucault, power does not function in a linear fashion; it operates through complex, web-like relations. In "Two Lectures" he writes that, "Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain....Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization, and not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power...individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application" (98). Thus power simultaneously constitutes the individual and depends on her for its circulation.

Foucault rejects a traditional, “repressive” perspective that regards power as something that is possessed by a person or group, and imposed upon others. In fact, in his view, power can only be exercised through the production of truth (or discourse). Manifold relations of power in any society depend on discourse for their establishment, consolidation, and implementation. We are forced to re-produce the “truths” that our society depends upon for its functioning (Ibid. 93).

Many aspects of Foucault’s theory of power set off alarm bells for feminist theorists. We cannot speak of a “feminist response to Foucault.” There are many feminisms and thus many responses to Foucault ideas depending on the theorist’s own model of power, conception of the subject, and notions of agency, among other factors. However, it is safe to posit that most feminists are at least in part concerned with working to end oppression on the basis of gender. Foucault’s re-conception both of power as non-repressive and of the subject as constituted by power is problematic for some feminists because they perceive these concepts to pose a threat to this goal.

If power is diffused throughout society and present in all relations, and no one person or group possesses power, then how can we account for the central tenant of traditional feminism - that of asymmetrical power relations between men and women? In regards to this frequent critique of his theory, McLaren notes that, “Foucault acknowledges more than once that although power is pervasive it is not equally distributed” (115). Moreover, she appreciates the fact that he complicates problematic binaries sometimes found in feminist theory: of resistance and power, of oppressor and

oppressed. Many contemporary feminists no longer see gender politics as involving only two groups - men (who possess power) and women (who do not); instead they consider stratifications and intersections along lines of race, class, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, etc. A view of power as operating in all relationships is compatible with this more nuanced view of oppression.

Agency and resistance

For Foucault, individuals are enmeshed in relations of power and the subject is produced through discourses and practices. Some feminist theorists perceive this view of the subject as a threat to human agency. Foucault's ideas challenge the liberal essentialist conception of the subject at the centre of humanistic thought: the polarity between a knowing subject and a known-about world. Janet Ransom claims that Foucault displaces the focus from the speaking subject to the neutral domain of subject positions and functions deployed by discourse (135). Many feminists decry his replacement of the autonomous subject with a totally determined being incapable of moral and political agency (McLaren 109).

Other feminists worry about the implications of this re-conception of the subject for political action; if the subject is fragmented and is constructed in the service of various regimes of truth, how can she be an effective political actor? Haber explains that, "While it is true that the theory of the subject can be seen as one more instance of the repressive effects of patriarchal power, there are times at which it is strategically

important to insist on the availability to oppositional theory of a coherent and unified subject” (107). She points to Jana Sawicki’s warning that while self-refusal may work for white male theorists, women tend to question themselves, and don’t need to be further disempowered through this fragmentation (Ibid. 108).

While Foucault may not speak of agency, he does understand individuals to be capable of resistance. Foucault writes, “as soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy” (Politics 123). He distinguishes between power and domination, where the latter involves static, irreversible relationships of power. “Indeed, without the possibility of resistance there can be no power in Foucault's sense, only domination. And it is through power and its constitution of the subject that resistance is possible” (McLaren 116). Power is inescapable not because we are repressed or imprisoned by it, but because it produces subjects, disciplines and discourses. We are incapable of acting outside of power, but we can resist discourses that we find oppressive through the production of alternative ones. For example, Anna identifies the D.I.Y. ethic evident among young people in Montreal as a productive response to a dissatisfaction with mainstream media representations: “Mainstream media don’t tell me what I want to hear, or represent any of the communities that I’m a part of or any of the realities I see, so I have to make my own zine or do my own radio broadcasting.” Muckelbauer explains that, “Foucault's resistance is not the drama of a free subject versus specific technologies of repressive

power, but is specific deployments of power versus other specific deployments.

Resistance, then, it simply the convergence of multiple and conflicting powers” (79).

Politicizing the private

Foucault’s model of power is compatible with the feminist desire to expand the notion of what is political beyond the state and public life, into the home and personal life. “The pervasiveness of power and its effect on all aspects of our daily life is a significant move away from the traditional liberal understanding of a centralized political power emanating from the state. Foucault's understanding of power as pervasive supports feminist challenges to the public/private split and encourages extending the analysis of power dynamics to interpersonal relationships” (McLaren 114). Nancy Fraser elaborates on the implications of Foucault’s model of power for feminist activism:

In revealing the capillary character of modern power and thereby ruling out crude ideology critique, statism, and economism, Foucault can be understood as in effect ruling *in* what is often called a ‘politics of everyday life’. For if power is instantiated in mundane social practices and relations, then efforts to dismantle or transform the regime must address those practices and relations. (Unruly 26)

Extending power into these areas of our existence “thereby widens the arena within which people may collectively confront, understand, and seek to change the character of their lives” (Ibid.).

Foucault’s view of power as pervasive and unrestricted to politics at the level of the state (affirming the feminist adage “The personal is political”) is pertinent to my examination of craft as it is largely considered a “private” activity. Crafters such as Dana

challenge the exclusion of craft from the political sphere in proclaiming that, “Every time you make your own clothes you’re kind of like, ‘fuck the system!’.” The treatment of craft as a political practice constitutes a discursive negotiation of what should be considered a matter of “public” concern, in the sense described by Fraser in her discussion of subaltern counterpublics.

Subjugated knowledges

As Foucault understands power to operate through knowledge, the privileging of certain knowledges, or the “truths” established by them, is of great interest to him. In “Two Lectures” he discusses the importance of investigating those knowledges that are both marginalized and left behind in an attempt to build a coherent narrative or scientific discourse. He calls these “*subjugated knowledges*” (“Two Lectures,” 81). Foucault describes two forms of subjugated knowledge: one form is characterized by “blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory,” and the other form by “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated...which involve a popular knowledge...a particular, local, regional knowledge” (Ibid. 82). He advocates a genealogical approach wherein these two forms of subjugated knowledge – the erudite and the disqualified – are uncovered and united such that they may be brought into play (Ibid. 85). These knowledges then challenge the cohesion and coercion of unitary and dominant discourses, revealing power relations that were previously veiled.

Genealogy is a diachronic method in that it is concerned with reconstructing the origins and development of discourses over time. My investigation of contemporary craft cannot be characterized as a charting of its historical development, however I do conceive of craft as a type of subjugated knowledge, disqualified and somewhat invisible in the context of dominant discourses in North American culture. The potency of discourses which privilege consumption as a fulfilling practice and reinforce hegemonic notions of gender has meant that craft is undervalued in a contemporary context. Craft can also be considered a subjugated knowledge in that it is a popular knowledge that is based at the local, grassroots level rather than in institutions or large organizations. Craft skills can often be gleaned through family or friends or even books available at the local library. Moreover, the practice of craft is an experience common to most of our lives. In his interview, Clayton points out that everyone in our culture has crafted at some point in their lives, most likely during their childhood, and have likely derived some satisfaction from it. Like many subjugated knowledges, craft is not outside of common experience, though it is nonetheless excluded from discourses that dominate our cultural landscape.

Foucault suggests that, “it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work” (Ibid. 82). In the chapters to follow I will explore the ways in which craft, as a knowledge, is subjugated by dominant discourses pertaining to consumerism and gender politics. I will reveal some of the ways in which these discourses are disrupted by the practice of craft through the analysis of my ethnographic research. Invoking elements of

the above discussion such as power, knowledge, and resistance I will investigate the ways in which contemporary craft constitutes a meaningful political practice.

Chapter Two

Defying the Pattern: Challenging Consumerism

Like a lot of people I like having cool stuff and I find that [crafting is] a good way to be able to get the things I want without promoting the myth of economic growth, without supporting the economy by buying everything you need and buying a whole bunch of things you don't need as well. I find before I set down to making something I kind of question [if] this is really going to be worth my energy, is this something I'm going to use or that somebody else is really going to use or enjoy? (Jim)

By engaging in craft practices, young people are acting as producers in a culture of consumption. Firat and Dholakia and Martyn J. Lee chart the development of the categories of “production” and “consumption” in North American industrial society. In order to maximize profit modern capitalism required a discourse that designated a definitive separation between the workplace and the home, where production occurred in the former and consumption in the latter (Firat and Dholakia 7). Mass production required mass consumption, and the home became the locale in which “*the will to consume*”³⁵ was developed (Lee 90). In the early years of North American mass-production “the household was...transformed from a domestic space of general self-sufficiency into a modern consumption unit” (Ibid. 91). This necessitated the re-articulation of gender roles in which consumption was constructed as gendered: men produced as women consumed. A proliferation of advertisements that linked women to domestic and cosmetic commodities enhanced this association (Ibid. 92). Despite being instrumental to the growth of the North American economy, women’s consumptive activities were constructed as frivolous and self-indulgent (Firat and Dholakia 19).

³⁵ Lee writes that commodities played a negligible role in traditional societies, and therefore mass consumption depended upon the insinuation of a “will to consume” into everyday consciousness (90).

As a consequence of both the development of the public/private, production/consumption binaries and the fact that household production had no exchange value,³⁶ productive activities in the private sphere such as cooking and sewing became difficult to categorize and were amalgamated into the consumption category (Ibid. 7). Domestic labour began to change shape in pre-war homes, influenced by “principles which had been applied to the sphere of production, namely those of rationalization, modernisation and the ceaseless drive to achieve efficiency within the place of work” (Lee 93). Household maintenance was complemented and substituted by market goods (e.g. the washing machine), which required additional products to function (e.g. laundry detergent). Increasingly, home production was supplemented by consumer goods such as pre-cooked meals and machine-made clothing (Firat and Dholakia 7).³⁷ “Such changes were motivated by the urgent requirement to establish commodity consumption as the natural means to need satisfaction. This was a process in which traditional handicraft and home-production techniques (especially in the areas of food and clothing) were now to be presented as outdated and profoundly anti-progress” (Lee 93).

Domestic craft practices once common to most homes such as knitting, sewing, embroidery, and cooking therefore largely became supplanted by goods manufactured in the “production” sphere. Thus opportunities for women to actively participate in the

³⁶ This issue will be explored further in the following chapter in a discussion of gender and subjugated knowledges.

³⁷ Judy Wajcman notes that, “mechanization gave rise to a whole range of new tasks which, although not as physically demanding, were as time-consuming as the jobs they had replaced” (239). Therefore a shift in the nature of women’s domestic work should not be construed as a reduction of their workload.

production of goods diminished significantly. Though social and economic conditions in late-capitalist society differ significantly from those of pre-war North America, an “alienated consumption pattern” persists (Firat and Dholakia 7). Firat and Dholakia give this name to the behavioural pattern in which individuals participate very little in the production of the commodities they consume, and where consumption has become a largely passive act in terms of the consumer’s level of physical or mental engagement (Ibid.).

Despite having identified the predominance of a consumption pattern that alienates us from production, Firat and Dholakia explain that in a postmodern context, consumption is a value-*producing* process. For example, the market encourages the sampling of commodities associated with various lifestyle niches and therefore facilitates the fragmentation of the subject advocated within postmodern thought. Thus consumers can customize their identities through the goods they purchase (Ibid. 75-77). Michel de Certeau also conceives of consumers as playing an active role in the process of consumption. He proposes that production is “hidden” in consumptive activities and systems whose “steadily increasing expansion ... no longer leaves ‘consumers’ any *place* in which they can indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems” (xii, italics his). The production that occurs within consumptive practices, “insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order” (xii-xiii). In the act of consuming we do not reproduce cultural meanings that are fed to us, but we re-interpret them to produce our own meanings. We

are unable to recognize this process as productive because we are limited by the binary distinction between consumption and production. Firat and Dholakia suggest that this dichotomy is in fact a relic of modernist thought, whereas “postmodernist insights recognize that any separation between consumption and production is purely critical and arbitrary, useful solely for the purpose of the development of modernist theoretical and philosophical concepts” (77). Thus, according to these theorists, while the system of categorization described above - in which consumption and production were rigidly distinguished - may have been compatible with modernist, industrialist purposes, it is no longer pertinent to a postmodernist discourse.

Craft as a subjugated knowledge

While consumption may enable the production and negotiation of values among consumers, it nonetheless has oppressive consequences. Moreover, categories of “production” and “consumption” are still relevant in a contemporary context, as this binary continues to operate in dominant discourses (including the market, as Firat and Dholakia reveal (89)). The evolution of a culture of consumption³⁸ through the production of (modernist) discourses around production and consumption has meant the subjection of craft as an inferior form of knowledge. Values and practices associated with production in the private sphere have been marginalized in the establishment of the

³⁸ Featherstone explains that, “To use the term ‘consumer culture’ is to emphasize that the world of goods and their principles of structuration are central to the understanding of contemporary society. This involves a dual focus: firstly, on the cultural dimension of the economy, the symbolization and use of material goods as ‘communicators’ not just utilities; and secondly, on the economy of cultural goods, the market principles

science of market capitalism. Thus the persistence and celebration of independent production can be construed as a threat to “truths” upheld by a consumer culture, such as the notion that increased commodity procurement guarantees a greater quality of life (Firat and Dholakia 45). As described by Foucault, in the emancipation of discordant discourses, dominant ones are destabilized. I wish to explore the disruption of dominant consumption discourses by craft, but first I will describe some of the consequences of its subjection in the context of consumer culture.

Craft is subjugated first and foremost by virtue of the fact that there is little room for production in a culture that constitutes its citizens as consumers. In her email interview, Bigsister comments that, “there's not very much outlet or reward for creativity in the work-a-day world.” Serene complains that within our current cultural climate, if one does not demonstrate traditional artistic talent, one is not given the “right” to be creative. The urge to create something of our own is curbed when we are young, and we are restricted to expressing ourselves through the things we own, rather than through that which we produce. In fact, Serene sees, “consumerism as being born of unaddressed creative drive,” where we shop to fill the void left in the absence of opportunities to create.

One significant consequence of the devaluation of creativity within our culture is the disappearance of craft knowledges. The stratification of our society according to age is also understood by some crafters to disrupt the transmission of craft skills. Vanessa

of supply, demand, capital accumulation, competition, and monopolization which operate *within* the sphere of life-styles, cultural goods and commodities” (84).

believes that in learning to knit from one's grandmother, one, "tak[es] on something that we don't do anymore, which is history. It's understanding and having a sense of history, of where we came from and what was passed down and that doesn't happen any more. Generations just get truncated one after the other." In reference to late-capitalism, Anna suggests that, "maybe there's this feeling of loss, that because you can just go buy everything, that there's still this value to making things, and some of my friends feel, 'wow, I really missed out,' and "why *don't* I know how to knit?". That's weird that we might all forget how to do that at one point and *have* to buy manufactured goods all of the time." Anna's concerns reflect the fact that young people were born into a world where things are more easily purchased than made. While this is most frequently understood and celebrated as a modern-day convenience, it has had consequences for the subjugation and potential disappearance of craft knowledges.

The sense of loss described by Anna is understood by some as a consequence of a frustrated human instinct: the urge to make. Tracy sees craft as having "connotations of basic human survival, like doing it because it's healthy for you." In the context of her own life she expresses that, "There's something about craft that's really grounding. Like sitting down and making something makes me feel really solid." Similarly, Jenny believes that, "our spirits are drawn to making things...I think that everyone does get some sort of satisfaction out of stopping what they're doing for awhile and just doing with their hands...or using their imagination...I think there's something in human nature that draws us to making things." However, as their daily lives do not provide them with opportunities to do so, "many people just don't utilize their hands to the extent that

they're born with them for" (Vanessa). In a sense we are de-humanized by a dominant consumption ethic.

As consumers rarely participate in the production of the goods they consume, it should come as no surprise that their understanding of worth and value are distorted. In purchasing a scarf, how are they to know how much the yarn cost, how many hours it took to knit, and what degree of planning and skill went in to its construction? Many crafters identify a widespread inability among mainstream consumers to recognize the value of handmade objects. This devaluation can be considered further evidence of the subjugation of independent production within a culture of consumption. Tracy recalls with disdain how customers attempted to barter down the cost of ceramic pieces that she had spent hours making and had priced low to begin with. She affirms the notion that quality is difficult for people to identify because they don't have an understanding of how things are made. Here Tracy identifies another consequence of the alienated consumption pattern that dominates western society. In removing the consumer wholly from the process of production, alienated consumption denies us access to the knowledge of the value of the objects we consume.

Resistance through production

My ethnographic research revealed that many crafters are aware of the political implications of their craft (or D.I.Y.) practices, especially with reference to consumerism. They craft in resistance to a dominant ethic of consumption which, as one crafter notes,

raises many financial, ethical, and environmental concerns. In her email interview, Raspgirl explains that she is “beginning to see crafting as a statement of some sort.” She describes her craft sessions with friends as “very anti-consumerism and empowering.” Tracy believes that an increase in the popularity of crafting could have potential implications for our entire economic order: “The more that people realize that it’s accessible, that everybody can have the ability to create, to make their own mugs, to make their own skirts, to make their own dresses – if people really get this going it could change economics, it could change the way consumerism, on the whole, looks.”

Resistance to a dominant consumption ethic begins with the encouragement of production within our society. Feminist webzines that have D.I.Y. sections and groups such as the Church of Craft are examples of initiatives that open up space for creation in our lives. The Church of Craft Mission Statement reads as follows:

The Church of Craft aims to create an environment where any and all acts of making have value to our humanness. When we find moments of creation in our everyday activities, we also find simple satisfaction. The power of creating gives us the confidence to live our lives with all the love we can. By promoting creativity, we offer access to a non-denominational spiritual practice that is self-determined and proactive. (“The Mission”)

Along with other groups, the Church of Craft recognizes the need for individuals to create. They understand that this urge is frustrated within our culture and attempt to facilitate its expression by celebrating the act of making.

We can change our consumption habits by learning to make things. In making things ourselves, Serene observes, we experience a decrease in our desire for commodities. Jenny describes her experience at a craft fair where, while there were

many interesting items for sale, she and her friends (who were fellow vendors) experienced little desire to purchase anything. Because they possessed the skills to make the craft products themselves, they enjoyed appropriating ideas and sharing craft tips above consuming.

Becoming a producer also enhances our ability to recognize the value of objects in terms of the skills and labour that went into their production. At a recent craft fair she participated in, Tracy noticed that the customers who truly appreciated the value of her work were those who had sewed or screen printed themselves. Similarly, Serene explains that learning to screen print revealed to her how much work is involved in the production of any consumer product, down to the packaging. She explains: “Crafting shows you the value in everything, that everything takes time, and it makes you want to keep everything longer, to repair it instead of throwing it out, and when you have to, you make a new one.”

Preserving rather than disposing of used items has positive implications for the environment. In “Exhausted Commodities: The Material Culture of Music,” Will Straw reminds us that when we get rid of personal objects we no longer desire, they do not simply disappear in space. He proposes that, “The accumulation of artefacts for which there is no longer any observable social desire invites us to deal with the question of how we deal with cultural waste” (Straw). Reviewing Daniel Bell’s discussion of the problematic nature of modern capitalist ideology, Martyn J. Lee writes that, “With the development of a mass-production economy, capitalism is actively required to endorse

and foster a generally hedonistic, spendthrift and throw-away ethic in order to operationalise a greater acceleration of commodity and value turnovers that is implied in the principle of mass-consumption” (106).

Many crafters recognize the extensive amount of waste produced within a culture of consumption that privileges an ever-changing “new.” Moreover, they understand the environmental implications of this phenomenon. They therefore acquire some of their crafting materials, such as fabric and yarn, at thrift stores and charity shops. While finding recycled or organic materials that he enjoys working with can be more difficult than buying new fabric, Clayton is committed to making politically responsible choices in his sewing business. Many craft “recipes” found in third wave feminist magazines and webzines involve reusing materials such as old records (melted into bowls), buttons (fashioned into a bracelet), or pillowcases (sewn into a skirt). While this orientation is likely in part motivated by the fact that many young crafters do not have a lot of money to spend on new supplies, environmental concerns are also at play in their choice to recycle materials.

While the positive aspects of globalization (such as cultural tolerance and learning from others) are lauded within consumer culture, the exploitative aspects (such as child labour and environmental damage) are rarely recognized. Lisa Nakamura describes how advertisements from communications companies such as Origin obscure colonialist relations in their deployment of imagery that depicts the “sharing” of knowledge across culture (23-24). Many of the crafters surveyed in my ethnographic research situate craft

as a challenge to global production and consumption, and to the discourse that promotes it as unproblematic. Jim reports that he was attracted to craft in part because in making something himself he can be sure of where it comes from, who made it, and how it was made. He has practiced “tag reading” for some time - attempting to purchase items made by companies that don’t exploit human labour and the environment. Similarly, the Revolutionary Knitting Circle is concerned with “cast[ing] off dependencies on global trade for our subsistence,” where, “in so doing, we shall all be able to enter fairly into meaningful and equitable trade of not only goods, but also those cultural intangibles that are necessary if we are to bring about understanding, justice and peace to truly enrich our individual lives and our communities” (“Proclamation”). Resistance to unethical global trade can also take the form of buying locally made items, an action which Clayton views as an “undermining [of] the current corporate structure,” and as a choice not to support child labour overseas.

Leila laments that she is not provided with more opportunity to sell her wares due to the fact that foreign factory workers or machines can produce similar products at a much lower cost. Leila’s complaints echo those of her artisan foremothers and forefathers whose lives were deeply affected by industrialization.³⁹ Prior to the age of mass production, craftspeople (largely males) produced their wares in guilds that commonly contained three or four workers and a couple of apprentices. At the turn of the nineteenth century enterprising American artisans and merchants hired multiple semi-

³⁹ Canadian and American labourers working in craft-related areas share a rich history of protest and union-disputes motivated by the effect of industrialization on their working conditions (see “Working-class History” and Licht 50-51).

skilled workers to perform isolated parts of the production process, rather than producing items from start to finish (in response to increased market activity and the demand for manufactured goods). Eventually master cabinetmakers stopped taking on apprentices and hired only semi-skilled workers whom they could pay a small daily wage and garments were produced in city sweatshops (Licht 48-49). Canada followed a similar trajectory wherein with the introduction of the factory system in the last third of the nineteenth century the autonomy of independent workshops became limited as they were rationalized to ensure the greatest output for the lowest cost. By 1920, the factory system had virtually eliminated craft production in British North America (“Work”).

Thus the North American industrial revolution brought about the near demise of independent, autonomous artisan production. Expanded mass-production, automated manufacturing, and global trade have meant that goods that are produced on a smaller scale and at the local level are rarely available for purchase in mainstream retail outlets. The production and sale of independently-produced goods by young crafters can therefore be seen to constitute an alternative economy. Clayton and Leila indicate that in offering clients products made on a local level, crafters provide them with the opportunity of not participating in an exploitative consumption process, a guarantee that they are denied when purchasing products manufactured by multinational corporations. Similarly, Jenny perceives craft fairs to be an ethical alternative to other venues of consumption because they enable consumers to support production on a local level.

Some view the choice to earn one's livelihood through a creative skill and independent of conventional institutions to be politically significant in a contemporary context. Tracy believes that more people should pursue "alternative" occupations (such as artisan) rather than "conventional jobs" that leave little room for exploration of one's creative abilities. She is saddened by the fact that many people feel bound to conventional work and do not realize that they can make a living out of pursuing their creative passions. Steve also understands the political potential in pursuing this career path: "Given that we all live in a capitalist society – if there's a crafts community where there is a strong emphasis on people trying to subsist off their craft...the political implications are obvious. It's the proletariat establishing their own means of production outside of being obliged to work for someone else. There's a profound liberation that can come out of craft in this respect." Thus in a contemporary context entrepreneurial crafters carve out a subversive niche in the mainstream economy in which ethical trade can occur and personal autonomy is maintained.

Another dominant discourse that craft has the potential to resist is the conflation of speed and progress that has accompanied modernity (and continues to be upheld in late-capitalist culture). A discussion of how crafters construct a relationship between craft and deceleration benefits from a brief exploration of the socio-historical construction of time. Kim Sawchuk writes, "The standardization of time, a hallmark of modernity, ushered in a distinct spatial and temporal organization that has become so fixed in our lives that it seems to be the natural force of time, a history we forget" (161). In fact there is a rich history in the perception, organization, and valuation of time. The

introduction of metric time (units that are interchangeable and do not vary across the seasons) coincided with the expansion of urban wage labour in Europe during the fourteenth century (Biernacki 62). Clocks were erected in public squares so that urban employers who paid their wage labourers by the day could establish a work shift that was uniform across the seasons and announce its start and finish in an official and public fashion (Ibid. 63). Time underwent further standardization (and departure from localized, nature-based time) during the 1880s in Europe and North America with the introduction of a 24 hour clock and the imposition of time zones (Sawchuk 156). This systematization was necessitated by the development of communication technologies, an expansion in political and economic activity, and the increasing speed of transportation across greater distances (Ibid. 157). These changes had significant implications for time-space relations, similar to the implications of the internet on the contemporary culture of work. For example differing time zones allow for continual productivity within multinational corporations and projects. As the workday ends in one nation, the workload shifts to another inhabiting an earlier time zone (Ibid. 158). In comparing this time-space relation to that of agrarian societies whose days' length was determined by the sun one can comprehend the socio-historical nature of time sense.

Some interview respondents complain that time moves too quickly within a late-capitalist culture that promotes hyper-productivity. This unchecked acceleration is perceived to pose a threat to our emotional well-being. Richard Biernacki demonstrates in "Time Cents" that the formulation of time within institutions is not only informed by economic imperatives but also by cultural assumptions (81). In his comparison of textile

mills in Germany and Britain, Biernacki observes that “contrasting interpretations of labour time laid the ground for the development of correspondingly different political ideas among German and British textile workers” (Ibid.). Time sense can have implications for political orientation. Thus if North American time sense were to undergo a transformation, political ideas might shift correspondingly.

Many interview respondents note that when engaging in craft, one is forced to renounce the frenetic pace of modern-day life and slow down. In the context of a culture that relies heavily on digital technology and virtual practices, for crafters like Anna, the materiality of craft practices is integral to this process. “I think crafting is a very material practice, and particularly because I work with sound, I don’t have a lot of materiality to that...I like [craft] because I feel like there is a tactile element to it, and there’s a meditative aspect to it, I can take my time, I don’t impose deadlines for myself when I do that sort of work...I don’t really care when I finish.” Though elsewhere Leon designates his sound art as craft, he recognizes that, “There’s one thing that I can’t do in music that I was able to do when I was drawing or crafting: that’s taking a lot of time, like spending time to work on something that’s not immediate, whereas the big thing about music now is immediacy.”

Other interviewees make direct reference to the political implications of this deceleration. Vanessa explains: “I think that craft is really revolutionary in a number of ways, but one really tangible way is how it will slow people down. Just take the speed

away from their life, for an hour or whatever.” Jim believes that this aspect of craft could have important social ramifications:

I was thinking that if this was a broader recreational activity, if it was a more popular recreational activity for people...Just because of the mental and social atmosphere that it promotes, it might discourage people from working these ridiculously long hours. It might cause people to slow down a little bit, in a sense, or maybe slow down a lot, and just sort of stop and enjoy themselves, enjoy life, enjoy the relationships they have with people.

He wonders if this could eventually result in the slowing of our economic growth, “discouraging the idea that the economy *has* to grow, that things must be produced and consumed and that people don’t always have to do more, and do it faster.”

In this chapter I have identified multiple discourses that have been constructed to assure the functioning of market capitalism. Though theorists such as Firat and Dholakia contend that we exist in a postmodern context, modernist binaries are still at play in contemporary, consumerist culture, ensuring that activities that fall outside of the capitalist production sphere are devalued. Contemporary crafters recognize both the cultural, social, environmental, and global consequences of this worldview and the potential of craft as a mechanism to disrupt it. In the following chapter I will explore how craft is similarly employed as a means to negotiate and re-define gender.

Chapter Three

Increases and Decreases: Shaping and Reshaping Gender Norms

Essentially, crafting in the sense that [we're] talking about, especially here in Montreal, is about people saying, 'making it myself, whatever that might be, is important'. It is about empowerment too, it's not just 'women's work' or something. (Anna)

While men are increasingly becoming involved in North American craft culture by entering craft communities, taking up “soft crafts”, and calling their work “craft” without shame, popular and domestic craft is still primarily associated with the female realm. Craft and “the feminine” have shared a long, co-determinate history, as illustrated by Rozsika Parker in The Subversive Stitch. She describes the role played by embroidery in the construction and perpetuation of the feminine ideal, where over the course of several centuries femininity was perceived to be innate, to connote leisure, gentility, docility, obedience, and “naturally” connected to embroidery (Parker 11). Parker writes that, “Embroidery has provided a source of pleasure and power for women, while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness. Paradoxically, while embroidery was employed to inculcate femininity in women, it also enabled them to negotiate the constraints of femininity” (Ibid.). In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which both male and female crafters utilize craft - a practice that has historically been associated with women’s oppression - to engage in progressive gender politics.

This conception of femininity - or gender - as constructed is at the heart of Teresa de Lauretis’ contestation of gender as sexual difference. In “The Technology of Gender,” de Lauretis describes a tendency in feminist writing and practice in the 1960s and 1970s

to emphasize the notion of gender as sexual difference in its production of discourses and social practices. She warns that in maintaining this view, feminist theory remains ensnared in a patriarchal and universal dichotomy in which woman's difference is measured against man (de Lauretis 1). This orientation prohibits the articulation of differences between and within women. Moreover, it frustrates radical feminist thinking that proposes a social subject that is, "constituted in gender, to be sure, though not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations; a subject en-gendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual, relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted" (Ibid. 2). In order to clear a discursive space for a heterogeneous conception of the subject, de Lauretis suggests that the concept of gender must be unbound from sexual difference and (through a deconstructive method influenced by Foucault's theory of sexuality as a "technology of sex") reconceived of as a representation, where its social construction is this representation of gender (2-3). This representation is formed within each society through a gender system, "a symbolic system or system of meanings, that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies" (Ibid.5). These meanings are deployed in discourses that operate through various state and cultural apparatuses (such as cinema) as well as through theory. It is through these "technologies of gender" that "women" and "men" are constituted (Ibid. 12-13).

In conceiving of gender as socially constructed rather than bound to sexual difference, possibilities for resisting rigid gender categorization become available. de Lauretis writes that, "The terms of a different construction of gender also exist, in the

margins of hegemonic discourses. Posed from outside the heterosexual social contract, and inscribed in micropolitical practices, these terms can also have a part in the construction of gender, and their effects are rather at the ‘local’ level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation” (18).

Contemporary feminists move back and forth among hegemonic representations of gender and “what that representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable,” thereby inhabiting a contradictory, multitudinous, and heteronomous space (Ibid. 26). The women and men of my ethnography inhabit this space, deconstructing and negotiating gender roles through their engagement with craft. In this chapter I will explore some of the ways in which crafty women confront associations between women and domesticity, locating this discussion in the feminist “wave” debate. Moreover, I will investigate the implications that their engagement with craft communities has on male crafters’ gender identity. I will begin by identifying how craft has been subjugated by dominant discourses around gender and women’s work as I believe that it is relevant to my discussion of craft and gender politics as a whole.

Gender, craft, and subjugated knowledge

In the previous chapter, craft was identified as a subjugated knowledge in the context of consumer culture. Modernist discourses that define production and consumption domains often play a part in the construction of a culture’s gender systems. Thus consumer and gender discourses can function concurrently in the subjugation of knowledge.

The primary function that women have served in the domestic arena since the onset of industrialization has been reproductive in that “domestic work reproduces human beings and a set of social relations, using the goods and services produced by industrial production. These human beings become the wage workers in production or the domestic workers in reproduction who produce the goods or services or transform them into the form suitable for consumption within the household” (Luxton 36). Women have therefore played an integral role in the cycle of production by rearing children to participate in the labour force or in facilitating their husband’s ability to engage in labour through their performance domestic work. Nonetheless, “women who work exclusively at home without pay are not regarded as workers because they neither exchange their capacity for work without wages nor sell their goods and services to the market” (Armstrong and Armstrong 87). Hence, despite the fact that female domestic labour has played (and continues to play) a vital role in the persistence of the capitalist system, it nonetheless continues not to be acknowledged in dominant, patriarchal discourse. Though the primary subject of my investigation is not domestic labour, contemporary crafters engage in many of the practices that women once performed in their home as domestic duties such as sewing, knitting, quilting, and embroidery. The historical failure to adequately acknowledge the value of these activities must be considered in evaluating their contemporary subjugation.

Also addressed in the previous chapter was an inability on the part of Western consumers to recognize the skills and labour involved in the creation of craft products.

While crafters attribute this devaluation to a lack of experience in producing goods, it can also be understood as the assignment of a lesser value to objects produced by women or associated with the feminine. This gender distinction is especially evident in the art/craft hierarchy in which “The arts of painting and sculpture enjoy an elevated status while other arts [primarily performed by women] that adorn people, homes or utensils are relegated to a lesser cultural sphere under such terms as ‘applied’, ‘decorative’ or ‘lesser’ arts. This hierarchy is maintained by attributing to the decorative arts a lesser degree of intellectual effort or appeal and a greater concern with manual skill and utility” (Parker and Pollock 50). Lucy R. Lippard also addresses the significance of the sex of the maker in her account of the exhibition of Navajo rugs in New York art galleries in the early 1970s. The rugs “were eulogized as neutral, ungendered sources for big, bold geometric abstractions by male artists like Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland. Had they been presented as exhibitions of women’s art, they would have been seen quite differently and probably would not have been seen at all in a fine art context at that time” (135).

While today one is more likely to find textile crafts (explicitly) produced by women in gallery settings,⁴⁰ crafters identify the persistence of gender hierarchies with regards to work produced by women. Anna notes in her interview that we esteem the tailor (who tends to be male) while undervaluing the woman who sews all of her children’s clothes, despite the fact that they may be employing many of the same skills. A Glitter discussion participant laments the fact that many people are ignorant of the

⁴⁰ For example quilts produced by African American women from the tiny island of Gee’s Bend, Alabama were recently on exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and are currently touring galleries across North America.

extent of mathematical skill necessary to engage in fibre arts – weaving especially. She notes that she experienced a greater challenge in studying the mathematical aspect of knit-lace than engineering. She ascribes this unawareness to the fact that the majority of fibre artists (or domestic labourers who engage in fibre arts) are women. Several alternative explanations are advanced by discussion participants who do not see gender as the only variable at play in the assessment of craft's worth. Some claim that the utilitarian aspect of knitting, quilting, sewing, and cooking is at the root of their devaluation. One Glitter member observes that the current crafting trend emphasizes process rather than product, which shifts the attention from the finished work and reduces art forms to hobby status. Moreover, some glitterati and interview respondents note the shoddy workmanship evident in some craft products, hence justifying their depreciation. Nonetheless, most glitterati recognize that craft is in part a low-ranking knowledge by virtue of its association with “women's work.”

Thus far my exploration of subjugated knowledge has positioned craft in conflict with discourses that could be considered oppressive in a conventional sense, namely capitalism and patriarchy. However my ethnographic investigation has revealed that some crafters believe that craft has become subjugated within a “progressive” discourse: second wave feminism. Many of my interview respondents understand the choices they make in their personal lives to have political implications. Some female crafters have felt constrained by their perception of progressive and regressive behaviour for women, often perceived to be limitations set out by second wave feminists. My discussion of this

tension within feminism will illustrate the complexity of both the feminist landscape and of contemporary gender politics.

Crafting in waves

Until recently, many young feminists had come to associate crafts with the feminine or domestic realm, the den of women's oppression. While this perception has manifested itself for some in mild shame or secrecy regarding their practice of craft, others have gone so far as to cease their engagement in craft altogether. Leila explains:

I've always had a lot of conflict because my idea of a woman does not involve domestic things. Like say when I was a teenager I was like, 'I'm not going to do that *shit*, I'm not going to do that kind of stuff because that's like...the patriarchy's idea of what women are supposed to do. I'm not going to have kids.' Which was weird, because I've always loved kids, loved sewing, and even cooking and stuff like that. I guess I just had the idea that women were forced in to that or something, and so I didn't want to have anything to do with that, I totally rejected that, which caused total conflict because I always liked sewing and creating and doing things like that, but they were domestic things, so there were times where I was totally not doing that at all.

Similarly, in her article "A Broom of One's Own," [GetCrafty](#) founder and contributing editor Jean Railla writes that the feminism she grew up with taught her that women's liberation came from freeing themselves from the home and its accompanying activities. "Housework, we were taught, is nothing but boring drudgery - work done by women who don't know better. Smart, enlightened women became artists, writers, thinkers; they became *important*. They didn't have time for silly things like cooking, sewing, knitting or cleaning" (42).

Many contemporary female crafters are aware of the political implications of engaging in activities that have long been associated with femininity, passivity, and domesticity. While some understand these characteristics (and the undervaluation that accompanies them) to be fixed, others recognize them as representations that can be manipulated. As described by de Lauretis, in identifying the gender constructions at play in craft, contemporary crafters can choose which ones to accept and which ones to reject, thereby inhabiting multiple subjectivities such as feminist, knitter, activist, and mother.

Thus, in line with Fraser and Foucault, some crafters recognize possibilities for resistance in the domestic realm. For example, Railla views her development of the GetCrafty webzine and online community (where crafts, cooking, home decor, and personal finance are discussed with the goal of creating a more meaningful life), as her “way of reclaiming domesticity as feminist practice” (44). Similar to Leila, one Glitter discussion participant who identifies as a feminist admits that for years she did not pursue crafts due to her reluctance to engage in “feminine” practices. Currently, however, she often feels that in embracing a feminine craft she is performing a feminist act. Alanna, like other women in my study, frames the contemporary embracing of craft as an evolution of feminist activism. While “earlier feminism was more preoccupied with taking over more traditional men’s activities, women [currently] feel that they can start doing traditional women’s crafts again without being oppressed...[They recognize] a subversive aspect [in] really traditional women’s crafts.” These women are comfortable inhabiting the marginal space between traditional femininity and feminist politics.

As is evident in the above discussion, my ethnographic investigation reveals that some young feminist crafters understand second wave feminists to hold anti-craft attitudes. In a discussion thread addressing feminist waves, some Glitter discussion participants took issue with this assessment, suggesting that a more accurate understanding is that second wave women contested the notion that if you were not adept at domestic arts you were not a “real woman.” Some participants indicate that their mothers were strong feminists and employed crafts to express their political beliefs.⁴¹

The perception that second wave feminists oppose craft practices could be read as support for the claim that some third wave feminists fail to recognise continuities between these two waves. Many feminist artists in the 1960s and 1970s employed craft methods in their art. “Realiz[ing] that textile practices are rich sites to explore and question the assumptions made about subjects like women’s work, femininity and domesticity, ... [w]omen like Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago in the United States and Joyce Wieland, Inese Birstins, Mary Scott, Barbara Todd, Ruth Scheuing, Lise Landry and Michelle Hon in Canada and Quebec... explored textile metaphors [in their work]” (Perron 122). Judy Chicago used embroidery, pottery, and china painting in her famous installation The Dinner Party (1978), while Joyce Weiland’s quilted her 1968 piece, Reason over Passion. As Shapiro wrote in 1977, Rather than reject domestic activities due to their association with hegemonic femininity, second wave feminists “wanted to

⁴¹ Verb tense varies as a consequence of the fact that young feminists alternately speak of the second wave as an historical and a contemporary phenomenon. This reflects an inconsistent perception of waves as a temporally-based.

validate the traditional activities of women, to connect [themselves] to the unknown women artists who made quilts, who had done the invisible ‘women's work’ of civilization. [They] wanted to acknowledge them, to honor them” (qtd. in Regan). Moreover, embroidery featured prominently in the political activity of British suffragettes (or first wave feminists) who stitched the names of prominent female figures onto hand-sewn protest, and embroidered parasols with the colours of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WPSU) (Parker 197-201). While first wave feminists did not employ an elaborate discourse regarding gender roles they did recognize the political implications of using feminine practices to express their political ideals. Continuities between waves can be identified in their shared recognition of the political potential of craft, offering further support for a differential rather than generational or temporally-based understanding of feminist politics.

Perhaps the waves diverge not so much in their attitude towards craft and gender, but in their approach to addressing this issue. Third wave feminists frequently employ irony as a political tactic.⁴² In Splitting Images Linda Hutcheon describes irony as, “a mode of ‘speech’ (in any medium) that allows speakers to address and at the same time slyly confront an ‘official’ discourse: that is, to work *within* a dominant tradition but also to challenge it - without being utterly co-opted by it” (1). Echoing de Lauretis’ description of contemporary feminist subjectivity, Hutcheon claims that, “irony opens up new space, literally between opposing meanings, where new things can happen” (17).

⁴² Shugart detects this approach both among third wavers and members of what has been called “Generation X.”

Irony is used by contemporary feminist crafters in their exploitation of oppressive stereotypes associated with craft. As many craft mediums connote passivity and docility, when they are employed to convey overtly political sentiments the effect can be particularly jarring. In my own interview I explain that, “it is an effective type of communication because knitting and needlepoint signifies certain things, a certain softness, and when you stick something really hard in there it becomes very powerful, and it cuts through a layer of consciousness.” Along similar lines, Grant Neufeld, founder of the Revolutionary Knitting Circle, says: “We’re a loosely knit group. We use this humorous approach to show the contrast of the peaceful act of knitting and these forms of protest that have been to a large extent misrepresented as harsh conflict” (qtd. in “Revolutionary Knitters”). Irony is at play in some of the RKC’s activist projects, such as the knitting of “tree cosies” to symbolically protect the trees in Kananaskis from security forces during the 2002 G8 summit.

Third wave feminist craftivism often addresses the private realm, from the body to the home. Eschewing traditional floral or bird patterns, interview respondent Alanna embroiders vulvas on to recycled fabric. As part of her “Dainty Time”⁴³ project on femininity, American artist Sherri Wood crochets tampon cosies.⁴⁴ Both of these projects ironically employ “feminine” crafts to expose the shame and secrecy that many women experience in regards to their bodies, publicizing subject matter they are taught to keep

⁴³ The “Dainty Time” project is online at <http://www.daintytime.com>

private. Bead artist Liza Lou creates life-sized domestic environments out of bugle beads, transforming something as banal as a sink of dirty dishes in to a dazzling, awe-inspiring piece of art. Her work “puts the infinitesimal homely labor of craft wildly over the top, and creates a sudden spellbound awareness that everyday life is utterly gorgeous, if we can only see it” (Girl 112).

Crafty third wave feminists also engage in ironic play in their re-appropriation and glorification of domesticity and domestic arts in the pages of popular feminist magazines such as BUST and Bitch, and countless webzines with a feminist agenda. These publications contain advertising images from the 1950s that depict women performing domestic duties and crafts with sparkling grins on their faces; they promote craft products such as aprons made from vintage fabrics, and run satirically-toned articles on being the perfect hostess or evaluating trendy cleaning products. In doing so they confront a dominant, historical discourse that binds women to domestic duty, and instead of rejecting it they claim it as their own. In an article entitled “Queens of the Iron Age: On the New Feminist Hygiene Products,” Justine Sharrock observes that, “The fun’ lovin’ lipstick feminist of the mid-‘90s has become the home-obsessed Brillo-pad chick of the ‘00s...the yen for the domestic is shared by many savvy feminists, third-wave rebels, and crafty gals, who see it as a feminist celebration of girl culture” (61-62). Thus, in the context of third wave feminism, this trend is framed as a drive to celebrate previously denigrated elements of women’s history (similar to second wave artists who sought to validate the traditional activities of women). Moreover, the capacity to be

⁴⁴ Cosies are likely a popular craftivist project as they are so closely associated with “granny crafts” and the domestic, and therefore have great ironic potential.

ironic about the past indicates women's simultaneous ties to and liberation from the private sphere.

Some of my interview respondents find this embracing of domesticity to be problematic. Tracy believes that domesticity has been “revived” (which she distinguishes from “re-appropriated”) within popular feminism without much of a critical perspective, and this makes her “leery.” She sees it at play within the craft fair community in items such as crafty ironing board covers. To her, the reclamation of the domestic seems anti-progressive. Tracy attributes her desire to remain critical about this issue to her upbringing in a house that is domestically divided along traditional lines: “It’s always been: father goes to work, brings home the bacon; mother stays home, raises kids, cooks dinner.” Writing in *Bitch*, a third wave publication, Sharrock asks, “If we claim cleaning as a cool feminine – and feminist – realm, we’ll only be ensuring that we’re stuck with the job forever. How is that liberating?” (93). While Sharrock recognizes the political potential of craft (and especially the D.I.Y. ethic), she laments the celebration of domesticity in craft culture and that women insist on pursuing “feminine” crafts.

Tracy and Sharrock's problematization of the ironic treatment of women's history within third wave feminism (and the related effort to valorise feminine labour) further complicates the “great wave debate,” as both women would typically be identified with the third wave. Craft can be considered a subjugated knowledge in reference to its association with women and the feminine; this subjugation is resisted by third wave feminists who are empowered by craft and employ it as a political tool. However, as so

many continuities exist between waves, it cannot clearly be designated as knowledge that is subjugated by second wave feminist discourse (though many third wave feminists experience it as such). As described above, third, second, *and* first wave feminists used and continue to use craft techniques to express their political convictions. Like second wave artists, third wave feminists recognize the importance of celebrating aspects of women's histories that have been unjustly undervalued. Moreover, though third wave craftivists may be well versed in ironic technique (due in part to their coming of age in a postmodern era)⁴⁵, irony was not absent in first and second wave activism. Several members of the WPSU, imprisoned and on hunger strike, embroidered handkerchiefs with their signatures, emulating a refined female social tradition where guests would present an embroidered kerchief to their hostess as a commemorative gift. Womanhouse (1972), a whole-house installation (organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro) housed The Nurturant Kitchen in which flesh-coloured ceilings, walls, and floors-were dotted with foam-rubber fried eggs gradually metamorphosing into milk-filled breasts. Both of these feminist initiatives demonstrate that all feminist waves have employed irony as a political tactic.

The above exploration of feminist tensions regarding craft and gender roles has exposed that discourse does not operate in a linear fashion, and that knowledge produced by feminists is not exclusive to each wave. Sandoval's concept of differential consciousness is relevant here in that it "undermines this appearance of mutual exclusivity of oppositional practices of consciousness and social movement...and allows

⁴⁵ See Linda Hutcheon's "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern." for a discussion of links between irony and postmodernism.

their re-cognition on new terms” (Sandoval 58). Rather than positioning themselves as oppositional to second wave feminists, third wave crafters must recognize the commonalities between waves and the fact that their foremothers were pioneers of the craftivist work they themselves are engaged in. In doing so, today’s young crafters may learn from their elders’ accomplishments and employ this knowledge in their re-negotiation of gender.

Grappling with (male) gender roles

Susan Faludi and George Mosse describe masculinity, like femininity, as a fluctuating construct. While at one time, men were expected to provide for the family and community, the rise of aristocratic societies meant that chivalry and honour (both aristocratic values) became important (Porter). The association between masculinity and virility, strength, and courage persisted throughout the twentieth century (Ibid.). Faludi comments that, “[t]o be a man increasingly meant being ever on the rise, and the only way to know for sure you were rising was to claim, control, and crush everyone and everything in your way” (Ibid.). Victory in the Second World War meant that American post-war masculinity became, “all about taking control - and, even more important, displaying it” (Faludi, qtd. in Porter). Contemporary advertising imagery and market products suggest that males may depart from these historically-established roles and play at traditional femininity by indulging their vanity and acting as the objects of male desire. However, a closer examination of these technologies of gender reveals that what appears to be a greater flexibility in gender roles is in fact the reproduction of hegemonic

masculinity (Porter). In her analysis of the male beauty industry and homoerotic imagery in clothing advertisements, Nicole Porter indicates that male models and consumers preserve traditional masculine ideals of strength and power.

Male crafters, like female crafters, attempt to be critical about the gender roles they encounter in discourses that dominate the gender system. Several male crafters reveal in their interviews that they feel restricted by discourses that reinforce hegemonic masculinity. They perceive their engagement in craft and in craft communities to open up a space for gender deconstruction and re-negotiation. It is their association of craft and craft communities with femininity that facilitates their gender play.

Many crafters perceive communal craft spaces to be “feminized” environments, largely due to predominantly female membership. However, Clayton appreciates that craft communities are “open to everyone,” regardless of gender. He does not restrict this assessment to groups with younger members, as he finds that the older women who quilt in his hometown love to teach him skills and discuss their crafts with him. While the town is fairly conservative in regards to gender roles, he does not experience this constraint within craft environments. For Clayton as well as many other crafters, craft facilitates cross-generational⁴⁶ and cross-gendered communication.

⁴⁶ Many of the participants in my ethnography describe bonds forged with older men and women through craft. Connections are formed between crafters and their grandparents, other older relatives, and strangers they encounter on the metro when knitting. Like many crafters, Anna cherishes these connections which she sees as hard to come by in a culture stratified by age.

The accessibility and openness that Clayton describes with reference to craft communities is understood by some male crafters to be a consequence of what they see as the feminine nature of these spaces. They feel more at ease engaging with others and expressing themselves in these situations than in more “masculinized” environments, the term that Steve uses to describe music or skateboarding scenes. Steve believes that men are socialized to be less sensitive or liberal with their expression than women. He recalls occasions in male-dominated environments where he felt he had to act “macho” and censor his personal thoughts as he was bound to “unspoken roles [that he felt he] had to fill in order not to be ostracized or ridiculed.” Thus, these male-dominated subcultures acted as technologies of gender through which hegemonic notions of masculinity were circulated.

Steve identifies arts and crafts communities as spaces in which gender roles are more flexible. He explains that these communities tend to attract sensitive people and are populated predominantly by women, whom he believes have generally had more experience expressing themselves than men. Steve therefore feels more at ease discussing his feelings and sharing personal stories and meaningful experiences in these contexts. He explains that, “gender almost becomes a non-issue, where I can feel comfortable expressing myself without worrying about the repercussions of my maleness.”

Similarly, Jim finds that, “through crafting a lot of traditionally masculine values go out the window. Things like dominance and competition.” By explanation he suggests

that one is much more likely to offer support to, or seek support from a fellow crafter than compete with them. Here co-operation is privileged over competition, a historically assigned gender role that Jim finds restrictive. Engaging in traditionally feminine crafts such as knitting constitutes a subversion of the gender system for Jim: “I think in rejecting these boundaries, men are rejecting the traditional roles left for them by previous generations...Through giving up that role, I guess that male crafters could be giving up that position of power that society has left for them.” Thus, Jim perceives masculinity to be bound up in a system of power that privileges the interests of men over those of women. In deconstructing and disrupting dominant models of masculinity, men simultaneously destabilize this system.

While the increase in male participation in craft culture is celebrated by many, it is important to note that some female crafters perceive it as a threat to the strength of “the craft community.” In an interview conducted at the Renegade Craft Fair, Lori Wilbois and Kim Holich tentatively celebrate the fact that craft is still primarily practiced by women. Lori warns that men tend to embrace things that women do and then co-opt them for their own purposes. Kim confesses: “This might be very bad, but I’m almost afraid that if men were to get involved, it would become a less sacred space, it would be less open.” While Serene does not overtly express concern regarding the participation of males in craft culture, she believes that their engagement in craft communities is inevitably accompanied by a heightened degree of self-awareness and a sense of alienation. She supposes that, “when guys show up to a crafting session, they are aware...that they are entering a world that is communicated in differently, so they

definitely feel like outsiders because the codes are not familiar to them.” While women can be motivated to craft by a love of fashion, Serene feels that men must constantly remind themselves (and others) that it is an activist activity for them in order to avoid criticism from other men for engaging in a feminine endeavour.

The question of male participation on the Glitter discussion boards arises frequently. While opinions range from exuberant invitations for more males to join to unflinching advocacy of an all-female space, most glitterati agree that men are welcome – if they don’t unnecessarily announce their gender. Many female participants resent what they perceive to be a desire on the part of male participants to be fawned over due to their gender, exemplified by “Hi, I’m a boy”- type posts. Like Kim and Lori, Glitter members appreciate the openness and camaraderie of their network and express concern regarding the implications of male involvement.

Thus, while male crafters may perceive craft communities as a forum in which they can freely embody gender roles that are off-limits to them in the larger society, female crafters may not be as uncritical and accepting as they would assume. In line with the “sexual difference” approach that de Laetis is critical of, some women may not be willing to compromise what has been designated - largely by men- a “feminine space;” they adopt a supremacist or separatist ideology in which a superior, feminine consciousness must be protected through segregation. Others make (possibly accurate) assumptions about male motives that may have consequences for their alienation from the community. Still others, while sanctioning male involvement in craft culture, stipulate

conditions for membership or acceptance that entail the suppression of male gender identity and the behaviour connected with it such as aggression and attention-seeking. Perhaps with increased communication across gender lines, male and female crafters could better understand each others' motives and could mutually engage in the deconstruction and re-construction of gender norms.

In this chapter I explored how men and women employ craft as a means to engage in gender politics. Though the appropriation of craft as a feminist practice in third wave feminism highlights tensions among feminist waves, in celebrating craft as an art form or political activity, contemporary crafters accentuate the way in which craft has been subjugated and imbue it with value. Moreover, craft associations not only allow for communication that is relatively unencumbered by restrictive gender norms, they also permit individuals to question aspects of their gender assignment that lead to dominance and subjugation. Both male and female crafters inhabit a space in the margins of hegemonic gender, employing craft as a means of resistance. Resistance through craft, as described in this and the previous chapter, can be characterized as an alternative form of political action. In the following chapter I will investigate the political and social structures through which these politics operate.

Chapter Four

Loosely Knit: Contemporary Social Movements

The craft movement that's happening now - because it is a movement – first of all, with popular magazines in the feminist community such as BUST and Venus and Bitch, they really focus on crafting as part of their lives. And so something like the Renegade Craft Fair happening is bringing together all of these artists and making all of these connections which is creating a bigger community, which in turn is making a movement happen. And really making people see that it is something valuable... (Janina Bain).

As described by Foucault, power operates through discourse. In the preceding chapters I have investigated how young women and men engage in politics through the deployment of a subjugated knowledge – that of craft - in order to destabilize totalizing discourses within Western culture. Their practice of craft constitutes a challenge to dominant consumption patterns and oppressive gender roles, while simultaneously advocating progressive alternatives to these discourses. Craft is popularly conceived of as a strictly domestic activity practiced by older women and school children, or more recently as a trendy pastime currently embraced by hipsters and celebrities. If through the preceding discussion craft was re-imagined as a political practice, what does this indicate about the contemporary North American political landscape? While previously I have attended to the operation of power, in this chapter I will investigate the structures and forms through which this politics operates. I will begin by considering whether and how contemporary craft constitutes a social movement.

In “Social Movements: Creating Communities of Change,” David S. Meyer outlines four elements that distinguish social movements from other social and political phenomena. The first and most critical factor in identifying a cultural phenomenon as a

social movement is the fact that, “*Social movements make claims on the state* or any other authority that has the capacity to redress activist grievances (Meyer 39, italics his). He warns that while cultural campaigns may share stylistic elements with them, making demands on the state is a critical factor in distinguishing social movements.

While craft certainly “*challenge[s] cultural codes and transform[s] the lives of participants*” and “*use[s] means in addition to those offered and accepted by mainstream politics*” (elements two and three of Meyer’s criteria), crafters rarely campaign for change at a state or policy level (Ibid. 39;40). Moreover, “*movements are comprised of a diverse field of organizations and actors working in pursuit of the same goals*” (Ibid. 40). It is erroneous to claim that one knitting circle shares the same political orientation with another. One group may be knitting to challenge over-consumption, and another to exchange skills and patterns. Most individuals (or small craft groups) have distinct ideological conceptions regarding craft.

According to the criteria outlined above, the absence of concrete political organizations, intervention at the state level, and a shared ideological orientation prevent us from conceiving of contemporary craft as a social movement. However, this model describes a relatively traditional social movement. Firat and Dholakia explain that we have entered a postmodern age where social movements based on modernist principles of order and stability are no longer relevant. They claim that traditional movements were based on fixed norms and a unitary view of a desirable social outcome. These movements required total commitment from their members and promoted belief in the

superiority of one world view over another. The authors assert that these movements have largely failed to achieve their goals, and that many individuals have become distrustful of grand projects (128-9). Thus a re-conception of social movements is necessary to understand how resistance is mobilized in a postmodern context. I will call these re-imagined structures *contemporary social movements*.⁴⁷

Contemporary social movements operate on a model of power that is compatible with Foucault's questioning of truth, conception of power as non-linear, and location of resistance in the employment of knowledges. Moreover, they have evolved out of a postmodern condition wherein relations are fragmented and meanings are fluid; in this context political actors capitalize on instability rather than seeking to achieve order and cohesion. Many of the theorists that I have employed thus far (such as Nancy Fraser, Linda Hutcheon, Chela Sandoval, and Teresa de Lauretis) in fact advocate disruption, fragmentation, and instability as an oppositional tactic. Therefore we must look to theorists who understand politics as operating under these conditions in order to better understand whether craft constitutes a contemporary social movement.

Best and Kellner investigate postmodern cultural politics in "Postmodern Politics and the Battle for the Future." They locate the political terrain at the level of culture, which they understand to be the contemporary site of social reproduction. "It is culture that moulds the sensibilities and thus a radical cultural politics attempts to undo the

⁴⁷ In labelling these movements "contemporary" I do not imply that all social movements operating in a contemporary context can be characterized by the criteria I describe here. Movements that are primarily

enculturation of the dominant culture by providing new ways of seeing, feeling, thinking, talking, and being.” Social change and resistance occurs at the level of cultural production for crafters, who generate their own goods, share craft skills and knowledge, publish websites and magazines that celebrate craft, provide consumers with locally-made goods, and produce overtly political craft items that contend with dominant ideas about gender.

Firat and Dholakia describe political strategies that characterize contemporary social movements. They explain that in a culture characterized by fragmentation, a united vision is unrealistic for social movements (Firat and Dholakia 129). This is true for crafters who do not share a singular political goal. As Podgirl states in her email interview, “Anyone with any sort of political agenda can craft.” In place of absolute commitment to a cause, individuals are engaging in lifestyle changes or smaller, local projects which demonstrate an indifference to mainstream forces and achieve modest, modifiable changes (Ibid.). Rather than a global, cohesive movement, small locally-based projects and groups have formed around craft. Examples include stitch ‘n’ bitch groups, knitting circles, Church of Craft chapters, anti-war quilts, scarf drives for the homeless, canning and preserve exchanges, and craft co-op stores that promote craft skills. Participation in these initiatives generally does not require consistent attendance, membership, or wholehearted commitment to the group.

modernist in character (in that they challenge the state directly, have a shared vision, and a fairly consistent membership base) continue to exist today alongside contemporary social movements.

Political action within contemporary social movements takes the form of alternative practices rather than a direct confrontation of the state. Counter-cultural groups exercise contemporary forms of social change: they practice instead of preaching, experiment with variations, and make alternative life modes visible through art forms, fashion, and presence in public spaces (Ibid. 144). Within craft culture, social change is sought through the pursuit of alternative life modes rather than in campaigning to change social policies. Anna characterizes the crafting she has observed among young people in British Columbia as a social movement, “in that there are people who want to have a deeper consciousness about how they’re living. They are asking really hard questions about, ‘How do I live?’” They have sensed that, “there is a hollowness to [their] consumer lifestyle, I mean like busy busy busy – there’s a little bit of a hollowness to that. There is a satisfaction about taking time to work on something – to do that in a potentially meditative way.” Jim too locates politics at the level of lifestyle in that he believes that a crafty orientation has the potential to inspire certain values, such as an awareness about over-consumption and a reduced emphasis on dominant tendencies promoted by our culture (such as possession and control). He notes that while craft does not challenge state policies directly, it could challenge our attitudes enough that present-day state policies may become irrelevant one day.

This reconfiguration of contemporary resistance is compatible with Foucault’s own, in which “political action ...emphasiz[es] strategic local activity and transitory alliances as opposed to traditional conceptions of mass collective movements” (Mucklebauer 89). Foucault explains that resistance does not inspire, “great radical

ruptures”; “more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shifts about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings” (*History* 96). As explored in the preceding chapters contemporary crafters create multiple fractures in unitary discourses that dominate our society through their craft practices.

Are contemporary social movements viable political structures?

In reflecting upon the changing structure of social movements in a postmodern context, it becomes possible to conceive of today’s young crafters as composing a contemporary social movement. However, before celebrating its validity as a movement, I feel it necessary to examine whether, in the transition from a modernist to postmodern and poststructuralist orientation, political efficacy is lost. In other words, can a social movement that boasts a transient membership, lacks shared ethics and goals, and does not engage in politics at the level of the state achieve political change? While I don’t believe this question can be answered definitively, I will explore some of the issues raised within it.

The apparent lack of a cohesive normative agenda in Foucault’s politics is a cause for concern for many feminist theorists. McLaren explains that feminist critics of Foucault would argue that, even if a resisting subject can be located in Foucault’s work, he fails to provide the normative framework essential to an understanding of what one ought to resist (121). Fraser concurs that the place of norms in his work is very unclear.

She claims that Foucault suspends normative justification, refusing to judge power/knowledge regimes as legitimate or not (*Unruly* 21). Fraser asks what the scope of this refusal is – does he suspend only the liberal political framework associated with modernity (whose central categories are right, limit, sovereignty, contract, and oppression), or all political norms? She asks on what basis Foucault calls for resistance to domination: “Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted? Only with the introduction of normative notions could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it” (*Ibid.* 29).

Diamond and Quimby find Foucault’s lack of a totalizing ethic challenging in a constructive manner, inciting us to be more critical and to question our thoughts and actions (xiii). “In his later interviews and analyses in particular, he proposes that ethics should be grounded in resistance to whatever form totalitarian power might take, whether it stem from religion, science, or political oppression...But because his intellectual stance is to reject the role of the prophet or the legislator of morality, Foucault refuses to draw up a blueprint for contemporary ethics and indeed, assaults the notion of a single ethic” (*Ibid.*) Muckelbauer asks if we in fact need ethical imperatives for resistance, or if they serve only to “generalize singular practices of resistance into necessary and mandatory requirements for all resistance, integrating subjects in to uniform power relations and, in effect, normalizing resistant practices” (87). He warns that if normalized, they can prohibit the production of alternative practices of resistance.

The consequences of an apparent absence of a normative framework or shared ideals and goals in contemporary political movements are unclear to me. I understand that a movement orientated around a totalizing discourse can exclude people, interests and strategies as well as obscure relations of power, reducing a movement's capacity to achieve social change. However, a shared orientation often serves as social glue for political groups. Furthermore, many groups that qualify as practicing contemporary politics (in that their membership is transitory and locally-based, they operate at the level of cultural production, and they challenge consumption patterns) express strong, shared moral convictions and goals. The Revolutionary Knitting Circle's manifesto proclaiming their vision of a world where production is community-based rather than in the hands of corporate giants is one example.

While the craft movement (or any other contemporary social movement) as a whole does not share a single moral commitment, individual crafters may be attracted to smaller groups or projects with common orientations. Nonetheless, where unity is attempted, fragmentation in orientation is evident. All group members may not adhere to the manifestos or mission statements set up by their founders. For example, whereas the Church of Craft statement emphasizes spiritual fulfilment through craft, each chapter defines their own priorities such as skill-sharing, awareness of over-consumption, or support for craft entrepreneurship. Members may be attracted to the larger group's objectives' initially, but that commitment is not permanent or inflexible.

Another area of contention for theorists is the location of political action in the private domain or at the level of lifestyle, where change in social relations and cultural practices is deemed more effective than the alteration of state policies. Elizabeth Frazer feels that while there may be problems with political structures (in terms of their patriarchal foundation), keeping politics at a “level of conscious deliberation” (i.e. the state) is more effective than simply politicizing “private” and other issues (236). She warns that politicizing sexuality and reproduction, kinship and culture can be emotionally draining and can desecrate aspects of our private lives such as interpersonal interactions and apolitical cultural forms (Ibid.). By engaging with a political system or “rule” we can contest it, subvert it, change it, and legitimate it. Best and Kellner describe another danger of restricting politics to a “private” level:

While today we need the expansion of localized cultural practices, they attain their real significance only within the struggle for the transformation of society as a whole. Without this systemic emphasis, cultural and identity politics remain confined to the margins of society and are in danger of degenerating into narcissism, hedonism, aestheticism, or personal therapy, where they pose no danger and are immediately co-opted by the culture industries.

Though I believe that changes to state policy are ineffective when they are not partnered with challenges to the discourses that support them, I concur with Frazer and Best and Kellner’s assessment that confining politics to the private arena of cultural production can have grave consequences for the viability of contemporary political action. I will further discuss the limitations of this mode of resistance and some possible approaches to sustaining an effective postmodern/poststructural politics in the conclusion to this thesis.

Community and social movements

Some theorists question our ability to form community bonds in a fragmentary postmodern context. This can have consequences for political action as many feminist theorists perceive community to be the “proper locus of politics” (Teske and Tétreault 12). In her discussion of postmodern politics, Honi Fern Haber explains that to become conscious of and act against subjugation requires the articulation of a “subject-in-community” (104). Though she acknowledges that individuals are dissimilar from one another and that none are the site of a single narrative, acknowledging our similarities through affiliation with others is, “an important component of our ability to recognize what has been suppressed or distorted” (Ibid.109,5). Referring to Lyotard and Rorty, she critiques postmodern theory as negating the possibility of community formation and collective resistance. “By insisting on the universalization of difference, postmodern politics forecloses on the possibility of community and subjects necessary to oppositional resistance” (Ibid. 3).

Haber does align herself with Foucault in her conception of a political community that is “plural, internally inconsistent, open ended, and always amenable to deconstruction” (114).⁴⁸ Moreover, she writes that the subject which is a product of one community will also be a product of many others, not all of whom share compatible interests. “Empowerment is made possible...by realizing the extent to which we are never simply the member of a single community” (Ibid. 120-1). This view is consistent

⁴⁸ Haber recognizes that Foucault is a poststructuralist, but nonetheless includes him among the three theorists she examines in her investigation of postmodern politics.

with Firat and Dholakia's conception of postmodern political movements where actors move fluidly among life mode communities (142).

A desire for community or an affinity with others is evident among the individuals surveyed in my ethnographic research. Jenny explains: "Community is definitely something that I desire and that I want in my life, and I get creative energy from seeing what other people do, and from doing things with other people...I suppose there's times when I want to be alone in creating stuff, but I definitely get a lot out of being with people and having people doing like things, and being able to talk and share." Serene points to the failure of the market to allow consumers form connections with one another or achieve true individuality. "Lifestyles today that are very consumer-orientated...actually thrive on isolating people, they thrive on making sure everyone pursues that individuality they want, and in pursuing it they become one of millions." She believes that many individuals are drawn to craft communities out of a need to be part of a group while maintaining their individuality. Craft and other contemporary progressive political affiliations allows for this fluidity.

Alternative community structures: collective associations

The form of community that Haber speaks of and that is at play in contemporary social movements differs from traditional community. Feminist theorists such as Frazer condemn traditional communities as having a patriarchal history which has reinforced oppressive gender, race, and class norms. Weiss calls for a re-conception of community

based around structures and practices other than patriarchal ones (such as the household, church, or bloodline), resulting in the “formation of new communities that alter how we meet our material, political, intellectual, and emotional needs” (4).

Weiss and Friedman describe the “collective association” as an alternative form of relation compatible with postmodern social conditions. Collective associations are chosen communities which, “offer structures and modes of interrelationship that are more flexible and adaptable than those of the traditional patriarchal communities” (xii). While conventional communities are assigned to us based on where we live or who we are related to, these alternative social forms allow us to critically select to whom we wish to relate. Karissa, along with many other crafters, defines “community” as a group of people who are like-minded, who share ideas and care for one another. “I think of it less geographically and more a group of people you choose to be around.” While these relations may be less permanent than traditional community bonds, as individuals are able to constructively distance themselves from their “community” as to critique and evaluate it, collective associations allow for critical negotiation of values and norms.

Elements of flexibility and negotiation are evident in Leila’s description of her experiences with contemporary social alliances. When asked to define “community” she replies: “I see it as the people that I surround myself with that are doing similar-minded things to me and have some of the same beliefs. That doesn’t mean that they have to all fit completely. And this is something that I’m redefining all of the time, especially as a parent.” She illustrates this statement by reporting that when she spends time with

parents who pursue a different lifestyle to hers in that they are not pro-breast feeding or use disposable diapers, she doubts her own choices. She begins to question whether she should be building a career or working on a degree rather than remaining at home doing crafts with her daughter. Then she reminds herself that perhaps these people aren't a part of her community. Her community allows her to, "foster and nurture th[is] part of [her]self" and doesn't cause her to question why she likes to sew and knit. They do not cause her to believe herself to be a "whipped housewife." In a conventional community context where she would not have the freedom to seek out those who share her worldview, Leila would likely feel pressured to accept norms that she considers oppressive and regressive.

If collective associations are not dependent on traditional community institutions such as neighbourhood, family, and church, what is the basis of their formation? Lawrence Grossberg suggests that media and popular culture tend to play a significant role in the formation of contemporary collective associations (478). Grossberg perceives that beyond functioning as instruments of representation, media facilitate alliances among individuals. Crafters' engagement with the internet has meant the development of a complex web of online craft networks comprised of craft-related webzines, discussion boards, blog and web rings⁴⁹, skill-sharing websites⁵⁰, and online boutiques and consignment shops.⁵¹ Grossberg describes media as inspiring "affective alliances",

⁴⁹ Webrings link together websites that are thematically related. By continually clicking on a web-ring icon that appears on one site, one can be transported through the ring to visit all member sites.

⁵⁰ Some websites are primarily concerned with imparting "craft how-to" or D.I.Y. knowledge and encourage readers to submit articles sharing their own expertise.

“network[s] of empowerment... [or the] organization of concrete material practices and events, cultural forms and social experience which both opens up and structures the space of our affective investments in the world (478).

These alternative forms of affiliation have arisen out of postmodern cultural conditions and are therefore rarely recognized as valid social bonds by conventional communitarian theorists and sociologists. Weiss explains that these theorists, “often criticize individualistic society for its absence of bonds, affiliation, socialization, and rituals because they ignore or discount those affiliations and rituals that do not conform to patriarchal nuclear family norms” (15). They uphold a narrative (one that has been questioned by sociologists and historians who emphasize both historical continuity and diversity)⁵² within which idealized communities are tragically ravaged by modernity. However, as Durkheim writes, “The remedy for the[se] ill[s] is nevertheless not to seek to revive traditions and practices that no longer correspond to present day social conditions, and that could only subsist in a life that would be artificial, only one of appearance” (Durkheim 205). We must therefore seek not to rebuild old community forms, but instead to imagine new modes of association, as the theorists (and practitioners) discussed here have done.

⁵¹ Many crafters have created websites through which they promote and sell their craft products. Recently many sites have appeared that offer to sell various crafters’ wares on a consignment basis. Items on these sites tend to share a similar aesthetic that corresponds to a subculture (e.g. “indie”, “kitchy/girlie”, or “hippie”).

⁵² Pre-modern times were not uniform in social structure and power relations, therefore a coherent notion of traditional or premodern community is not valid (Sawchuk 158). Moreover, many theorists recognize elements of continuity among traditional and contemporary social forms.

Alternative affiliations inspired by contemporary craft are in many ways shaped by the political character of this practice. Associations connected to a productive activity (rather than consumption) foster distinctive modes of relation. As Anna describes, “to stop and make things together and get together in a way that doesn’t involve spending money becomes kind of profound.” It is through this type of engagement that skills that promote self-sufficiency are learned, tips for reducing consumption traded, and ideas for living a more satisfying, responsible lifestyle shared. As discussed in the previous chapter, craft communities can also be forums for deconstructing and re-imagining gender identity. Whereas conventional community structures may have reinforced masculine/feminine-art/craft-producer/consumer binaries, craft inspires associations in which members are less constrained by these oppressive stereotypes. Thus within craft culture, politics are enacted through social affiliations while these relations are shaped by politics.

In this chapter I have sought to identify the forms and structures through which the politics of contemporary craft operates. I have proposed that the social relations and modes of resistance at play in craft culture are compatible with contemporary social movements. Moreover, the collective associations discussed above intersect in many ways with the relational and political characteristics of contemporary social movements. Both facilitate an engagement in alternative practices, operate at the level of cultural production and do not require absolute commitment (engendering transitory alliances). The fact that one can choose her community enables affiliation around shared political goals, though, as it would frustrate critical negotiation, a consistent viewpoint is not

required. These shifts in relational structure open up possibilities for resistance not found within traditional communities. Contemporary social movements depend on the creation of collective associations - such as craft networks - to create a space for the discontinuities and disruptions integral to postmodern and poststructural politics. Thus my investigation of contemporary craft has not only uncovered alternative forms of resistance, but also progressive relational structures that facilitate these oppositional practices.

Conclusion

Casting Off

About a year ago I attended a collage party hosted by Winnipeg artist Paul Butler. Butler has hosted several collage parties in Canada and Europe, in which participants are provided with food, drink, tape, glue, scissors, and a huge pile of magazines to play with. Upon arriving I commandeered a stack of magazines and began to scan them for images to use in my collage. I quickly became frustrated, bemused, and even a little angry looking through what were mostly fashion and design magazines. Were it not for the slickness of their glossy pages I would have sworn that someone had already taken glue and scissors to these magazines, as the fashion spreads and advertisements alike exhibited a cut-and-paste aesthetic. Figures comprised of mismatched body parts were adorned in designer clothing. Sentence fragments in irregular fonts floated across advertising images. Text blocks appeared to be taped or sewn on to the page. Somehow the prospect of deconstructing texts and images that had already been manipulated by commercial designers and copy editors made me queasy.

I have always perceived collage to have political potential in that cohesive images and texts (often products of dominant discourses) can be fragmented and thus disrupted by disconnecting a part of their whole and placing this part in a different context.⁵³ As Johanna Drucker writes in her book review of texts profiling Dada artists, collage is a

⁵³ Perhaps these were not the terms through which I appreciated collage as a teenager, but even then I understood that by placing a supermodel's head on a short, fat, and hairy man's body I was engaging in an act of subversion.

“fragmentary assault on the illusions of wholeness promoted by rational systems of representation” (84). Many Dada artists employed collage as a medium of political expression. For example in Germany during the Weimar period, Hannah Hoch made collages with commercial imagery to deconstruct the “mythic image of the New Woman, very much a media product linked to consumerism, labor practices, and social agendas such as child bearing” (Ibid.). Thus what frustrated me most about the cut and paste aesthetic that I encountered in the magazines was not that it made the task at hand (to create an original collage) more difficult, but that commercial texts had absorbed a tactic of subversion that I held dear. This scenario exemplifies the fact that when resistance is exercised through cultural production, it is at risk of being co-opted by dominant discourses. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, contemporary crafters engage in gender and anti-consumerism politics through their practice of craft and participation in craft communities - very much at the level of cultural production. In this conclusion I discuss how, despite the threat of absorption by mainstream forces, craft can constitute an effective politics when situated in a system of resistance. In so doing I demonstrate how my investigation of craft has inspired important insights into contemporary politics in general.

The current graphic design trend in which craft mediums and materials such as embroidery, collage, and textiles are incorporated in to the layout is one instance among many of the absorption of craft into commercial culture. The “handmade” look is everywhere in fashion, where clothing is embroidered, ripped apart, pinned together, and patched-up by machines or sweatshop labourers en mass. The clothing company J-

Crew features mass-produced knitwear products that emulate hand-knit items in their loose tension and uneven borders. Craft projects such as “marble magnets”⁵⁴ that have been sold by independent entrepreneurs within alternative craft communities for years are currently available at mainstream outlets such as Old Navy. Retail companies are capitalizing on the popularity of craft among young people by creating craft kits with a trendy aesthetic. The Parcel Knitting Kit is one example of this phenomenon: along with brightly-coloured yarn and knitting needles, the kit includes instructions for creating a mod-style skinny tie and leg warmers.

The co-opting of countercultural resistance by market forces is a common trend within consumer culture. Yiannis Gabriel explains that, “Consumer capitalism has an extraordinary capacity to look at what directly threatens it and, after a direct intake of breath, convert it into a marketing opportunity” (qtd. in Scanlon 303). This statement echoes Foucault’s warning regarding subjugated knowledges, in that once they are identified, brought to light, and accredited, “they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation” (“Two Lectures,” 86). Unitary discourses such as market capitalism which at first ignored these knowledges become eager to absorb them back into their own discourse (Ibid.).

There is still room for resistance within these re-colonized discourses, however. As mentioned in Chapter Two, de Certeau proposes that consumers are productive in their “*ways of using*” commodities. de Certeau’s distinguishes between “strategies” and

⁵⁴ Marble magnets are fridge magnets made by gluing an image to a round magnet, and then affixing a flat glass marble to the image’s surface.

“tactics” in his theory of consumer resistance. Strategies are structural organizations of reality, mediated through institutions such as cities, universities, supermarkets, and advertising campaigns to order (and “other”) that which threatens them. Tactics are “an art of the weak” who resist this ordering by using or experiencing strategists’ products in unintended ways (de Certeau 34-37). Thus consumers can appropriate the materials of strategies (even that which has been appropriated by the strategists in the first place) to violate the interests of strategists. For example, one could employ a Martha Stewart card-making kit to embroider anti-consumerist slogans on holiday cards, or borrow a friend’s Parcel Knitting Kit and use the instructions to learn to knit with needles and yarn inherited from one’s grandmother. These tactical manoeuvres reflect an understanding that we are in many ways bound to consumer culture but are able to resist it from within its confines. As I state in my interview:

I think that to try to totally get away from consumption is impossible [and] not even necessarily desirable, because you are not negotiating the culture you are living in, and you have to negotiate that culture. And I think that contemporary crafters are aware of that on different levels – maybe a subconscious level, maybe a conscious level. I think they are working within a culture of consumption to create more ethical, environmental, global politics-type alternatives.

Thus the assimilation of subversive practices into commercial culture does not preclude possibilities for resistance. However a singular reliance on tactical practices at the level of cultural production is not an effective political strategy. In the previous chapter I identified the fact that in confining activism to this level of micro-politics, the possibilities of achieving social change become limited. At the same time, however, waging war against the state without addressing cultural politics is also ineffectual.

Crafters, citizens and consumers alike must recognize, as Best and Kellner do, that engaging in one form of politics need not negate the possibility or necessity of engaging in the other. “Indeed, both modern and postmodern positions have strengths and limitations, and we should seek a creative combination of the best elements of each. Thus, we should combine modern notions of solidarity, alliances, consensus, universal rights, macropolitics and institutional struggle with postmodern notions of difference, plurality, multiperspectivalism, identity, and micropolitics” (Best and Kellner). In a sense political actors must adopt Sandoval’s “differential consciousness” where disparate modes of consciousness are not constructed as oppositional or superior to one another. In accepting the validity of multiple modes of resistance activists may move among them, choosing which tactic is most effective in a given situation. As Sandoval notes, “The differential mode of social movement and consciousness depends on the practitioner’s ability to read the current situation of power and self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations” (60).

Contemporary craft can - and does - function as one among the many modes of consciousness that political actors inhabit. As discussed throughout this thesis, craft acts as a vehicle through which young people contend with discourses that they find limiting and destructive. However craft is not necessarily the only means through which they engage in resistance. A third wave feminist active in queer politics may become involved in a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Interest Group, lobby for same-sex partner benefits, and cross-stitch a patch that proudly displays the word “FAGGOT”

surrounded by cherries.⁵⁵ A young man concerned with global corporatism and over-consumption may petition his university to teach a class on globalization politics, attend an FTAA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) protest, and knit scarves instead of buying holiday gifts for his family. Crafting alone may not constitute an effective political approach, but when mobilized as one amongst many modes of oppositional consciousness, it can be a powerful instrument of social change.

I will conclude by returning to a discussion of my own personal relationship with contemporary craft and the culture that surrounds it. As I described in the Introduction, I am actively engaged in this culture. I have social relationships with many of my interview respondents and a deep fondness for the on- and offline communities that I discuss throughout this thesis. In my discussion of methodological issues I expressed a concern that my relationship to the crafters that I investigate may have compromised my ability to be critical about their statements. I believe that my use of critical theory throughout this thesis has enabled me to retain an analytical perspective with regards to the ethnographic data. However I must acknowledge that as a member of the culture and community that I study, I myself hold some of the same understandings that I criticize among my respondents; these understandings have shaped my research. One primary example is the continual distinction I make between younger and older crafters. My insistence that the practice of craft by young people be distinguished from that of older women reproduces the generational divide at issue within the feminist wave debate. Perhaps, like some of my respondents who have similarly absorbed the sometimes

⁵⁵ A young woman once did so at a Church of Craft workshop.

divisive rhetoric of third wave feminism, I too neglect to recognize continuities between the motivations of older and younger crafters. It is also possible that my exclusive focus on craft as performed by young people today has hindered me from adequately exploring the development of similar forms of resistance in history, such as the work of feminist art historians in the 1970s. Subsequent research regarding these affinities will enable me, as an activist and scholar, to learn from the accomplishments and failings of this work and to build upon its foundations.

Moreover, my personal investment in the political dimension of craft may have shaped my thesis in a manner I was unaware throughout its development. As my engagement in craft enabled me to participate in politics and to construct myself as a political actor, it is important to me that craft be validated as a meaningful political practice. As someone who, like most people, wishes to be part of something beyond myself, this thesis may have been motivated in part by my desire to act in solidarity with a larger social movement. This inspired me to depict contemporary craft culture as a political network and the small groups and individuals that I see engaging in this shared activity as an army of crafters, who despite having different motivations and being loosely connected, are engaged in the same battle as I. However, this recognition does not disqualify the analysis. While the sentiments of contemporary crafters have been subject to interpretation in these pages, their voices nonetheless remain clear and strong. And what is evident from their words is that they too conceive of craft as a meaningful political practice capable of inspiring social and political change.

Though the focus of this thesis has been contemporary craft, I believe that this investigation has provided some insights into the social and political dimensions of contemporary resistance as a whole. Sites of contestation have opened up with the re-recognition that politics are not confined to the state, but are at play in social relationships, media, and cultural practices. Individuals and groups can resist oppressive forces by producing knowledges that challenges the “truths” that are imposed upon them.

As described above, savvy political actors move tactically among oppositional modes; where cultural production may be an appropriate vehicle of dissent in one circumstance, political lobbying might be more effective in another. Political actors practice flexibility in their approach to social relations as well. In forming transitory alliances and constructing life modes with those who share their interests, they can support each other in progressive projects and challenge one another to remain critical about their beliefs and practices. While flexibility is integral to contemporary politics, continuity must be emphasized as well. Much can be learned from the history of oppositional politics and rather than categorically rejecting that which occurred in different cultural circumstances, present-day political actors must build upon the groundwork laid by past generations. In embracing flexibility and continuity as guiding principles in their social and political practices, this generation of activists can adopt an orientation that is compatible with their present cultural and conjunctural circumstances, thereby facilitating the movement towards social change.

Works Cited

- Armstrong, Pat and Hugh Armstrong. The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979.
- Bachmann, Ingrid and Ruth Scheuing, eds. Material Matters: The Art and Culture of Contemporary Textiles. Toronto: YYZ Books, 1998.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer and Amy Richards. Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.
- Bellafante, Ginia. "Feminism: It's all about ME!" Time Magazine 29 June 1998: 54-62.
- Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner. "Postmodern Politics and the Battle for the Future." New Political Science 20.3 (1998): 283-299. Illuminations: The Critical Theory Website. 2002. 15 Dec. 2003
<<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/Illumina%20Folder/kell28.htm>>
- Biernacki, Richard. "Time Cents: The Monetization of the Workday in Comparative Perspective." Nowhere: Space, Time and Modernity. Ed. Roger Friedland and Deidre Boden. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. 61-94.
- Brown, Janelle "Do it yourself: Homemaking Gets its Groove Back As Youthful Martha Stewart Acolytes Knit, Purl, and Make Curtains." Salon.com. 21 May 2001. Salon. Feb. 25, 2002 <<http://www.salon.com/mwt/style/2001/05/21/handmade/print.html>>
- Cavendish, Dominic. "Why Knitting is the New Rock'n'roll." Daily Telegraph 12 Oct. 2002. The Shed Online. 13 March 2003
<<http://www.theshed.co.uk/dailytelegraph.html>>

- Cole, Sally. "Taming the Shrew in Anthropology: Is Feminist Ethnography 'New Ethnography'?" Ethnographic Feminisms : Essays in Anthropology. Eds. Sally Cole and Lynne Phillips. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995.
- Craftster.org. Ed. Leah Kramer. 2004. 25 Feb. 2004 <<http://craftster.org>>
- Craftygal. Ed. Jan Mater-Cavagnaro. Winter 2003. 25 Feb. 2004
<<http://www.craftygal.com>>
- de Certeau, Michel. The Practice of Everyday Life. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. "The Technology of Gender." Technologies of Gender.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989. 1-30.
- Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research." Handbook of Qualitative Research. Eds. Denzin and Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994. 1-21.
- Deveaux, Monique. "Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault." Feminist Studies 20.2 (1994): 223-247.
- Diamond, Irene and Lee Quimby. Introduction. Feminism and Foucault. Eds. Diamond and Quimby. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988. ix-xx.
- Digsmagazine.com. Ed. Yee-fan Sun. 23 Feb. 2004. 25 Feb. 2004
<<http://digsmagazine.com>>
- Disgruntled Housewife. Ed. Nikol Lohr. 17 Feb. 2004. 25 Feb. 2004
<<http://www.disgruntledhousewife.com>>
- Drucker, Johanna. "Dada Collage and Photomontage." Art Journal 52.4 (1993): 82-87.

- Durkheim, Emile. "The Division of Labour: Causes and abnormal forms." The Division of Labour in Society. Trans. W.D. Halls. London: Macmillan, 1984. 217+. Rpt. in Classical Sociological Theory: A Reader. Ed. Ian McIntosh. New York: New York University Press, 1997. 194-206.
- Featherstone, Mike. Consumer Culture & Postmodernism. London: Sage Publications, 1991.
- Firat, Fuat A. and Nikhilesh Dholakia. Consuming People: From Political Economy to Theaters of Consumption. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Fontana, A., and J.H. Frey. "Interviewing, *the art of science*." Handbook of Qualitative Research. Eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994. 361-375.
- Foucault, Michel. History of Sexuality. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon, 1978
- . "Two Lectures." Power/Knowledge. New York: Pantheon, 1982. 77-108.
- . Politics, Philosophy, Culture : Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Fraser, Nancy. Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.
- . "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the critique of an actually existing democracy." The Phantom Public Sphere. Ed. Bruce Robbins. Cultural Politics. 5. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 1-32.
- Frazer, Elizabeth. The Problems of Communitarian Politics: Unity and Conflict. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- GetCrafty. Ed. Tsia Carson. 2004. 25 Feb. 2004 <<http://www.getcrafty.com>>
- Girl. "Liza Lou." BUST Magazine Spring 2001: 112.
- Greer, Betsy. "A Little Bit More About Why..." Craftivism.com 28 July 2003. October 24, 2003 < http://www.craftivism.com/archives/2003_07.html>
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the empowerment of everyday life." 1984. The Subcultures Reader. Eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. London: Routledge, 1997. 477-493.
- Haber, Honi Fern. Beyond Postmodern Politics: Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Hebdige, Nick. "Posing...Threats, Striking...Poses: Youth, surveillance, and display." 1983. The Subcultures Reader. Eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. London: Routledge, 1997. 393-405.
- Hudson, Kirsten "Sew Hip : A new generation is finding creative outlets in its grandmothers' crafts." Church of Craft.org. Oct. 2001. Ten By Ten Magazine. 28 Feb. 2002 <<http://www.churchofcraft.org/steeple/press/tenbyten.html>>
- Hutcheon, Linda. Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- . "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern." UTEL Criticism and Theory Resources. January 1998. University of Toronto English Library. 10 Feb. 2004 <<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>>
- Isaak, Jo Anna. Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter. London: Routledge, 1996.

- Leblanc, Lauraine. Pretty in Punk: Girls' gender resistance in a boy's subculture. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Lee, Martyn J. Consumer Culture Reborn: The Cultural Politics of Consumption. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Licht, Walter. Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Lippard, Lucy R. The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- Lotz, Amanda D. "Communicating Third-wave Feminism and New Social Movements: Challenges for the next century of feminist endeavor." Women & Language 26.1 (2003): 2-9.
- McLaren, Margaret A. "Foucault and the Subject of Feminism". Social Theory and Practice 23.1 (1999): 109-129.
- Meg Luxton. "Housework." Canadian Dimension 12.7 (1977): 35-38. "The Mission." Church of Craft.org. 2003. The Church of Craft. 12 Feb. 2003
<<http://www.churchofcraft.org/church/mission.html>>
- Meyer, David S. "Social Movements: Creating Communities of Change." Feminist Approaches to Social Movements, Community, and Power. Eds. Robin L. Teske and Mary Ann Tétreault. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000. 35-55.
- Muckelbauer, John. "On Reading Differently: Through Foucault's resistance." College English 63.1 (2000): 71-95.

Nakamura, Lisa. "Where Do You Want to Go Today? Cybernetic Tourism, the Internet and Transnationality." Race and Cyberspace. Ed. Beth E. Lolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman. New York: Routledge, 2000. 15-26.

Nearing, Helen and Scott. Living the Good Life: How to Live Sanely and Simply in a Troubled World. New York: Schocken Books, 1970.

Not Martha. Ed. Meagan Reardon. 23 Feb. 2004. 25 Feb. 2004

<<http://megan.scatterbrain.org/notmartha>>

Parker, Rozsika. The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Parker, Rozsika and Griselda Pollock. "Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts." Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology. London: Routledge; Kegan Paul, 1981. 50-81.

Perron, Mireille. "Common Threads: Local strategies for 'Inappropriated Artists'." Material Matters: The Art and Culture of Contemporary Textiles. Eds. Ingrid Bachmann and Ruth Scheuing. Toronto: YYZ Books, 1998. 121-136.

Porter, Nicole Wendy. "I Can See His *Bum!* Exposing the Male Body and Repositioning Masculinity in Advertising." On Distortion Conference. University of Western Ontario, London. 6 Apr. 2003.

"Proclamation of Constructive Revolution." Knitting.activist.ca. 2003. Revolutionary Knitting Circle. February 12, 2003 <<http://knitting.activist.ca/manifesto.html>>

Railla, Jean. "A Broom of One's Own." BUST Magazine Spring 2001: 40-45.

- Ramazanoğlu, Caroline. Introduction. Up Against Foucault : Explorations of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism. Ed. Ramazanoğlu. New York: Routledge, 1993. 1-25.
- Ransom, Janet. "Feminism, Difference and Discourse: The limits of discursive analysis for feminism." Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism. Ed. Caroline Ramazanoğlu. New York: Routledge, 1993. 123-146.
- Reckitt, Helena, ed. Survey by Peggy Phelan. Art and Feminism. New York: Phaidon, 2001.
- Regan, Margaret. "Daughter of the Revolution." Weekly Wire. January 25, 1999. Tuscon Weekly. February 18, 2004 <http://weeklywire.com/ww/01-25-99/tw_review1.html>
- "Revolutionary Knitters Target G8 Summit." Ananova.com. 20 May 2002. Ananova Ltd. 12 Feb. 2003
http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_591623.html?menu=news.quirkies
- Sandoval, Chela. "U.S. Third World Feminism: Differential Social Movement." Methodology of the Oppressed. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000. 41-66.
- Sawchuk, Kim. "Modernity, Nostalgia, and the Standardization of Time." Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity. Ed. Lynda Jessup. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. 155-164.

- Scanlon, Jennifer. "Purchasing Possibilities: Sexuality, pleasure, and resistance in consumer culture." The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader. Ed. Scanlon. New York: New York University Press, 2000. 303-308.
- Scott, Joan W. "Experience". Feminists Theorize the Political. Eds. Judith P. Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992. 22-40.
- Shapiro, Stephanie. "Crafting a New Culture: They're Young, They're Hip, and They're Not Afraid to Knit in Public." Sun spot.net. 25 Jan. 2004. The Baltimore Sun. January 28, 2004 <<http://www.sunspot.net/features/home/bal-hf.craft25jan25,0,5820144.story?coll=bal-artslife-home>>
- Sharrock, Justine. "Queens of the Iron Age: On the New Feminist Hygiene Products." Bitch Magazine Winter 2002: 60+.
- SheMadeThis.com. Ed. Elaine. 2004. 25 Feb. 2004 <<http://www.shemadethis.com>>
- Shugart, Helene A. "Isn't it Ironic?: The Intersection of Third Wave Feminism and Generation X." Women's Studies in Communication 24.2 (2001): 131-168.
- Siegel, Deborah L. "The Legacy of the Personal: Generating Theory in Feminism's Third Wave." Hypatia 12.3 (1997): 46-76.
- Straw, Will. "Exhausted Commodities: The Material Culture of Music." Canadian Journal of Communication Online. 25.1 (2000). Canadian Journal of Communication. February 12, 2004 <<http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=571&layout=html>>
- Teske, Robin L. and Mary Ann Tétreault. Introduction. Feminist Approaches to Social Movements, Community, and Power. Eds. Teske and Tétreault. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000. 1-25.

von Helmholtz-Phelan, Anna A.. The Social Philosophy of William Morris. 1927.

Norwood, Pa.: Norwood Editions, 1977.

Wajcman, Judy. "Domestic Technology: Labour-saving or enslaving?" Inventing

Women: Science, Technology and Gender. Eds. Gill Kirkup and Laurie Smith

Keller. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. 238-254.

Weiss, Penny A. "Feminist Reflections on Community." Feminism and Community.

Eds.

Penny A. Weiss and Marilyn Friedman. Philadelphia: Temple University Press,

1995. 3-17.

Weiss, Penny A. and Marilyn Friedman. Preface. Feminism and Community. Eds.

Weiss and Friedman. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

White, Catherine. "Good Wool Hunting." Daily Mirror [London] 22 May 2003: 47.

Wolff, Cindy "The Rebirth of Knitting." HGTV.com. 2003. Home and Garden

Television. 23 November, 2003

<http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/cr_needlework_knitting/article/0,1789,HGTV_3263_1390411,00.html>.

"Work." The Canadian Encyclopedia. 2nd Ed. 1988.

"Working-Class History." The Canadian Encyclopedia. 2nd Ed. 1988.

Interviews

Face to Face

Anisef, Jennifer. Personal interview. 24 Oct. 2003.
 Cove, Karissa. Personal interview. 2 June 2003.
 Craig, Jenny. Personal interview. 25 Sept. 2003.
 Daoud, Serene. Personal interview. 11 Apr. 2002.
 DeKuyper, Dana. Personal interview. 8 July 2003.
 Douglas, Leila. Personal interview. 30 Apr. 2003.
 Evans, Clayton. Personal interview. 2 October 2003.
 Friz, Anna. Personal interview. 11 Sept. 2003.
 Lo, Leon. Personal interview. 25 Sept. 2003.
 Lynch, Alanna. Personal interview 24 July 2003.
 Maurice, Tracy. Personal interview. 26 Sept. 2003.
 Morris, Jim. Personal interview. 24 July 2003.
 Simard, Steve. Personal interview. 1 June 2003.
 Yanow, Vanessa. Personal interview. 17 Sept. 2003.

Impromptu (Renegade Craft Fair)

Bain, Janina. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2003.
 Holich, Kim. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2003.
 Wilbois, Lori. Personal interview. 20 Sept. 2003.

E-mail

Bigsisiter. E-mail interview. 23 Nov. 2002.
 Miscreation. E-mail interview. 23-25 Nov. 2002.
 Podgirl. E-mail interview. 25-26 Nov. 2002.
 Raspgirl. E-mail interview. 22-25 Nov. 2002.

Appendix A: Demographic Information for Face-to-Face Interviews.

Name: **Jen Anisef** (Interviewed by Jenny Lee Craig)

Age: 26

Date: October 24, 2003

Interview location: her living room

Lived in Montreal: 2.5 years

Originally from: Toronto, ON

Occupation: student, research assistant

Crafts: collage, knitting, sewing, mixed media, zine making, screenprinting

Co-founder of Montreal Church of Craft

Name: **Karrisa Cove**

Age: 24

Date: June 2, 2003

Interview location: her Living room

Lived in Montreal: one year

Originally from: Niagra Area, ON

Occupation: Entrepreneur (screen-printed accessories, purses and pouches, zines)

Crafts: screen printing, sewing, knitting, collage, zine making

Has attended Church of Craft in the past, ran a screen-printing and sewing workshop

Name: **Jenny Lee Craig**

Age: 26

Date: September 25, 2003

Interview location: her living room

Lived in Montreal: four years

Originally from: Lower Mainland, BC

Occupation: student

Crafts: collage, sewing, printing and aspiring to make books

Co-founder of the Church of Craft

Name: **Serene Daoud**

Age: 26

Date: November 4, 2002

Interview location: her kitchen.

Lived in Montreal: 14 years

Originally from: Saudi Arabia

Occupation: animator

Crafts: knitting, collage, accessory making (art: drawing, photography, animation)

Name: **Dana DeKuyper**

Age: 26

Date: July 8, 2003

Interview location: her back porch

Born in Montreal

Occupation: entrepreneur (screen-printed clothing, handmade dolls)

Crafts: silk screening, doll making, dioramas

Has attended Church of Craft in the past, ran a screen-printing workshop

Name: **Leila Douglas**

Age: 25

Date: April 30, 2003

Interview location: her balcony

Lived in Montreal: less than a year

Originally from: Ottawa, ON

Occupation: full-time mom to Teagan, 18 months.

Crafts: knitting, crocheting, sewing, embroidery, baby wear (sewn and knitted).

Church of Craft regular

Name: **Clayton Evans**

Age: 26

Date: October 2, 2003

Interview location: art gallery-cafe

Lived in Montreal: one year

Originally from: many places (armed forces family), mostly Northern Alberta (Fairview)

Occupation: entrepreneur (clothing artist), elementary school assistant.

Crafts: sewing, printing, beading, dyeing, fibre techniques, homewares, jewellery, plastics, past: glassblowing, painting, macrame

Name: **Anna Friz**

Age: 33

Date: Sept. 11, 2003

Interview location: her living room

Lived in Montreal:

Originally from: Vancouver, BC

Occupation: sound artist (performance artist, radio art)

Crafts: knitting, bookbinding, previously collage, zines, ceramics

Name: **Leon Lo**

Date: September 25, 2003

Age: 26

Interview location: restaurant-cafe

Lived in Montreal: twelve years

Originally from: Belgium

Occupation: retail

Crafts: currently: sound art, violin, formerly: graphic design, drawing, radio plays

Name: **Alanna Lynch**

Age: 25

Date: July 24, 2003
Interview location: her bedroom
Lived in Montreal: 2 years
Originally from: Kingston, ON
Occupation: retail, research assistant.
Crafts: knitting, embroidery, collage, clothing reconstruction
Church of Craft regular

Name: **Tracy Maurice**
Age: 20
Date: September 26, 2003
Interview location: Cafe
Lived in Montreal: 2 years
Originally from: Welland, ON
Occupation: student, entrepreneur (screen-printed clothing and accessory business).
Crafts: textiles, design, silk screening, sewing, zine making

Name: **Jim Morris**
Age: 26
Date: July 24, 2003
Interview location: his living room
Lived in Montreal: 1.5 years
Originally from: Lethbridge, Alberta
Occupation: CJEP teacher, high school substitute teacher
Crafts: knitting
Church of Craft regular

Name: **Steve Simard**
Age: 28
Date: June 1, 2003
Interview location: my kitchen
Lived in Montreal: less than a year
Originally from: Victoria, BC
Occupation: telesales, entrepreneur (dioramas)
Crafts: Dioramas, doll/character-making
Occasional Church of Craft attendee, ran a diorama workshop

Name: **Vanessa Yanow**
Age: 30
Date: September 17, 2003
Interview location: her studio
Born in Montreal
Occupation: artist, mixed media and glass
Crafts: Functional blown glass, sculptural glass jewellery, hand drawn magnets, lipbalms and creams

Appendix B: Demographic Information for E-mail Interviews.

Avatar: **Bigsister**

Age: 33

Originally from: all up and down the East Coast

Current location: Baltimore, MD

Occupation: Tech writer

Years using Glitter: two and a half

Avatar: **Miscreation**

Age: 29

Originally from: Pointe Claire, QC.

Current location: Pointe Saint Charles, QC.

Occupation: administrative assistant

Years using Glitter: several months

Avatar: **Podgirl**

Age: 23

Originally from: Northwestern New Jersey.

Current location: NYC

Occupation: lab tech in a med school research lab

Years using Glitter: just over a year

Avatar: **Raspgirl**

Age: 26

Current location: Portland, OR

Occupation: seamstress

Years using Glitter: one year

Appendix C: Conversation Probes for Face-to-Face interviews.

- *Have you always been crafty?
- * Do you see a connection between craft and community? If so, describe this connection.
- *What does the word 'community' mean to you?
- *Do you see craft as having social or political importance? How so?
- *Is crafting political for you?
- *Do you see a relationship between craft and gender politics? Describe this relationship.
- *How does craft fit in to consumer culture?
- *Could contemporary craft be considered a social movement?

Appendix D: E-mail Interview Questions.

1. What role does craft play in your life?
2. Would you describe glitter as a community? Why/why not?
3. How do you 'use' glitter? (e.g. as a craft-idea resource, as a community of (mainly) women, as a way to kill time at work). Feel free to give multiple answers.
4. Do you see modern-day craft as a social/political movement? If so, how does glitter fit in to this movement?

Appendix E: Letter of Introduction for Face-to-Face and Impromptu Interviews.

Dear _____

I am conducting a research project for my Master's thesis requirement through Concordia University in the Media Studies program of the Communications department. My research concerns women, craft, community, and politics. I wish to investigate how female crafters understand the political and community-formation aspects of craft, and how this relates to research on these topics in various fields (including feminist theory and communitarian studies). While I am interested in theoretical understandings of these topics, my primary area of interest is the meaning that craft has for contemporary female crafters.

I plan to interview individuals who craft regarding their understandings and feelings about craft, and I would very much appreciate your participation in this project. While I hope we can engage in a free-flowing discussion on this subject, I do have a few questions that I hope we can address. For example, I would like to know how and why you started crafting, how you see craft as fitting into our culture of consumption, whether you consider there to be a relationship between feminism or globalization politics and craft, and what your feelings are about 'community', especially as it relates to craft. When the individual interviews are complete, I will invite you to participate in a group craft session and discussion. Participation in this discussion will, of course, be optional. You will also have the option of reviewing my summary of our interview (and eventually, the analysis) to ensure that I have represented your words accurately.

If you are interested in participating or would like to verify the authenticity of this project, please contact me at _____ or my supervisor, professor Kim Sawchuk at (_____)

I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Jen Anisef

*** Consent forms for male crafters contain this additional paragraph:

As described above, my research interest centers on female crafters. However, I do feel that understanding male crafters' perceptions of these topics will be an important element of my research. It will help me identify whether women's experience of contemporary craft is unique, and how male and female perceptions intersect.

Appendix F: Participant Consent Form.**Participant Consent Form**

I, _____ agree to be interviewed and understand that the conversation will be recorded with the intention of contributing to Jen Anisef's thesis paper, "Crafting a Revolution?: Intersections between craft, community, and politics for contemporary female crafters", as well as potential future publications. I am aware of my rights as a participant; that I can choose for my identity to remain confidential, demand that certain information remain private and excluded from publication, and even withdraw from the research process at any time.

I have been informed that I can contact the principal investigator, Jen Anisef, at _____ should I require further information about the project or questions concerning my participation. I may also contact supervisor Professor Kim Sawchuk, at (_____ from the Communications Department at Concordia University to verify the authenticity of the research, confirm the identity of the researcher and/or communicate any concerns about the research.

Witness Signature:

Date:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Researcher's Signature:

Date:

Glossary: Knitting Terms

Materials and gauge: Before commencing a project the knitter selects a particular yarn and needle size to work with. This will determine the texture and density of the piece.

Casting on: A foundational row of stitches is placed upon the needle in order to begin knitting.

Knitting pattern: A pattern dictates every last stitch one must knit to produce a fixed outcome.

Increases and decreases: The addition or reduction in the number of stitches in a row in order to change the shape of a garment.

Loose knit: If a garment is knit loosely – on a large gauge needle or with very little tension - then it will be very flexible and malleable in form.

Casting off: Used to finish an edge or segment. Loose ends are woven in to the piece.