

Handmade 2.0: Women, DIY Networks and the Cultural Economy of Craft

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ABSTRACT

Handmade 2.0: Women, DIY Networks and the Cultural Economy of Craft

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This dissertation is a feminist ethnography of the contemporary craft scene in North America. It examines do-it-yourself (DIY) networks of indie crafts as a significant cultural economy and site of women's creative labour, moving beyond existing research, which has historically focused on craft as primarily associated with women's domestic activity, or as a *salon refusé* subordinated to the fine arts, or affiliations with turn of the 20th century industrialization. Rather, my research focuses on contemporary craft work as a field of women's cultural production, informal networks and entrepreneurship—a highly contemporary cultural and economic phenomenon buoyed by the rise of the so-called creative class, a DIY ethic and a broader conception of craftwork as “Handmade 2.0,” underscoring the role of digital media and networked communications in the modern craft economy. By contrasting the global ecommerce marketplace, Etsy, and the work of independent crafters, it offers a significant contribution to emergent debates at the intersections of the gendered workplace, flexible labour and (corporatized) cultural production. Specifically, this research makes three key interventions: a reconceptualization and cultural analysis of DIY craft as a Bourdieuan-influenced field of gendered cultural production; a case study and critique of Etsy as a corporatized model and significant marker of social class and distinction; and a feminist cultural analysis of crafty women's making, connecting, and the precarity of their feminized labours.

The research findings underscore the contemporary importance of gendered, informally networked cultural production that must constantly interface with other more entrenched institutions, while also exposing the vast personal and professional networks that female makers as individual entrepreneurs must incessantly nurture to earn esteemed social and cultural capital—both on- and offline. These dynamics require crafty women to play multiple roles in the circuit of culture, and most often for paltry wages and at significant emotional cost. By way of a critical feminist analysis, it concludes that today's indie craft represents a complex and dynamic web of tensions, discourses and contradictions as women negotiate the material and emotional labours of their multiple identities and investments in the ‘always on’ work/lifestyle environment of the digital age. Finally, by calling for the continued vigilance of feminist inquiry and policy and advocacy work, I suggest pathways for future research as new technologies, social media and economic models continue to evolve and affect this growing sector of flexible forms of women's creative work existing outside conventional employment structures and social protections.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	vii
Introduction	1
Starting-up: my early career	4
The contemporary craft moment: Handmade 2.0	11
Why study DIY craft? Why now?	16
Chapter outline.....	21
Chapter 2 Literature Review: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks	26
Situating craft.....	28
Cultural economy	36
Bourdieu’s cultural field theory	41
Moral economy and cultural work	47
Feminisms, political economy and cultural production	52
The aesthetics of cultural production.....	66
Web 2.0 and participative media	68
Chapter 3 Method and Methodology	73
Research design	73
Politics of access	77
On feminist methods	79
On ethnography	83
Adapting ethnography for digital environments as cultural field sites	85
Individual research methodologies	87
Chapter 4 A Handmade Life: Craft’s Habitus, Etsy and the Constraints of a Corporatized Model	99
DIY craft as a cultural field	100
Entering the circuit of culture	111
DIY craft’s habitus: Etsy, a case study	117
Disposition and taste: cultural capital, class and the consumption of DIY craft	136
Conclusion	154
Chapter 5 Craft’s Feminized Labours: Women, Making and Connecting	159
Crafty women	160
Crafting: then and now	162
Contradictions: renewed interest in craft in the digital era	166
Making is connecting	169
Post-Fordism, gender and immaterial labour	184
DIY craft as a precarious feminized sector	190
Conclusion	208

Chapter 6	Conclusion: Threading Together of my Intellectual Handiwork.....	211
	Summary of research	212
	Personal investment	213
	Research contributions and considerations	216
	Notes toward future research directions	223
Works Cited	230
Appendix A	Research Ethics Approval and Sample Consent Form	246
Appendix B	Summary Chart and List of Interviewees.....	249

List of Figures

Figures 1, 2 & 3	Feather skirt, Pencil case and Tote bag made by DIY crafters at <i>Emeline&Annabelle</i>	1
Figure 4	Circuit of culture. Johnson, R. 1986/87.....	46
Figure 5	The short circuit. Soar, M. 2002.....	48
Figure 6	Fringe necklace by Angie J. of <i>Norwegian Wood</i>	116
Figure 7	2012 Etsy year-end statistics.....	122
Figure 8	Etsy site navigation and interface (June 30, 2005).....	125
Figure 9	Etsy site navigation and interface (November 2013).....	126
Figure 10	Etsy mission statement.....	130
Figure 11	“Dolly Parton” by Jenny Hart.....	144
Figure 12	“Iggy Pop” by Jenny Hart.....	144
Figure 13.	Etsy Office.....	148
Figure 14.	Etsy yarn-bombed décor.....	149
Figure 15.	“Handpicked items” feature on Etsy home page.....	150
Figure 16.	<i>Door Sixteen</i> Etsy Tastemaker page.....	153
Figure 17.	Drape vest by Angie J. of <i>Norwegian Wood</i>	163
Figure 18.	Bath salts by Anne. D. of <i>Dot & Lil</i>	163
Figure 19.	Obi belt by Emeline V. of <i>Emeline&Annabelle</i>	163
Figure 20.	Vancouver Make It show by Jenna H. of <i>Make It Productions</i>	163
Figure 21.	Tie necklace by Marie-Pier L. of <i>Days of August</i>	163
Figure 22.	Historical stuffy dolls by Chen R. of <i>Late Greats</i>	163

Introduction

DIY craft today is a movement. It's about women who make stuff with their own hands. And, there's a worth in something that you make in comparison to something that you buy, and that's in everything. It's in food. It's in clothing. It's in your home. It's in your work. This isn't entirely new, but now it's not about sheer necessity or just hobby. It's different. It's about being creative in our urban, fast-paced world. It's about being your own boss. It's about collaborating and connecting with a community, both face-to-face in our sew lounge and also online through blogs and Facebook and Instagram. It's why we opened Emeline&Annabelle in the first place.

(Interview, Emeline V., March 7, 2012)



Figure 1, 2, and 3: Feather skirt, Pencil cases and Tote bag made by DIY crafters at *Emeline&Annabelle*

I met Emeline Villedary¹—co-owner of *Emeline&Annabelle*, the Montreal sew lounge, DIY craft space and café—in the spring of 2010. Although I had already been following the rise of DIY craft for several years, the opening of a craft workspace in my own neighbourhood and getting to know the two 30-something entrepreneurs affirmed my impulses that the renaissance of craft was something quite different than that of previous generations.

¹Emeline V. is one of my research participants, a group that I introduce in more detail in Chapter 5. Participants' real names are used throughout as per the interviewees' consent form (see Appendix A).

As I pieced together what would become the first quilt in my life as a crafter, I engaged in friendly conversation with the half-dozen women sorting out patterns, cutting material and hemming garments in the cozy confines of the Emeline&Annabelle sew lounge on a Tuesday night in June 2010. In this very 21st-century space, I carefully matched fabrics and sewed seams, while the discussion flowed. We talked about our latest projects, the events of the day and the latest news of our families, much as our crafting forebearers down the centuries would have done in their sewing circles, church bazaars and family kitchens.

In quiet moments, I wondered how we had all come to be here—modern women in our 20s and 30s, many with full-time careers, exploring our shared interest in making things with our hands, while still taking a moment every now and again to check our email or the latest Facebook post. It wasn't about domesticity, décor or hobby; it was a new way working, of making and selling handmade goods on Etsy, of connecting and sharing outside the home—in cafés, on Flickr pages, or in the sew lounges of our cities.

We were, I knew, typical of many groups throughout North America in that we were part of craft's resurgence. But what were we doing in an urban storefront and online environments that would have been foreign to our mothers and grandmothers as place for pursuing what were once quaintly known as the domestic arts? And, what was going in the broader world of craft and in the lives of my sewing sisters that inevitably directed

so many of our conversations to whether and how we could make a living from our hand making and those who already were?

* * *

This doctoral research examines do-it-yourself (DIY) networks of indie crafts as a significant cultural economy and site of women’s creative labour. Specifically, I investigate contemporary craft work as a field of women’s cultural production, informal networks and entrepreneurship—a highly contemporary cultural and economic phenomenon buoyed by the rise of the so-called creative class, a do-it-yourself ethic and a broader conception of craftwork as “Handmade 2.0,” implying an intersection with digital media, new technologies and networked communications as key to the “new wave of craft.”

Within this context, the following two research questions guide my inquiry:

1. *How to explain the significant turn to do-it-yourself, micro-economies of handcrafted goods and “feminized” creative labour in the present moment, a seemingly paradoxical cultural development in the age of digital media, networked communications and a rising sense of dematerialization in cultural production?*
2. *And, by framing this new wave of DIY craft as a “cultural economy,” how might we understand the constraints and rewards between the labour and lifestyle of crafters as embroiled with questions of gender, the development and impact of social, cultural and economic capitals, and the material and structural authority of late capitalism?*

This project began with a commitment to the importance of studying lived culture.

Indeed, as Raymond Williams (1981) suggested over 30 years ago, culture is the symbolic currency that enables us to make sense of daily life. My interest in DIY craft extends Williams’ notion to include *work* as an essential aspect of everyday culture—one that preoccupies much of modern life and is in currently in flux as conventional types of

employment are shifting and new modes of flexible, production-based labour enabled by networked technology are emerging in their place. Furthermore, contemporary craft is marked by an overwhelmingly *female* production workforce, emphasizing a need to understand the gendered aspects of its labours, identities and privileges. As such, my research is concerned with investigating DIY craft in North America from 2005 onwards through a feminist-oriented critical ethnography that maps the contours of DIY craft as a field of cultural production, unravels the impact of global craft e-marketplace, Etsy, as a corporatized model in the cultural economy of craft, and analyzes the making, connecting and labouring of the crafty women as entrepreneurs and consumer-producers. This study is, of course, reflective of a particular time and place and takes advantage of the nature of ethnographic work to produce a highly-contextualized and in-depth investigation, which allows for “thick description” (Geertz 1973: 5-6, 9-10), yet is not intended to produce widely generalizable findings. I do not claim to investigate all of craft, but rather I focus on the particularities of DIY craft as a field of contemporary cultural production and distinct from hobby craft or professional fine craft or particular genres or histories. Moreover, this study is bound by inevitable constraints of limited time and funding inherent to ensuring a doctoral project that is feasible and remains timely in its contribution to contemporary knowledge production.

Starting-up: my early career

This research stems, in no small part, from my professional experience founding and growing a visual media production and licensing company, one of many creative companies established in the 2000s as the internet, digital media and e-commerce

increasingly took root. The company, aptly named *Veer*², was founded to diverge from the norm and disrupt an established market by presenting our products (digital photography, illustration, typefaces and motion footage) with imagination and style, to appeal to the design sensibilities and “inner circle” of peers in the graphic design community. We were designers too and we shared a common vocabulary with our audience, who understood the cultural references and affinities of our brand and voice, which gave our efforts credibility.

Veer was more than just a random start-up. Many members of our founding team had worked together at earlier companies in the visual media industry. When a number of us were spun out after an ownership change at another company, we felt there was still opportunity in the market to offer a curated selection of products and appeal to designers, but we knew we needed to do things differently in order to successfully compete with the other major players in our market space: big, faceless companies—the Walmarts of the industry—with uninspiring communications materials and approaches. Veer, on the other hand, was steeped in design. Where our competitors were large databanks of stock images that focused on quantity over quality of products, we followed a “look what you can do” philosophy with our images and typefaces and produced monthly print catalogs and web site features that showcased compelling designs and beautiful typography. We played up common misunderstandings of graphic designers’ identities in our merchandise products with whimsical t-shirts that read “I draw pictures all day” or our “Kern” zip-up hoodie, an inside reference to typesetting. We were constantly interacting

² <http://www.veer.com>

with the creative community through our print communications, web site and blog, at conferences and in co-productions, like our involvement in the documentary film *Helvetica*⁴, directed by Gary Hustwit. Our goal was to inspire creativity at every touch point with the company and we were rewarded with many design industry awards and accolades⁵, affirming our approach within the graphic design and advertising communities.

Being part of a successful start-up was a remarkable experience. We were completely immersed in a culture of production and we were fortunate to be able to build a corporate culture that valued creativity and collaboration, and understood that making mistakes is part of the creative process. For the most part, Veer was a very progressive organization with a sincere commitment to gender equality. As part of the management team, I modeled my feminist values as leadership qualities, and was able to put them into action through the strategies I employed, my approaches to decision making, and the way I mentored up-and-coming team members. I influenced the culture and policies of the company and played a key role in creative decisions about visual representations of women in our print and web communications. Rewardingly, I played a central role in developing our visual and brand strategies. We designed our look and voice to be positive, warm and witty, and we expressly avoided using violent, gratuitously sexual or politically charged images or ideas out of context for shock value or to grab attention. I facilitated opportunities for staff to debate and critique popular culture and visual references, and

⁴ <http://www.veer.com/ideas/helveticafilm/>

⁵ <http://www.veer.com/about/media/awards/>

the results of those discussions worked their way into our communications with our audience. This became part of every stage of our working practice—from developing the creative brief, brainstorming and creating design concepts, through to pitching, execution and proofing. For example, a cover image had to be defended for its aesthetic qualities, affinity to our look and voice, and to the broader cultural references and relevance to the conceptual idea we were trying to express. I was not alone in taking this approach and our team was conscious that creative work in advertising and visual culture at large often used sexist and objectifying representations of women as tactics to garner attention, yet it was an area that I personally championed as a means of enacting my feminist values and required ongoing discussion and vigilance on my part to ensure these issues were addressed and that each creative execution involved such discussions and review.

Overall, we understood that to be a peer in the design community was to share a common language, to care about the design process, to sweat the details, and to understand that inspiring creativity was at the heart of all our work. We lived the “work hard, play hard” ethic of a start-up company, and were rewarded by the following we received as a respected brand in the design community.

After the company was established, my role evolved from what it had been during the early start-up phase, which was being primarily responsible for communications and media relations, and cultivating partnerships with other creative professional, photographers and complementary brands. In 2005, I took on the role of Vice President, International, leveraging my international communications background, French- and

German-language skills and ecommerce competency. I was responsible for expanding the company outside of North America, establishing our European headquarters in Berlin and an international distribution channel. I spent three years living and working in Berlin and found this experience both interesting and challenging. I was able to lead an excellent team of creative people and adapt our approach to be localized in new markets. It resulted in Veer becoming a leading source for design products and services in over a hundred countries worldwide and contributing to the company being successfully acquired in 2007.

Yet, despite all our success, I grappled with the precarious realities and constraints of creative work as “emotional labour”—that is, the investment of personal identity, a high degree of care and nurture, and embodied emotional commitment transferred to the workplace (see Hochschild 1983). I also experienced tensions related to personal agency, negotiation and power relations due to the intensity and demands of a start-up culture. I personally struggled with what I would now call the covert nature of living my feminist values inside the company. I had no role models or mentors. There was often an implicit deferral to the loudest male voice at the table. There was also, at times, an underlying, unexpressed competition among some of the women in the company. I found myself working and travelling 24/7, particularly as I took charge of international expansion. I made many personal sacrifices, and worked to the point of exhaustion, handling ever-increasing levels of responsibility and stress. And the more successful the company became, the more my work revolved around management, numbers and administration, and the further away it moved from the creative practices I truly loved.

When I became interested in what I now understand as “cultural economy,” I was initially looking for a means to understand my own work experience, and to untangle the seemingly endless questions about what defined Veer’s production culture and how our practices, structures, beliefs and values inflected our products with creativity, imagination and style. I also wanted to better comprehend the “dark matter” of our work—the power relations, gender politics, economic imperatives and competing discourses that marked the constant tension between commercial and creative activity. I lacked the conceptual knowledge, terminology and theoretical frameworks to explain the complex web of factors that characterized the lived culture of production of which I was a part. Veer was a creative “indie” company—where creativity, independence and a belief that our work contributed to something bigger than just profit margins was entrenched in our culture—yet, the economic imperative was always biting at our heels. In all ways, starting the company and being part of its success was tremendously satisfying, yet the questions and struggles I experienced were what led me to return to graduate school to pursue a PhD and to research questions of women’s creative labour, cultures of production and the characteristics of this type of labour as they relate to identity, subjectivities, and cultural economics.

I share this personal narrative because it is this experience that is the fuel to what Stuart Hall has pointed out (and as Matt Soar has reminded me): that cultural studies work must be directed at issues that really *bother* us. The questions that really burn for me are made explicit in this dissertation and I suspect the issues that really bothered me in my professional career at Veer will continue to fuel my research as my academic career

evolves (I reference this experience periodically throughout this dissertation to validate my observations and insights where relevant).

However, these questions are not confined to the professional realm, nor what might be considered conventional employment. They apply equally well to the burgeoning world of DIY craft. In rekindling my own creative practices and as part of my transitioning career focus I sought out community, both on- and offline, within the circles of DIY craft communities and informal production networks. I have been following the rise of the DIY craft scene for more than five years now and have been greatly intrigued by the connections, communities and cultures that are emerging and expanding—exponentially, as it has transpired—due to web and mobile technologies, social networks and the spread of digital culture and production tools into the hands of individual crafters. I was also intrigued to find that the community of crafters was made up of mostly women.

Interestingly, as I relate in the opening anecdote, in my informal conversations with fellow crafters, I came across many other women with similar work experiences to my own. These women, too, were motivated to find more satisfying creative work outside the so-called professional realm and structures, yet were now confronting questions about their labour as crafters and entrepreneurs. At the same time, however, they were bolstered by the freedom, flexibility and potential that DIY craft seemed to offer.

The contemporary craft moment: Handmade 2.0

In December 2007, *The New York Times Magazine* ran an 11-page feature article entitled “Handmade 2.0.”⁶ It examined the latest crafting craze, its do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic, intersection with new media and digital culture, and a general enthusiasm for buying and selling all things handmade. More than a decade earlier, American tastemaker Martha Stewart had founded a multi-channel media empire on the idea that individuals could themselves make their homes, and consequently, their lives more beautiful. Her books, magazine and, eventually, television show, radio segments and website featured numerous examples of DIY craft projects—from sewing to seasonal decorating. In 2006, O’Reilly Media, best known for its tech-related publications, launched a new magazine called *Craft*⁷, now an online publication, website and blog, chock full of projects, instructional videos, patterns and columns by “featured crafters.” More recently, *Wired Magazine* pronounced on its April 2011 cover that “The DIY Revolution Starts Now” and devoted the entire issue to “How to Make Stuff.”

Fledgling author and filmmaker Faythe Levine describes her encounter with DIY craft as follows:

Just a few years after my first Renegade [Craft Fair in Chicago] experience, the craft scene was growing and developing. It reached out virtually through websites, blogs and online stores, while brick-and-mortar boutiques, studios, galleries, and craft fairs connected the greater public regionally. Worried that things would change too fast and all of the accomplishments of our community would never be accounted for, I felt driven to capture the heart of the movement, and I set out in 2006 to document the indie craft community (2008: x).

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/magazine/16Crafts-t.html?>, accessed Sep. 15, 2010

⁷ <http://www.craftzine.com>

Documenting “the new wave of craft in America,” Levine interviewed more than 80 crafters, makers, artists, curators, organizers, and historians—95 percent of whom were women—for a feature-length documentary called *Handmade Nation: The Rise of DIY, Art, Craft and Design*, released in November 2009.

Knitting, sewing and crochet—once the realm of grandmothers and the church ladies’ bazaar—have been taken up by a new generation of hip trendsetters, or so-called hipsters—urban, stylish, creative, and culturally astute women.

Many who are attracted to such activity cite its association with community, its Feminist overtones and the satisfaction that can be derived from tactile experience in an increasingly abstract, artificial world (Adamson, 2010: 10).

Levine captures in her documentary the indie community’s common drive to create, and she characterizes handmade goods as “a marriage of historical technique, punk and DIY ethos, influenced by traditional handiwork, modern aesthetics, politics, feminism and art” (2008: xi). By Levine’s account, “DIY is not only a term we use, but a lifestyle we live” (ibid.).

Over the last decade, more and more indie craft fairs have sprung up. Levine founded the Art vs. Craft Fair in Milwaukee; Handmade Bazaar ran for 10 years in Portland, Oregon; and The Renegade Craft Fair is now held yearly in “urban epicenters of creative indie-entrepreneurship,”⁹ including Brooklyn, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Austin,

⁹ <http://www.renegadecraft.com/about>, accessed Feb. 11, 2011

and London. According to their websites, these events differentiate themselves from traditional arts and craft fairs by outwardly promoting and cultivating DIY and indie-craft culture and, as one site states, by choosing to “purposely feature a curated, eclectic array of young and emergent designers producing original, handmade goods¹⁰”. Crafters are described as having “do-it-yourself backgrounds whereby they create innovative work using traditional craft methods, but not based on preexisting patterns” (ibid.). Products on sale include jewellery, clothing, paper goods, knitted wares, linens, artwork, prints and posters, designed objects and collectibles, toys, bath products, and many other handmade items. Closer to home, Montréal’s DIY craft community is similarly active, with such fairs as Smart Design Mart and Puces POP, and trendy craft cafes and sewing lounges—the modern equivalents of the sewing and knitting circles of yesteryear. Montréal’s craft scene has also included atelier-boutiques such as Emeline&Annabelle, which, until it closed in the fall of 2012, tagged itself as “your dream craft workspace,” and Effiloché—*salle de couture et de tricot*.

Etsy—the online marketplace that bills itself as “your place to buy and sell things handmade”—has skyrocketed to prominence as *the* global destination for crafters to sell their wares and for shoppers to buy unique gifts and handmade items.¹² Launched in 2005 (I have been a member since May 7, 2009), Etsy took the DIY craft fair model and made it digital, hooking it up to the tubes and wires of the internet, which vastly extended its reach and access for DIY makers and buyers alike. Labeled by some as “the eBay for

¹⁰ ibid.

¹² <http://www.etsy.com>

crafts,” Etsy lets sellers set up their own storefront and profile pages, choose a clever brand name for their shop and upload photos of their goods. It is the presence of Etsy, along with the other marketplaces, platforms, media and technologies that are accessible to modern-day crafters that distinguishes the DIY craft movement from its predecessors. Sellers handle all production, inventory and shipping to the customer, while the company provides the digital infrastructure and ecommerce capability, and promotes the goods on the site through multiple marketing channels, including daily “Etsy Finds” emails and blog posts, and on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram. The company takes a percentage of each sale, making it one of the few second-generation web properties that does not depend on advertising revenue as its underlying business model.

Etsy shoppers can search by keyword and category, such as needlecraft, ceramics and pottery, clothing or “geekery.” Alternatively, they can browse from galleries of handpicked items curated by Etsy staff under such titles as “Complement Me,” “Be My Valentine” or “Modernist Thought”—a gallery inspired by the popular television show *Mad Men* that features 1960s-inspired furniture, linens, artworks and clothing from a variety of Etsy sellers. The site also has an extensive “Community” section that includes forums, chats, virtual labs, events and a resources section of tips and tools for sellers to enhance their merchandising and marketing efforts. The Etsy blog offers news, events, videos and posts on featured sellers, and “get-the-look” photomontages, with links to individual products for sale. This area of the site also presents how-to tutorials and a section on “craftivism,” that connects crafters to social causes and political activism.

According to the website, “The Etsy community spans the globe with buyers and sellers coming from more than 150 countries. Etsy sellers number in the hundreds of thousands.¹³” Further, Etsy is one of the most trafficked websites on the Internet: Alexa.com¹⁴ ranks it 65th in the United States (meaning that there are only 64 other sites with higher traffic rankings) and 242nd globally, with more than 26,000 other websites linking into the Etsy marketplace.¹⁵ In charting Etsy’s rise to prominence, *New York Times* reporter Rob Walker zeroed in on the fact that the DIY craft as a movement is “not something Etsy created but rather something it is trying to make bigger, more visible and more accessible—partly by mixing high-minded ideas about consumer responsibility with the unsentimental notion of the profit motive”¹⁶.

New sites have followed in Etsy’s footsteps, including Cargoh and Folksy.co.uk, in Canada and the United Kingdom, respectively. As one of the newer entrants, Cargoh, is already garnering plenty of attention in the DIY design and craft community. The company’s website describes Cargoh as follows:

a place where artists, musicians, designers, and other miscellaneous creative types can be seen, heard, and collected in one community driven marketplace. We’re all of this and more, wrapped up in a user-friendly, inexpensive solution to marketing and selling goods online. Share the *Cargoh* love!¹⁷

¹³ <http://www.etsy.com/about>, accessed February 4, 2011

¹⁴ Alexa.com provides traffic rankings, statistics and metrics for indexed web sites. It is considered a reliable source of data on the Internet as a pioneer in the field since its inception in 1996.

¹⁵ <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/etsy.com>, accessed February 6, 2011

¹⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/magazine/16Crafts-t.html?>, accessed Sep. 15, 2010

¹⁷ <http://www.cargoh.com>, accessed February 6, 2011

The new wave of DIY craft has elevated select individuals to indie cult status—veritable poster women for the creative ethos and DIY ethic. Debbie Stoller, founder and editor of the third-wave feminist magazine *BUST*, for example, first launched “She’s Crafty” as a monthly column in that publication in the late 1990s. Shortly thereafter, Stoller emerged as a craft media personality and how-to entrepreneur after starting a “stitch ’n bitch” group in New York City and penning a series of books under the same moniker. “Packed with Feminist slogans and unintimidating step-by-step instructions, Stoller’s books are reminiscent of the 1970s Punk magazines that advised readers, ‘Here’s one chord, here’s another, now start your own band” (Adamson 2010: 10). Indeed, Stoller’s “get your knit on” and “knit happens” mottos captured the hip, indie ethos of the contemporary moment of DIY craft culture. But, as Adamson suggests,

if Punk was expressly anti-capitalist, the “Stitch ’n Bitch nation” is simultaneously a viable subculture and successful trademark in its own right. In the context of the astonishingly high economic value of the hobby crafts as a whole (estimated by one organization at \$30 billion in 2006 in the United States alone), even Stoller might be considered a fringe phenomenon—she stands at the hip end of a huge industry (ibid.).

Why study DIY craft? Why now?

The seeming contradiction between subculture and trademark to which Adamson alludes is one of multiple lines of tension that emerged when charting the development of DIY craft, complicating the problematic. While not distinct binaries, these uncomfortable juxtapositions encompass varying discourses on craft as a set of practices, on DIY craft as cultural politic and communal ethic, on “buying indie”, on the intermingling of labour and lifestyle, and on the political economy, power relations, and gender dynamics that underpin contemporary DIY craft. While Etsy is a community for creativity, crafts and

consumption of all things handmade, it is also a for-profit enterprise providing the digital infrastructure and commercial backbone for an army of craft entrepreneurs—mostly women, many of whom aspire to leverage their craft skills into a way to quit their day jobs¹⁸. At the same time, the DIY ethos, empowerment rhetoric, creative impulse and genuine desire to create alternative micro-economies—individuals buying from other individuals—are the warp and weft of today’s craft culture.

The combined thrust of all of these elements, along with the questions my professional experience raised and clear gaps in both the literature and formal research on DIY craft as a cultural economy and site of informal networks of women’s creative labour compelled me to pursue this study. In my view, this work is needed to help make sense of today’s ever-shifting economic climate, the changing roles and identities of women with regard to creative work, and the rapidly growing sector of the economy that DIY production represents—all in all to provide a comprehensive yet nuanced response to what is clearly a complex cultural phenomenon.

Three principals underlie my research into cultural production by women in informal networks, and help make it a timely pursuit, relevant to contemporary concerns. Together, these underlying principles formed the backbone of my research and led me to expressly examine the new indie craft movement as encompassing women’s cultural production, informal networks and entrepreneurship in the digital age.

¹⁸ www.nytimes.com/2007/12/16/magazine/16Crafts-t.html?, accessed February 6, 2011

First, *new modes of cultural work are at the forefront of today's societal shifts*. In light of the precarious state of the global economy and post-Fordist regimes, creative, flexible and production-based labour predicated on innovations in communication and information technology may be requiring individuals to negotiate the economic turmoil traditional enterprises are facing by carving out new types of livelihood. As Richard Sennett has suggested, “if institutions no longer provide a long-term frame, the individual may have to improvise his or her life narrative” (2006: 4). Doing so, however, requires a high tolerance for uncertainty about how one makes a living and necessitates acknowledging and responding to financial considerations as well as grappling with questions of what characterizes meaningful work and creative satisfaction. Discourses around the “the rise of the creative class” (Florida, 2004) indicate a shift by its members toward flexible work that is potentially both economically viable and creatively fulfilling. Underscored by a discernible economic and cultural imperative, members of the creative class perform intellectual labour or knowledge work, in which human creativity is a prized economic resource. In addition, a certain work-lifestyle mix is deemed to reflect the skills and values of these workers.

Second, there is a distinct *lack of research on informal cultural economies—in Canada and internationally*. Notably, the indie craft movement is a vibrant, growing sector of the economy that is characterized by more informal, dispersed networks of work. Given their more distributed and versatile nature, they are, arguably, more difficult to study than formal workplaces, conventional labour groups, and professional practices, which, by contrast, are included in government censuses, occupational statistics and documented by

professional associations or unions. The dispersed and informally networked aspects of DIY crafts are predicated on the entanglement of economic and cultural phenomena (du Gay and Pryke 2002). Although there are very limited sources for statistical information, a recent Etsy report indicates in the United States that:

Though government data is outdated and fragmented, the Government Accountability Office estimated in 2006 that 31% of the U.S. workforce is comprised of non-traditional contract, self-employed or freelance workers. Over the last several years, non-employer firms have increased from about 14 million in 1992 to more than 22 million in 2010. Meanwhile, the number of employer businesses has remained relatively constant.¹⁹

These trends suggest a pressing need to investigate the dynamics and implications of creative work and the production of culture as vital facets of contemporary capitalism—particularly in the case of non-traditional informal economies of cultural production.

Third, DIY craft comprises *a significantly gendered workforce of cultural producers*: up to 95 percent of DIY crafters are women (Levine and Heimerl, 2008). This calls for analysis that mobilizes feminist theory and research methods to counter notable limitations in existing work about the role of women in cultural economies. To date, the scholarly research either views craft as the poor second cousin of the fine arts, focuses on craft as design practice and skill, or looks solely at its reception and representational qualities. Moreover, research around women and craft is significantly tethered to craft's historic place in the domestic arts or as associated with William Morris and his fellow members of

¹⁹ Etsy Economic Impact Report:
https://www.etsy.com/blog/news/files/2013/11/Etsy_Redefining-Entrepreneurship_November-2013.pdf

the Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the last century. Thus, existing research expresses two distinct biases: it emphasizes formal forms of professional work; and it views craft solely as a type of domesticity and hobby, as such these analyses are narrow and problematic. They also fail to recognize the impact of today's digital media and convergence culture, in which the web, peer-to-peer values and globally networked communities have enabled crafters to work together to nurture entrepreneurialism, preserve women's heritage and wield economic power in new and distinct ways not available to earlier generations of artisanal producers. These networks also present valuable sites to examine DIY craft production as a cultural economy and to further analyze through a feminist lens how they contribute to producing, mediating and reproducing cultural form and discourse.

With these principles framing my research, I examined the production, circulation and consumption of handmade goods and culture through a variety of overlapping feminist, rhetorical, critical and digital lenses. I uncovered the specific attributes, values and working practices that characterize the culture of production of women in indie craft. I also established the characteristics that give shape to DIY craft and the lives of crafty women—their habitus (Bourdieu 1984; 1993) and their accumulation of cultural and social capital, and to understand both the constraints and rewards of labour and livelihood resulting from the entanglement of questions of gender, micro-entrepreneurship and the material and structural authority of late capitalism. These vital considerations have been significantly underrepresented in cultural studies research, which gave impetus to my feminist analysis and critique.

Chapter outline

Chapter 2: Literature Review

My research draws from multiple literatures across various disciplines, including media and communication studies, cultural studies, cultural economy, feminism, art and crafts history, political economy, and internet studies. In the literature review, I examine key concepts and establish the theoretical frameworks that situate my study. I begin with an historical view of craft to shed light on the ideological investments and tensions of specific periods, feminist influences and social, political and economic conditions relative to women's craft labour. I then engage the literature of cultural economy under the cultural studies rubric, theorizing the relationship between culture and economy as closely entangled, and arguing for a focus on studying the "cultures of production" of DIY crafters. Next, I provide an overview of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of the field of cultural production (1993) and discuss the central concepts that I mobilize from his oeuvre. I also introduce Richard Johnson's (1986/87) model of the "circuit of culture" and its advancement by Matt Soar (2002) to help understand the role of cultural intermediaries as key individuals in the circuits, who imprint meaning and affect the symbolic value of their handmade wares. Further, I integrate recent theory from cultural studies, which examines creative work relative to questions of the moral economy, probing connections with identity formation and a range of arguments that surround the debate on the virtues and antagonisms of creative work as part of contemporary capitalism. I then mobilize critical feminist literatures to explore the intersections of gender, labour and political economy and their impact on women's identity and livelihood relative to power relations and gendered hierarchies. Finally, I engage with the

key concepts, theories and vocabulary of participatory media culture, Web 2.0 and critical internet studies to further contextualize the research milieu. Together these literatures prepare the reader for the specificity of my study and work in hand with the methodological theories I employed.

Chapter 3: Method and Methodology

This chapter details the research design and the methods I employ to frame my field research and its analysis. My methodological orientation begins from a commitment to feminist methods and reflexivity, where I engage the work of Donna Haraway (1991) and Laurel Richardson (1998) as critical feminist approaches that foreground gender as an analytical lens, recognize subjectivities and value the process of writing itself as a method of knowing. Further this chapter outlines my ethnographic approach to the study of DIY craft as a cultural economy. It is guided by ethnographies of cultural production as modeled in cases studied by McRobbie (1998), Dornfeld (1998), and Soar (2002), and Stevens' (1998) cultural field analysis of architecture. Importantly, I integrate the evolving collection of work that explores the specificities of digital environments as cultural field sites and ethnography's value in the age of networked cultures, including research by Boellstorff et al. (2012), Kozinets (2010), Markham and Baym (2009), and Hine (2000). Finally, I review each of the specific methodologies I followed as part of my approach: participant-observation, digital and visual data capture of online content, a case study and immersive digital ethnography of Etsy, and eight semi-structured interview with members of the DIY craft community in Montréal and elsewhere and one auto-ethnographic interview.

Chapter 4: A Handmade Life: Craft's Habitus, Etsy and the Constraints of a Corporatized Model

In this chapter, I contextualize the indie crafts movement in North America since 2005 and the influences that led to its emergence as a field of cultural production. I open with a discussion of the DIY craft as situated within the field of culture, including how culture, as theorized by Bourdieu, serves social functions and is often employed as a means to mask power relations. I then explore the nature of informal production networks that comprise the world of DIY craft and that set it apart from professional fields cultural production, making a case for the particularities that constitute new, flexible modes of cultural work and entrepreneurialism, exemplified in contemporary craft. Throughout, I mobilize Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural intermediaries and social and cultural capitals as means to analyze the dynamics and tensions at play in the cultural economy of DIY craft. As a key component of DIY craft's habitus, a significant part of this chapter presents on an in-depth case study of Etsy as a corporatized model. Specifically, I investigate its structures, discourses, visual and rhetorical strategies, and gendered hierarchies as means to unpack and analyze Etsy's impact on contemporary crafting and those who work among its informal networks. I also examine the influence of network sociality and the expressly commercial context of technological individualism as held in productive tension with feminist notions of community that characterize women's cultural production in DIY craft. Finally, I take a broad look at notions of taste and the forms of capital (economic, social, cultural), power relations, and influence present in DIY craft, particularly noting the role of the indie craft "star system," and the role of Etsy as an arbiter of taste and marker of class.

Chapter 5: Craft's Feminized Labours: Women, Making and Connecting

By focusing on the experiences of individual crafters, I address Etsy's failure to acknowledge questions of labour, the gendered nature of its production workforce or specific practices of making and operating a craft micro-enterprise, which emerged from the previous chapter. I unpack the results of my interviews, craft community immersion and participant-observation, and self-reflexive experiences as assembled through my field research to explain the significant turn to do-it-yourself, micro-economies of handcrafted goods and "feminized" creative labour in the present moment. I begin this chapter by introducing the group of women I interviewed as part of my research. I then move to an account of what motivated them to start crafting, and a discussion of the renewed interest in craft and the handmade in the digital age. From there, I explore the increasingly blurred lines between craft, work and lifestyle as a significant outcome of the post-Fordist work environment and the new forms and conditions of work that characterize the digital economy (McRobbie 2010). For crafty women, these include connecting through making as amplified by the mediated and networked communications of blogging and social media. Consequently, I analyze the resulting feminist discourse that has been woven into the indie craft community through these means. Finally, I critically examine craft production and its gendered labours, including micro-economies, immaterial and affective labour, and the precarious feminization of work.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Threading Together of my Intellectual Handiwork

In the final chapter and conclusion to the dissertation, I draw together the insights and original contributions to critical feminist scholarship and cultural studies that

characterize do-it-yourself networks of indie craft as a significant cultural economy and site of women's creative labour. I reflect on my personal investment and the implications of this feminist critical ethnography as a vital contribution to cultural studies research, countering the underrepresented concerns and issues facing women in new, flexible modes of creative work. I knit together the implications of Etsy's corporatized model and celebratory rhetoric as contrasted with the everyday experiences of women crafters as micro-entrepreneurs in the digital age. To this end, I offers suggestions toward policy recommendations and advocacy that more readily address questions of social protections and benefits specific to the needs of women and families in this growing sector of the economy, which government seemingly covet under the rhetoric of national digital economic strategies but have no practical programs in place. Finally, I consider additional directions for future research that expressly address the question of sustainability for this type of flexible, feminized, precarious labour. In particular, how women might move beyond the Etsy toward a blended middle ground of collaboratories or co-work social enterprises that would enable sustainable, female-led cultural production conducive to the conditions of the digital age.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

In this chapter I review a selection of key literature from craft and craft history, cultural studies and cultural economy, feminist critical theory and political economy, and participative media and internet studies to situate the scholarly research and theory and provide the necessary frameworks for my study of DIY craft as a cultural economy and site of informal networks of women's creative labour. True to interdisciplinary research, these diverse bodies of literature articulate and assemble in various configurations as a means of drawing out the economic, cultural, political, social and aesthetic considerations and tensions vital to understanding the cultural production among DIY crafters in the contemporary moment.

My main intention with this literature review is to prepare the reader for the field research and analysis of the two related aspects of my investigation. First, for the specificity of the case study of Etsy—as a corporation, marketplace and community, and significant structuring institution in today's production, circulation and consumption of handmade goods. Second, for the group of crafty women—those I interviewed and followed for a period of nearly two years as well as those I encountered online as bloggers, producer-consumers and tastemakers as part of my immersive digital field work. Together these women's everyday experiences of making, connecting and labouring provide valuable insight into the growing cultural economy of DIY craft. Although I will

introduce these women in detail in chapter 5, they include six DIY craft entrepreneurs—four of whom operate Etsy shops—a craft historian and academic, as well as integrating my own experience through an auto-ethnographic interview and participant-observation.

The selective review of literature always requires the researcher to decide what to include and what to leave aside. For this study, three motives guided my choices: (1) contextualizing the field and situating DIY craft relative to its history and to its current manifestation as mode of cultural work enabled by new technologies and micro-entrepreneurship; (2) the need to address gaps in the study of cultures of production, specifically the lack of research on informal networks and the study of women as cultural intermediaries and members of the creative class; and (3) a commitment to feminist epistemologies, which are central to my research trajectory and whereby I have integrated literature anchored within feminist critical theory in light of its special attention to the gendered aspects of labour, identities, practices, representations, technologies and privileges.

Together the literatures that I review establish key conceptual foundations to provoke original and compelling thought and analysis of DIY craft as Handmade 2.0—of women’s cultural production, informal networks and entrepreneurship in today’s digital era.

Situating craft

“... ‘craft’ has floundered recently between many partially-formed definitions. It has displayed what one could describe, if one were being generous, as a plurality of meanings; less charitably, the word has been the epitome of confusion” (Dormer 1997: xi).

Although there are numerous potential entry points to the grouping of literatures that help frame my study, I begin by examining the field and scholarly literature of craft, predominantly out of the disciplines of fine crafts and art history, as means of mapping of its history, discourses, theories and practices to now. Tellingly, the above quote infers that defining craft is as slippery as handling cold, wet clay; it is virtually impossible to pin down one cohesive set of attributes that encompass its long history or myriad of lenses through which it can be understood. Fraught with contradictions, comparisons and conundrums (Is craft art? Is art craft?), it is an unstable compound that insists on an eye to its history to grasp a sense of the discourses, definitions and debates surrounding its classification.

While the making of objects both decorative and functional dates back centuries, the first published record purporting to deal with craft is *The Craftsman*, a printed newsheet produced by Caleb D’Anvers in London in 1729 (Greenhalgh 1997: 21). However, D’Anvers was the pseudonym of English poet and political writer Nicolas Amhurst²⁰, which explains why the journal made no references to handicraft or the skills or trade of making of any kind. Rather, the publisher used the word “craft” in the sense of being

²⁰ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/20522/Nicholas-Amhurst>, accessed January 27, 2013

shrewd, cunning, sly or, indeed, crafty, and strongly implied a sense of “political acumen” (Greenhalgh: 22). Even as craft came to be characterized as “manual art or trade,” it was only loosely connected to the idea of the process of making, and not considered a thing in and of itself. Rather, it could be applied to any form of cultural practice, as is evident in a citation from the 1773 *Dictionary of the English Language* where it is shown that “craft could be applied to poetry, the most cerebral of the arts: ‘A poem is the work of a poet, poetry is his skill or craft of making’” (ibid.). After a decline in use altogether until the late nineteenth century, a surge in the use of the words “craft” and “craftsman” ignited a lasting fuse, “when both became powerful signifiers in advanced debates in the visual arts and in institutional circles” (23). Indeed, the term “craft” became widely used to denote handmade *decorative arts* as well as referring to *the vernacular* and *the politics of work*. Together, these three distinctive “elements of craft” comprise what Greenhalgh has described as the “ideological and intellectual underpinnings of the craft constituency” (25). These constitutive threads remain ideologically significant to contemporary discourses of craft and act as important historical antecedents to aspects of DIY and today’s cultural economy of craft.

Decorative arts

Perhaps the most commonly understood and defining trait of craft’s evolution and history is as the decorative arts. For certain, the decorative element of handmade goods has been present across civilizations, and there is no reason to believe this will not continue, as the contemporary return to crafting suggests. Nonetheless, the evolution of “craft” from the late eighteenth century onwards shows an ideological progression,

whereby the decorative arts took on a succession of meanings stemming predominantly from European society. This notion is particularly important to the tensions that later arose between the arts and crafts in the hierarchy of esteem and value. These tensions emerged from the European classification of visual culture under which the “fine” arts broke off from crafts and led to crafts’ *crise de confiance* and its eventual position of lower status: “[T]here came to be, to use Walter Crane’s phrase, ‘the fine arts, and the arts not so fine’; the decorative arts were, and are, disenfranchised art, *the arts not so fine*” (Greenhalgh 26). Thus, crafts were denied the elevated status of the arts. Instead, painting and sculpture were privileged for having the aesthetic qualities and prestige consistent with the intellectual, religious and taste cultures of cultivated European society and the Enlightenment-era Academies.

[B]y the opening of the nineteenth century, a hierarchy was broadly in place. The developing infrastructure of European professional culture facilitated the further rise of academies, professional thinkers and connoisseurs, who further clarified a system from the amorphous, rolling actuality of object manufacture. The decorative arts steadily congealed into a *salon de refuse* [sic] of genres that cohered only by virtue of their exclusion. Outside the fine arts, there was no fixed nomenclature or hierarchy. Various—and interchangeably—known as the decorative, useful, industrial, applied or ornamental arts, they struggled to maintain a place in intellectual life at exactly the time when intellectual life was being classified and consolidated in museums, academies and universities (Greenhalgh: 28).

Crafts’ disavowal from the system of high arts was not without controversy or debate, drawing in additional distinctions between questions of poetic and prosaic art. The former was deemed to possess the cognitive aspects of creativity and the latter to questions of use-value and function, again elevating the arts as poetics and associating

artistic ideas and concepts as thought-process of the intellect (and refined taste associated with class) in contrast to crafts as assuming the more pejorative connotation of function. Even when healthily patronized, the decorative arts of furniture, ceramics, tapestry, jewellery, metalworks or glass at the high end could not dethrone painting and sculpture. Indeed, the “suffering of the decorative arts within the cultural hegemony thus had nothing to do with quality or confidence, but the abundant presence of both could not reverse the ideological tide” (30). And, for certain, the lower end of earthenware, needlework, textiles, and other handiwork were wholly rejected and dismissed as among the commonplace, the pre-industrial, or as Greenhalgh references, the second constitutive element of craft: the vernacular.

The vernacular

Often understood as the everyday language of a people or ethnic community, the vernacular, as a constituent of craft, was a response to the modernist happenings of industrialization and urbanism of the late 18th and 19th centuries. In this context, the vernacular extends the conception of everydayness to the cultural production of a community, and to being close to nature, unpolluted by economic desire and external influences. It “carry[ies] the mystique of being the authentic voice of society” and “a tendency to associate this authenticity with pre-industrial, rural communities” (31). True to irony, the vernacular was not wholly visible in its natural state, but rather became increasingly discernable in contrast to the modernization of European culture and cultivated taste of connoisseurs and urban-dwellers. It incited a desire among many to retain the simplicity of rural life and to conserve traditional ways of handcrafting and the

values and honesty of such cultural production as particularly virtuous. Craft became a signifier of nostalgia for simpler times—a mythologized uncomplicated life without the trappings of modernity and mass industrialization. As a cultural phenomenon, the vernacular challenged the ideology of progress:

Its attractiveness to all lay in the fact that it stood outside such notions as professionalism, specialization, authorship or academicism. It could make claims to universal honesty, that most desirable of normative values (32).

Moreover, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, starting in the 1880s, highly valued the vernacular and greatly influenced the philosophies of its members on the social, moral and economics of work.

The politics of work

The Arts and Crafts movement drew from the symbolic importance of the vernacular as key to its ideologies and principles, and a *politics of work* emerged as central to its efforts, representing the third element in Greenhalgh’s triad of the constituents of craft. Indeed, the Arts and Crafts movement arose as a concerted political and social stance against the Industrial Revolution, and the mechanization of labour and the production of goods. Led by William Morris and John Ruskin in the last two decades of the 19th century, the movement

inveighed against both the industrial division of labour that enslaves the worker and the ugly “perfection” of identical machine-made objects, compared to the beauties of handcrafted works that bear the variable marks of the human maker (Shiner 2007: 34).

Greenhalgh refines this moral sensibility around work, describing it as a politics of craft:

[William Morris'] socialism was deceptively simple. He channeled the whole of his vision of a better society through the need to engage in creative work. Creative work would improve the environment, lead to an equitable system of the distribution of wealth and generate psychologically fulfilled peoples. In this sense, craft—creative work—was about the empowering of individual workers, about the political control of the work situation. The objects produced were a by-product of this larger ideal (34).

More than anything, Morris' Marxian critique of capitalism is that it renders the worker soulless—prisoner to the master who controls his labour and owns the means of production—and deprives the “craftsman” of the meaning that is central to his authentic work. Craft for Morris represented, at its most fundamental, a resistance to industrialization and political control in the workplace and it “embraced the most basic of all political ideals: the right to be human” (34). Pursuing craft was consistent with left-wing politics, the trade union movement and the Independent Labour Party of Britain at the time, for whom the politics of work was the moral compass for British society. Morris' vision of craft “as unalienated labour” stabbed at the heart of the “widespread and protracted debate on the relationship of morality to culture” (35) in the 19th century, a theme we seem reemerge later in this chapter regarding the moral economy and cultural work.

The Arts and Crafts movement brought the decorative arts, the vernacular and the politics of work together to form the social, moral and aesthetic conscience of a society bound by a larger ideal:

[H]umankind would be liberated through communal creativity. Ultimately for craft pioneers, the movement was centered on physical and mental freedom. By uniting the work process directly to the demand for a higher quality of life, they had regenerated the idea that craft was synonymous with power (35).

Into the early 20th century, the Arts and Crafts movement gathered strength and became fully integrated across Britain, Europe and the Americas, spreading both its ideology and helping to solidify the notion of craft as a thing *in itself*.

Craft in the 20th century

The Bauhaus of the 1920s, founded in Weimar, Germany, is generally accepted as setting the esteemed standard for craftsmanship in the twentieth century. Its rigour of education exemplified the foundational principles of form, texture, line and colour that permeated the work of crafting objects. The school was known for producing “much work that was modern, innovative and experimental” and became the model that British and other European schools endeavoured to emulate (Dormer 1997: 2). Yet, the studio crafts era after the Second World War resulted in more of an “anti-climax” as it concerned quality of craftsmanship. “The serious endeavours of technology and design went their own ways and craft become ‘the Crafts’: people who enjoyed making things found themselves left, not with the yeast of culture, but the crumbs” (4). As a result, the downgrading of craft resulted in a corresponding lessening of its cultural capital and a very real shift in its perceived value and legitimacy. The art historian, T.A. Heslop, reminds us that the arts versus crafts value-shift has a long history and that, although making a direct historical correlation is naïve, a look back to the medieval 12th century illuminates that, initially, stained glass-making “got its prestige from and draws attention to its captivating display and the craft virtuosity upon which it rests”, yet quick on its heels, Heslop notes (1997: 60-65), was a change in taste culture away from such virtuosity of craft and toward the

“mimetic games of painting”. The cleavage of fine arts from craft thus has a long and sorted history as seen through Greenhalgh’s triad of elements that constitute craft as a theoretical and analytical lens, however crafts’ longstanding relationship to women, domestic work and leisure is curiously veiled in much of the art history literature on craft, marginalizing the role of gender, which is undeniably critical to craft’s history and, later, to feminist politics.

Women and Craft

More recently, however, feminist scholar Kirsty Robertson reminds us that craft as a subversive form was used both as a method of feminist expression and critique of the male-dominated art world in the 1970s and 80s, with artists such as Judy Chicago and Joyce Wieland creating textile work that upset the “phallogocentric and abstract-dominated art world,” noting that feminist “artists using embroidery, knitting and sewing attempted to unsettle the ease with which expectations of domesticity and child rearing were imposed on many female artists” (2010: 184). Moreover, Robertson points to crafts’ political history as means of resistance and activism, citing crafts’ important role in numerous 1970s and 1980s political actions, including that of knitters involved in the Women’s Peace Camp protest, staging a near 20-year opposition to the installation of American cruise missiles at Greenham Common Royal Airforce Base in England (1989, see also Wallace 2012).

Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch* (2010 [1984]), her seminal work of feminist art history reconsidered the decorative arts—the crafts of embroidery, knitting and weaving, in particular—interrogating their status as trivial practices associated with the feminine and domesticity. By bringing the crafts out of the home and into public space, Parker critiqued the art world's marginalization of the decorative arts as “lowly women's work,” pointing out the so-called fine arts' deeply institutionalized misogyny. In her study, Parker reveals how women in the 1970s and 80s subverted the decorative arts as statements of feminist politics. Examples such as Kate Walker's 1978 deliberately defiant embroidery sampler ‘Wife is a Four Letter Word’ (Parker 2010: 205) marked the tensions for 1970s feminists between the constraints of the feminine and that of needlework as creative resistance, noting that “embroidering the personal as political was, above all, intended to challenge the subordination and oppression of women” (xv).

As I outlined in the Introduction, today's indie craft picks up on these important historical threads of the domestic arts, politics of work and the vernacular, alongside the more recent feminist influences mixed with traditional handwork and a DIY ethos, however it was its move outside the domestic sphere and beyond craft as hobby toward today's ecommerce enabled DIY craft entrepreneurship that brings me to the following set of literatures.

Cultural economy

More than a decade ago, Paul du Gay (1996) proposed the concept of “cultural economy” as a means to query a possible relationship between two seemingly oppositional terms:

culture and economy. In forming his theory, du Gay referenced cultural theorist Stuart Hall's affirmation that meaning is central to the activities and culturally constructed practices of daily life:

[C]ulture is involved in all those practices ... which carry meaning and value for us, which need to be meaningfully interpreted by others, or which depend on meaning for their effective operation. Culture, in this sense, permeates all of society (Hall, 1997: 3).

And "all of society," of course, includes the economy. But is the economy an aspect of culture? In proposing the idea of "cultural economy," du Gay—and others invested in this perspective and significant contributors to the literature of cultural economy—suggests that it is.²¹

Historically, the object known as "economy" had been defined by the relations and processes involved in the production, circulation and consumption of goods in a particular market context. The language of economy centres on ideas of exchange, value, supply and demand, wealth and resources, and efficiencies characteristic of commerce and economics. The language of culture, on the other hand, is attributed to "softer" qualities and linked to a sense of symbolic value and meaning associated with the arts and aesthetics, including popular forms such as craft. Culture is concerned with the social

²¹ The 2002 volume *Cultural Economy* edited by Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke was derived from the ideas and theorizations developed from a workshop on cultural economy held at the Open University in London in January 2000. Contributors included John Law; John Allen; Don Slater; Paul Heelas, Angela McRobbie; Keith Negus; Sean Nixon; Liz McFall; Daniel Miller; Alan Warde; and Nigel Thrift. See also the concurrent special issue of *Cultural Studies*, du Gay & Pryke (eds.), Vol. 16, Issue 4, 2002.

production and reproduction of sense, meaning and consciousness. What the literature of cultural economy theorizes, however, is in fact a much closer proximity between economy and culture, an entanglement between these two concepts— the systems of economy and the environment of culture—constitutive of the post-modern life of mass-produced material culture, including its production, circulation and consumption, and the association of meaning and culture as increasingly important to the conduct of economic life (and vice-versa).

It is “the ‘cultural’ dimensions of economic activities—the meanings and values these activities hold for people” (1997: 3)—that du Gay underscores as significant to articulating a vision of cultural economy. Similarly, if culture is an all-pervasive force in modern society, it must, as a result, encompass economic processes and practices, inextricably linking economic strategies, methods and relations with the production of meaning codified via culture. That is to say, a cultural economy “treats economic processes and practices as cultural phenomena, as depending on meaning for their effective operation” (4). These include economic models, sales, marketing and advertising practices, visual and product design and development, management approaches and organizational cultures as well as, and perhaps most significantly, the production of cultural forms.

This theoretical terrain does more than just posit a new term to define a relationship between economics and culture. It suggests as an imperative the need to understand the discourse of economics as a cultural phenomenon (which I pursue in my analysis of DIY

craft as a field of cultural production as well as the case study of Etsy in chapter 4 and by delving into the experiences of individual makers and craft entrepreneurs in chapter 5). Therefore, the language and modes of representation that signify the object “economy,” and its relations and processes, construct meaning and constitute the discursive space within which economic action is formatted and framed. Economy is thus not conceived as an objective reality that can be externally observed. Rather, it can only be understood by way of the discourses representing it. Consequently, its discursive formation is inherently cultural, given its reliance on language and representation as codifiers that carry meaning. Therefore, a theory of cultural economy assigns particular value to economic discourse as not simply descriptive of the relations and processes of an economy but in fact, as having a performative effect and influence on the economy itself. Thus,

[D]oing economics means acting on the assumption of a determinate nature waiting to be described by a neutral observation language; doing ‘cultural economy’ means acting on the assumption that economics are *performed and enacted by the very discourses of which they are supposedly the cause* (du Gay and Pryke 2002: 6; my emphasis).

The contemporary relationship between culture and economy has also led to the symbolic currency of meaning becoming, in fact, a hard currency of trade—that is, the economic can increasingly be defined as culturalized. This reality is part and parcel of a global economy and is reflected in the increasing flow of cultural commodities and forms, including the production and distribution of cultural products such as films, television, music, and video games by way of media and communications multinationals like Disney,

Time-Warner, News Corporation and Bertelsmann, for example. And, increasingly, by global Internet companies and social networks like Google, YouTube, and Facebook that enable users to produce, aggregate and distribute digital content and remixed media (see Lessig, 2004, 2008; Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2008; Shirky, 2009). The business of these companies is increasingly represented by a cultural quotient; they are operating in the economics of culture. Additionally, product design and the differentiation of goods by way of stylizing or fashioning with a particular attention to aesthetics is becoming ever more common. The increasing presence of “designed” products and cultural forms is visible in everyday life, including designer versions of commodity products such as tea kettles and toothbrushes, alongside lifestyle blogs and magazines devoted to cultural consumption, whose articles and glossy pages reflect back a consumer obsession for stylized products. These developments suggest that the use value of a product is not enough; it must appeal to the senses, be embedded with meaning and referential value, and promote emotional connections to the promises of a particular brand. This “aestheticization” of goods further highlights design and culture as central to the production and circulation of goods in today’s society (see Brown, 2009; Esslinger, 2009; Richardson, 2010).

This growing focus on aesthetics and the cultural commoditization of goods—what cultural studies has labelled “the cultural turn” (White 1973; Geertz 1973; Foucault 1977a; Bourdieu 1977)—is a manifestation of the relationship between culture and economy that du Gay and others (for example, McRobbie 1996, 1998, 2004; Nixon 2002; Soar 2002; McFall 2004, Luckman 2013) acknowledge. It also signals lines of debate within the

literature and registers of meaning accorded to the entanglement of economics and culture. Du Gay and Pryke, however, make an important theoretical distinction between the “production of culture” on the one hand, and “cultures of production” on the other. They caution against sweeping generalizations of the culturization of the economy and temper the claims made by the cultural turn that emphasize the idea of “production of culture” in order to mark the acceleration of culturally-amplified goods. Such a focus on the material product of culture—a crafted good, video game, film or book—circumscribes the cultural object, where culture is seen as influenced and guided by economy but ends up as a residual effect rather than a constitutive force. In contrast, du Gay and Pryke focus on “cultures of production” to underline their interest in the significant practices of the various actors, such as DIY crafters, as being critical to the installation of meaning. This, in turn, underscores their argument that economy is a conjectural and culturally built idea. Therefore, “the question [...] is not “how economy *makes* culture” but rather “how economy *is* cultural” (Lussier, 2003: 304; emphasis in original).

Bourdieu’s cultural field theory

Cultural economy owes a debt to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984, 1993) sociological studies on taste and capital, as well as to his influential analysis of the field of cultural production. The latter offers a highly useful conceptual apparatus that situates creative works within the social conditions of their production, circulation and consumption. For Bourdieu, “habitus,” is a system of dispositions through which individuals cultivate a “set of [...] preferences that are related to their class position,

education and social standing” (1984: 172). Within this frame, the relationship between one’s habits of cultural consumption and lifestyle preferences leads one to accumulate cultural capital that has a certain symbolic value. Bourdieu, describes cultural capital—which is distinct from social capital (networks of social relations and influence)—as intellectual, aesthetic and cultivated tastes and preferences that are esteemed within a particular cultural field (1984: 23, 40). Bourdieu specifies the field to mean a mutually constitutive and sustaining set of social institutions, individuals and discourses. It is a social space, in which individuals earn and lose capital in relation to others in the field, and in which control of resources, reputation, taste, and actual material capital as well as symbolic cultural capital are in play. Consequently, the field is a place of struggle, where those whose symbolic capital is highly valued retain privilege and power and typically have a great stake in maintaining the existing class structure and reproducing the dominant culture (in Stevens 1998: 60-61). Historically, ensuring the rarity of symbolic capital has been essential to maintaining the closed circles and taste leadership of high-profile and esteemed “stars” in such professional fields of cultural production as architecture, fashion, or advertising, for instance.

Cultural intermediaries

Central to Bourdieu’s cultural field theory are the actors involved in the production of meaning—“cultural intermediaries,” (1984: 39)—and their role and agency in affecting the cultural capital in any given field. Defined as those “occupying a position *between* the producer and consumer and operating across and exerting influence within the nexus of social relationships” (Negus, 2002: 119), cultural intermediaries are influenced by the

nature of their habitus and imprint meaning via their creative activities and practices. They attach signification to cultural products rather than acting as passive conduits in the creation of culture. Identifying the role and agency of a field's cultural intermediaries illuminates the influences, such as work culture, tastes and cultural preferences that are cast into the creative practices, which affect the production of culture. This viewpoint, therefore, intentionally does not privilege the "production of culture" as the *output* of material goods, with the culture as the "corrupted victim" of an economic imperative. Instead, the alternative view of the "culture of production" recognizes the role of cultural intermediaries and the influence of their habitus, and its associated values, norms and constructed meaning, as *input* to cultural production (Negus, 2002: 115).

It is here that Richard Johnson's (1986/87) "circuit of culture" proves valuable as a model for critical communication research that focuses on the division of culture into production, circulation and consumption, three differentiated yet connected dialectical aspects of economy (Figure 4). Johnson's model complements Bourdieu's cultural field analysis by allowing for a more granular break down of cultural processes and the role of intermediaries, so that production, circulation and consumption, and their interplay within what Johnson calls "lived cultures," can be brought to light. The circuit breaks down the distinct cultural processes to facilitate their individual examination, including of "the specific conditions of consumption" as well as the conditions (capitalistic) of production (see also Fuchs, 2009).

These conditions

include asymmetries of resources and power, material and cultural [and] they also include the existing cultural elements already active within particular social *milieux* (“lived cultures” in the diagram) and the social relations on which the combinations depend (Johnson: 47).

In turn, these relational dynamics generate discourses and meaning, and these then feed new cultural production, and the circuit continues in motion.

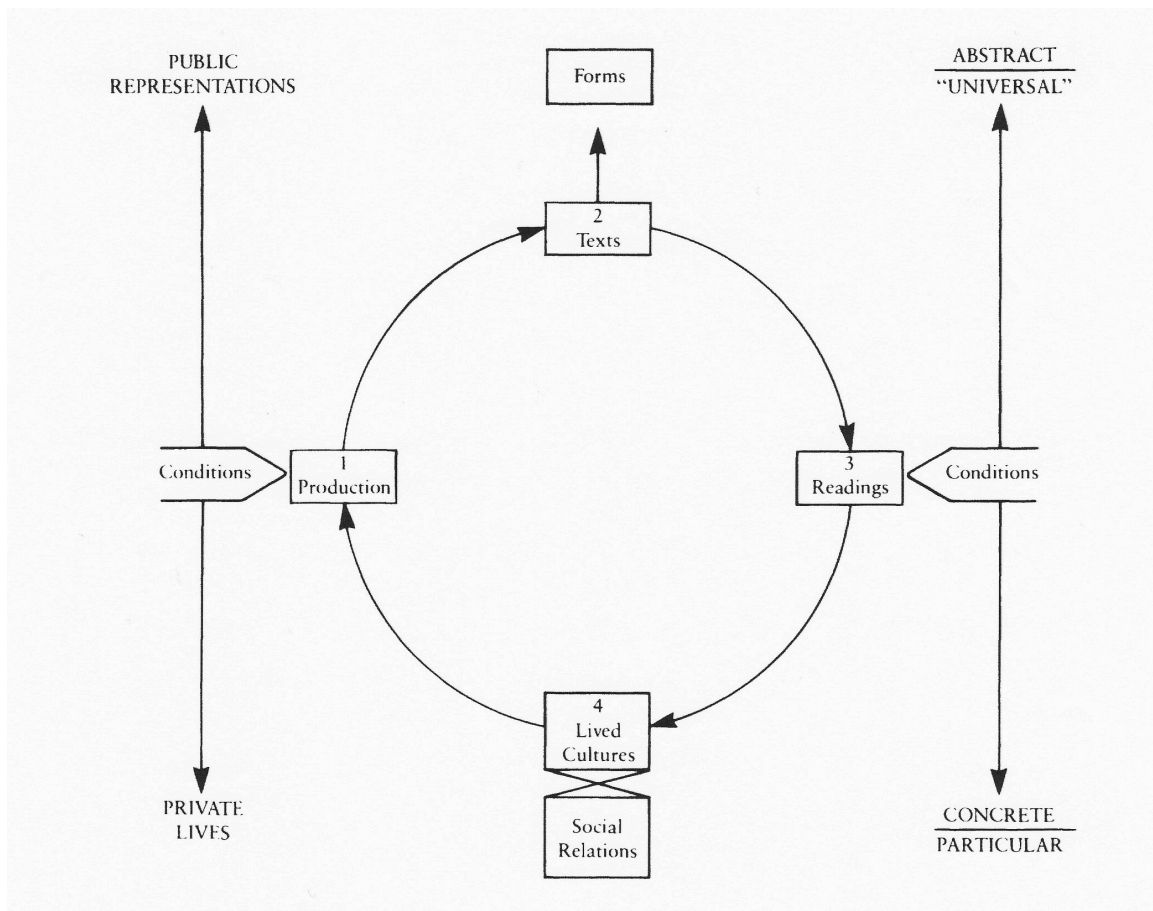


Figure 4. *Circuit of Culture*. Johnson 1986/87: 47.

Acknowledging the important role of cultural intermediaries and cultures of production among scholarly research reflects an effort on my part to move away from the historical

privileging of cultural analyses that focused almost exclusively on consumption and the “decoding” aspect of aspect of Hall’s (1980) “encoding/decoding” dyad through an emphasis on discourse and representation. In her ethnography of the advertising field, McFall (2004) succinctly characterizes this imbalance as “an enduring fascination not with *advertising* but with *advertisements*” (2), to give an example of this historically skewed concentration within cultural studies. McFall’s remark effectively affirms the importance of equally examining the process of “encoding”—that is, the material practices, conditions, identities, and social relations of those that inflect meaning as part the circuit. By focusing on encoding in my study, I recognize the vital cultural processes and significant practices of individuals who participate in the act of making as being critical to the establishment of meaning within the realm of handcrafted goods and the related discourses.

Soar (2002), in his study of the field of graphic design, evolves the circuit of culture by not only theorizing the moments of production, circulation and consumption but also by recognizing the intra-networked nature of intermediaries, in particular, “the degree to which the members of this group draw sustenance from their own ranks, i.e. from the work of other cultural intermediaries” (15). Soar’s “The Short Circuit” (Figure 5) supplements Johnson’s original circuit by including a sort of private loop,

one in which the cultural intermediaries act as producers and consumers, where [...] it is faster, suggesting that the cultural capital so carried is channeled back around to the intermediaries long before it works its way into, and through, the public domain (16).

Although Soar initially used his short circuit as part of his analysis of professional cultures of production, it presents significant potential as an analytical lens for the contemporary and informal production networks of crafters, whom navigate the material and immaterial worlds of cultural production, including on- and offline communities, and interact with their fellow DIY crafters and makers as peers, tastemakers and influencers as they go about their production practices and accrue cultural capital.

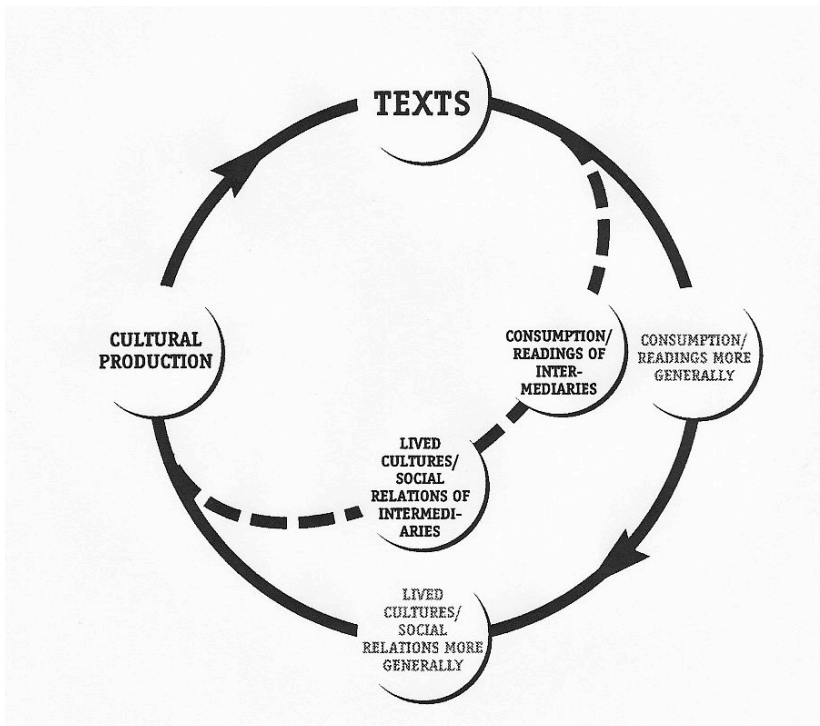


Figure 5. *The Short Circuit*. Soar 2002: 128.

The idea of cultural intermediaries in the cycle of production, circulation and consumption had not been given extensive scholarly attention until more recently, where important research has examined cultural intermediaries in advertising (Nixon, 1997, 2002; McFall 2004), graphic design (Soar, 2002), fashion design (McRobbie, 1998, 2000) and retail (du Gay 1996). These studies have gathered evidence on and contributed to the

maturation of the theory of cultural economy and its view of intermediaries and cultures of production as central to affecting meaning. This work has not, however, explored informal networks of cultural production, nor cultural intermediaries as micro-entrepreneurs of creative goods as enabled by digital storefront technology and associated online marketing and social media tools. Further, existing studies have focused on formal workplaces and have not considered how independent creative workers construct social networks to facilitate their work and support their creative aspirations more broadly.

Moral economy and cultural work

Creative labour, as viewed through the lens of cultural economy, reaches beyond the economics of making a living. Further, the images, sounds, textures, signs and symbols of cultural production as meaning-making prompt questions about what cultural producers *value*. A desire to express creativity, generate ideas and consider the aesthetics of making are common markers of the so-called creative class (Florida 2004). Yet, its discourse is also permeated with questions about making meaning and ethical responsibility, not unlike the ideological precursors of the Arts and Crafts movement as discussed earlier. Consequently, it is reasonable to ask where moral sentiment, values and ethics might factor into the working lives of contemporary cultural producers, including crafters? Andrew Sayer (2004) discusses the role that moral values play in the modern economy, noting that looking at our ethics and our behaviour towards others, as well as how we view moral norms and obligations overall, is part of developing a general understanding of “moral economy.” He characterizes this analysis as

the study of how economic activities of all kinds are influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms, and how in turn these norms may be compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures (2).

The “new” economy is often celebrated for the emancipatory potential of creative work and cultural production. In this idealized conception of work, where the independence of flexible work—freely setting one’s own hours and work schedule—and the cool-factor of producing for such cultural sectors as fashion, design, music, gaming or tech start-ups are said to chart a more exciting, creative and fulfilling path than traditional industries.

Dubbed “no collar,” “neo-bohemian” and “meccas for the creative class” (Bentley 1999; Ross 2004; Florida 2004) these work environments claim to value freedom, fun and equality among employees and management often depicted by the flattening of organizational structures. They also consider workers’ creative capacities as a prized resource to be cultivated. These creative workplaces have emerged as part and parcel of the cultural economy, where the production, circulation and consumption of products and services are specifically valued for their symbolic weight derived from their function as carriers of meaning. This includes an ever-increasing variety of goods that are the work of “creatives”—writers, crafters and photographers, among others—who produce the signs, symbols, images and sounds of these cultural products.

Along with these value-laden workplaces, the cultural economy has been praised by some for its remoralization of economic activity and for its potential for “a turn to life” (Heelas, 2002), a chance to recalibrate work toward a more meaningful, ethical and rewarding place in one’s life, not solely driven by economic imperatives or an ability to divorce work

from life. Conversely, critics fault neo-liberalism for undermining the social and cultural aspects of such work, as well as ceding to the pressures of free market capitalism, with an exceedingly blurred line between personal life and work (Adkins 1999; Banks 2006, 2007; Banks & Milestone 2011; McRobbie 2002; Sennett 2006; Perrons 2003; Tams 2002). Mark Banks notes that critics argue that “a widespread belief is that rampant individualization, a culture of self-interest, and the primacy of market rationality have rendered the economy more unethical and immoral,” characterizing the supposed freedoms of cultural work “as merely complicit in the consolidation of a hegemonic recursively ‘flexible’, neo-liberal regime” (2006: 456). Studies of high-profile cultural industries and start-up cultures (Ross 2004) have troubled the rhetoric of work and creative freedom that this sector promotes and promises to its employees. Instead, critics have argued that rather than “emancipation from the herd, [the cultural industries] provides only a new kind of individualized tyranny” (Banks: 456). Indeed, detractors of neo-liberalism and market rationality argue that the cultural industries are especially guilty of the bait and switch of offering the illusion of freedom while actually hollowing out the ethical basis of work through exploitation and individuation. Furthermore, the cultural industries have been systemically glamourized as having cachet, “hipness” and providing work to those with a certain creative “it” factor. This illusionary glamour raises the question as to whether a moral vacuum may have been created as a consequence of the perceived prestige and exclusivity of doing creative work that has ironically sheltered workers from being aware of their own exploitation and rendered them seemingly unconscious the commitment required to ultimately achieve success?

In response, Banks attempts to reframe the debate between these two polarized views as one of more nuanced complexity by proposing the value of taking a closer look at the identity construction of creative workers. He also suggests reviewing the position that holds that questions of the moral economy have been pushed aside by a celebration of the ideal

post-modern cultural entrepreneur [who] operates unfettered by tradition; a creative free spirit driven by the desire to make money but also broker creative alliances, combine previously disparate aspects of production and consumption, and to contribute to, and be drawn by, the cosmopolitan, diverse city and its sense of place (457).

In mapping the debate between those who uncritically celebrate the creative, aesthetic, and emancipatory possibilities of such labour versus those who tout the neo-liberal agenda to co-opt and exploit creative work as part of hegemonic contemporary capitalism, Banks notes that uncritical, populist investigations of the creative class and its cultural work dismiss any discussion of moral values or ethics by deeming it “uncool” or “old economy” (457). He also faults more recent critical accounts in the social sciences as upholding an antagonistic stance towards morality and normative value, particularly in post-modern social and cultural theory. Probing the question of why morally progressive or socially useful cultural work matters is thus—at first blush—fairly opaque.

In the media sector of the professional creative industries, globalization, consolidation and the production of universally themed products for mass appeal to generate maximum revenues far and away eclipse any predisposition for social good or moral obligation (Hesmondhalgh 2012). McRobbie’s ethnography of British fashion design (1998) extends

the demoralization critique by underscoring the unlikelihood that the cultural industries generally, and U.K. fashion in particular, might serve as a location for social good or ethical responsibility. According to her account, fashion is only getting faster and more competitive, such that it is virtually impossible for small, independent designers in the U.K. to survive among the large multinational holding companies and their brands that dominate the industry. The moral-political value considerations are dismissed in favour of those conducive to neo-liberalism. According to McRobbie, independent designers in the U.K. are in a highly precarious, asymmetrical power relationship with big fashion. She suggests that market conditions significantly constrain cultural entrepreneurs, leaving little to no room for them to consider the morality of their work or their ethical responsibilities (even though these are often entrenched ideals of early-career designers). Neo-liberal market forces demand fluidity, speed and a well-honed brand image, and

the increased pressure to become a flexible and productive ‘creative’ worker overshadows other social roles, meaning that—in the wider context of a new punitive workfare meritocracy and diminished social contract (McDowell, 2004)—the problem of work is now not that it has no meaningful link to the self as once argued, but that it has wholly captured the self and weakened the identity-forming power of non-work elements (Grugulis et al., 2000 in Banks 2006: 459).

Most of this debate has focused on the major cultural industries that operate at the global-corporate level. However, the emergence of micro-enterprises and new forms of creative entrepreneurship like DIY craft, in my view, mean that researchers have to ask new questions about moral economy and creative work. Banks’ empirical studies of small-scale creative entrepreneurs in Manchester, England, revealed agency and self-reflexivity among workers who are negotiating the complexity of cultural work, where:

progressive social and political values may happily co-exist with economic instrumentality; non-instrumental moral values can also have more direct purchase on shaping market relations and influencing economic choices and decisions (465).

McRobbie's 2012 study of the micro-enterprises, retail-production ateliers and small cooperatives that make up the contemporary Berlin fashion scene, updates, compares and contrasts her previous work on the sector in the U.K. and highlights cultural geography, localities and city-spaces as important additional considerations. In this recent work, which I return to in more detail in chapters 5 and 6, McRobbie points to flaws in the neo-liberal argument about the role of government as tending to homogenize and reduce practices. Rather, she suggests, in a similar vein to my study of DIY craft and its associated informal networks, that

by paying attention to the many multi-mediated associations, and networked arrangements where elements from an earlier tradition of feminist projects, third sector and not-for-profit activities can be drawn on, the assemblages of fashion emerge as a pathway for local growth, meaningful non-standard jobs and a merging of craft with ethical and sustainable practice (1).

Feminisms, political economy and cultural production

As part of my commitment to feminist epistemologies, this section of the literature review explores various relevant contributions of feminist scholars to contemporary studies on cultural production, providing valuable context for my research in terms of feminist critical theory, empirical research and perspectives on questions of gender and economics.

Gendered hierarchies and power relations

Alison Beale theorizes gender as a means by which we can

see how women and men are disciplined in to their social roles, including their sexuality, by an array of practices that range from the most intimate relationships to the structures of government and the international economy (1998: 232).

She argues that when these practices become the focus of investigation, they can only be examined effectively by probing their limits and the gender dynamics associated with them. Doing so makes visible how gender operates within a power structure, revealing a gender hierarchy that attributes more or less power in relation to “the presence or absence of authority, legitimacy, and personhood” (233). Beale’s model mobilizes de Lauretis’s notion of “technology of gender” (1987): gender is both “representation and self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (Beale: 234). From this perspective, gender also signifies certain types of activities, practices and language as being either feminized or masculinized, and carries socially constructed and built-in assumptions about and implications for the value and significance of the practices relative to accepted norms. In this way, practices that align with masculine discourses and assessments are esteemed in today’s patriarchal society as having greater value and a higher position in the gender hierarchy. This ranking reinforces masculine-inflected practices, discourses and ideologies that, for example, prize economic over symbolic capital, competition over collaboration and patriarchy over equality in order to maintain hegemonic structures. Beale notes that

it is important to keep in mind the gender hierarchy which operates when, for example, the cultural productions of women or their contributions to knowledge are less valued according to the various measures of status that our societies use (233).

Beale's model stresses the socially constructed nature of gender as a vital concept in feminist critical analysis, as well as a lens through which to analyze practices, institutions, economies and, most certainly, cultural productions as social technologies to uncover how power is exerted within the gendered system. Moreover, Beale's application of cultural policy as a technology of gender reveals a dual provision; it both reflects that gendered system and acts upon it. By connecting gender and the practice of cultural policy, Beale presents both a concrete example of and a theoretical framework for evaluating the structural oppression of women and how technologies of gender contribute to the ideology of women's inferiority.

Feminist cultural studies

Further, my commitment to feminist inquiry as central to my study of DIY craft, acknowledges feminism's important critiques of early cultural studies work. This research sought to understand the intellectual-political tradition of everyday culture—that is, popular cultural forms, values and consciousness as connected with social relations, issues of power, and as sites of ideological struggle (McRobbie 1998, 2000; Henderson 2008).

Feminist media scholars helped to shift

attention from the “masculine” genre of news and current affairs to the importance of “light entertainment” [and] aided a more general turn from older kinds of ideology critique [...] to approaches that centre on social identities, subjectivities, popularity and pleasure (Johnson, 1986/87: 40).

Feminist methods and ethnographic work, beginning with such research as McRobbie's early studies of working-class "girl culture" (1978), were a concerted challenge to the male-oriented models, assumptions and gender-biased practices of this era. Indeed, feminists were integral to the movement in British cultural studies away from class as a sole structural determinant of relations of domination. Instead, researchers began to take up questions related to multiple social dimensions, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and youth culture.

Feminists embraced critical cultural analysis and sought to express women's multiple identities, deliberately moving away from totalizing approaches and more intently exploring the contingent and contradictory manifestations of female selfhood. This approach brought to the fore an important tension in feminist critiques of cultural studies. At the same time, it embraced the populist inclination of the cultural studies project and a desire to bring the activities of subcultures to light, including, through reception studies, issues of pleasure and desire, and to look at the culture of the everyday. This meant that women's consumption of mass media and manufactured culture was taken seriously and examined for opposition to, and negotiation or alignment with, intended media messaging. These studies revealed the plurality of meaning audiences decoded (Radway 1984, for example). Moreover, they acknowledged that women enact their personal agency and affirmed women's leisure pastimes as valued cultural practices. Close examination of these activities provided insight into women's struggle against the dominant ideology and how they appropriated popular culture for their own oppositional

purposes. To this end, McLaughlin draws on Virginia Nightingale's (1996) *Studying Audiences: The Shock of the Real* to note

[F]eminist research that came out of the Centre [for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham] was based explicitly in a political orientation modeled on consciousness-raising, giving the private a social dimension through exposing and recovering voices and resistances; it 'attempted to replace masculine modes of research (which resulted in patriarchal or chauvinist analysis) with research grounded in the values and beliefs of feminist communities, and tried to extend the "community" rules of such groups (rules of loyalty and recognition which redressed the neglect of patriarchy) to a research agenda which endorsed and valued women's popular cultural forms' (in McLaughlin, 2002: 38).

Feminist cultural studies research that focuses on discourse, representation and the construction of meaning has enabled important analyses that reach into the private sphere of women's lives. It has validated their experiences as real and suggested that personal agency exercised in the private sphere might lead to political agency in the public sphere with the potential to achieve social change. Likewise, focusing a critical feminist lens on mainstream media representations has exposed negative stereotypes and both significant under-representation and misrepresentation of women in popular culture. These negative representations continue to dominate media texts and require ongoing research as part of critical feminist media studies, as new modes and forms of cultural production become entrenched in contemporary society. However, a focus on discourse and representation is only part of the equation. Feminist cultural studies research has been effective in connecting consumption and audience reception to relations of power, yet has largely ignored the production aspect of culture. As such, feminist cultural

research has been dislocated from issues of class, material conditions of production and the structural dimensions of centralized institutional power.

Feminist political economy

To better understand these dimensions and the gap in the literature related to feminism and political economy, a brief look at influences of Marxism on feminism is useful. Marx elaborated a position that the production capacity of society, and its associated materialist conditions, distinguished the powerful from the oppressed and resulted in class struggles related to the means of production, including labour, capital and commodity exchange. His theories privilege class as the dominant terrain for political-economic struggle in society, where the bourgeoisie exploit the working class, enabled by capitalism's material and structural authority.

First and second wave feminism aimed to establish women's rights and equality in the political sphere. Within the second wave, Marxist and socialist feminisms emerged, grounded in Marxist theory and focused on gender relations and patriarchal oppression as associated with class oppression under capitalism (Steeves and Wasko, 2002: 21).

Feminists faulted Marxism for failing to address gender relations within its overall critique of capitalism.

For Marxists, the exploitation of workers under the system of capitalism is privileged over the oppression of women under patriarchy. Feminist critiques of Marxism point to a major theoretical problem that assumes the concept of class is gender neutral, when in fact it has a masculine bias (Riordan, 2002: 7).

Marxist feminists recognized that patriarchy represents a wholesale system of social, political and economic organization that subordinated women to men, and that the capitalistic imperative assigned control of the mode of production to men. Women for their part were mostly denied entry those modes of production—their work being undervalued and largely confined unpaid labour in the domestic sphere.

Steeves and Wasko also interrogate socialist feminism and question its potential for merging feminism and Marxism as a way to narrow the distance between feminists and political economists. Accordingly, they note that Marx held that “human nature is a dialectical product of biological, social, economic and political factors and constraints” (22). Thus, Marxism rejects the radical feminist theory of biological imperative and likewise opposes the liberal feminist view of individual agency as means of social advancement and class ascension. The two scholars also discuss Friedrich Engels and his insight into how capitalism promoted the need for the nuclear family and for known heirs, while centralization of the mode of production required men to work away from the home as either capitalists or labourers. Men became household earners and controllers of capital, subjugating women within the family unit such that they were only child bearers and domestics beholden to their husbands for their material needs. Marxist and socialist feminists acknowledge that the capitalistic mode of production and associated class structure are veritable forces that have shaped the historical context for the oppression of women and are an important lens through which to consider the conditions affecting cultural production. These notions have led researchers to examine

men's control over women's labour in most societies, evident for instance in women's concentration in lower paying non-managerial positions, in inadequate maternity or child-care policies, and in the notion of the "family wage,"(22).

As pervasive a force as capitalism is, however, Steeves and Wasko note that feminists agree that it does not represent the sole variable in the oppression of women. Marxist assumptions privilege the economic basis for oppression and discount questions that look beyond materialist assumptions, thus leaving large gaps pertinent to feminist inquiry.

These lapses also generate a need to take a more holistic approach to studying the complexity of women's lives and "theorize a material basis for all major components of patriarchy, including ideology, individual agency and subjectivity" (23). Answering these vital questions requires an integrated approach that extends feminist theory beyond the limits of Marxist and socialist feminisms. While these have contributed a great deal to understanding both the economic class and gender dimensions of social structures, they fail to recognize other important distinctions such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and dis/ability.

Further, feminist scholarship and theory have changed significantly since the 1980s, when causality was the theoretical linchpin for explaining gender inequality and the oppression of women under patriarchy. Feminist theory of this era had a predominantly white and Western bias. As a consequence, reactions to heteronormative, middle class, white and Western feminism spawned additional feminist perspectives from the distinct standpoints (Harding and Hintikka 1983; Harding 1986), including women of color and working-class women, and which also informed LGBT and queer studies, and Third World and

international feminisms (Mohanty 1984). What these developments made clear was that not all women could be equally represented from one dominant standpoint. They also showed that a single socio-political movement or ideological orientation could not adequately represent the struggles of, for example, working-class Black or Latina women. The emergence of varying feminist standpoints revealed the complexity of what constitutes the female experience—the many, many perspectives, roles and identities women hold—and marked a shift to a broader recognition among theorists of the need to “embrace the difference within the category ‘woman’ which removes the possibility of there being a single truth about womanhood” (Fenton, 2001: 104). These approaches do not dismiss the struggles of white, middle class, but add important dimensions and reinforce the complex and sometimes contradictory experiences of all women as valid.

The notion of multiple truths, subjectivities and standpoints has meant that more recent feminist theory and methods have moved toward more collaborative and interdisciplinary modes that avoid dualistic and reductionist thinking. Newer approaches value the negotiations and contradictions that are crucial to understanding the move toward cultural studies that has largely characterized feminist theory in more recent times. Doing so has also been part of an effort to connect feminism to political economy in a more cohesive way.

Marxism’s critique of capitalism and feminism’s critique of patriarchy point to class and gender, respectively, as markers of social division. These tensions represent the historical antecedents to the contemporary concern of finding common ground between political

economy and feminist theory in the realm of communication and cultural studies. To date, economic class and gender have emerged as largely autonomous critical lenses through which political economists, on the one hand, and feminist scholars, on the other, examine culture and the mediascape. In their edited collection, feminist scholars Meehan and Riordan (2002) argue rather that sex and money are inextricably linked. They call attention to the fact that today's feminist media scholars have largely shied away from approaches that "venture into the field of media economics, industry analysis, and political economy," stating that "rarely do these studies examine capitalism, labor, and class as shaping women's experiences" (Riordan 2002: 3). This reticence has created a visible gap in the type of research and theory being produced in feminist circles.

Riordan aims to begin to remedy this situation by advocating and applying Donna Haraway's (1991) principles—derived from her and her radical critiques of scientific "objectivity" and its claims to authority (which I explore in detail in the following chapter)—in her discussion of possible common ground between feminism and political economy. Riordan notes that a feminist political economy is interdisciplinary, critically self-reflexive and committed to a feminist framework that acknowledges multiple subjectivities and situated knowledges. She makes an example of herself to illustrate her point:

I am not a feminist in one moment and a political economist in another. I am not a consumer of sexist music in one moment and a social activist in another. Because I am a feminist does not mean that I automatically and uncategorically do not find pleasure in sexist music. Because I am a political economist and social activist does not mean that I always purchase products from corporations that have fair labor practices (2002: 10).

She emphasizes that these multiple subjectivities require ongoing negotiation, which is why interdisciplinary research is particularly crucial as a method to understand the forces that shape our decisions at any one time. Further, by reaching over disciplinary divides, confronting the assumptions, biases, and paradoxes that emerge, we are able to better grasp the partial truths and situated knowledges, as Haraway suggests, and come closer to understanding reality. Accordingly, Riordan establishes that a feminist political economy “aims to understand these negotiations and contradictions and how they relate to capitalism and patriarchy” (10). Riordan also posits that a feminist political economy accommodates difference and multiple standpoints, and rejects the notion of one Truth. Rather, Riordan embraces the idea that multiple truths can co-exist and states that, in fact, “it opens up our inquiries to expanded possibilities for understanding lived experiences and social reality from a political-economic perspective” (11). By employing the feminist methods under Haraway’s rubric, Riordan argues for integrating approaches to describing a feminist political economy. Together, these would not only seek to understand women’s production and consumption practices, but would also crucially link them to the intertwined forces of capitalism and patriarchy, in an effort to expose these relationships and make them explicit, such that women can become aware of how these potent forces act in their everyday lives and choices.

A feminist response to Bourdieu

Feminists have criticized Bourdieu’s social philosophy and cultural field theory for not considering gender. His theoretical apparatus has largely focused on questions of class and has relatively little to say about women, gendered identities or power dynamics

relative to patriarchy. His theories have, however, offered a tremendous amount to cultural theorists, including feminists, and particularly to those of us studying cultural production. As such, despite this significant omission, Bourdieu's theories have begun to be reconfigured, critically extended, reframed and even rethought to address feminist analyses of contemporary problematics. It's important to note that even his contemporaries, such as Foucault and Habermas, also did not engage gender as a considerable part of their social theories and yet feminists have not been shy to take up and critically develop their work in meaningful new ways that contribute to the feminist project (see for example Butler 1993; Fraser 1997). Thus, the challenge here is to both unpack Bourdieu's relevance to feminism while also holding in tension the flip-side of the coin: how feminist theorizing and its contemporary engagement with questions of agency and affect; women's material identities; the politics of cultural legitimization; technologies and gender; and other pertinent foci of feminist scholarship extend beyond Bourdieu's own social logics (Adkins 2006: 3). In short: what are the parallels and challenges *from* and *to* feminism that Bourdieu's theories might offer?

In the co-edited volume, *Feminism After Bourdieu* (2006), feminist sociologist Beverly Skeggs responds to this question from her feminist vantage point, arguing that it is the *explanatory power* not offered elsewhere (21; emphasis in original) that gives Bourdieu's theories purchase for feminism. To this end, she points to three consistent thematics in Bourdieu's work: (1) connecting objective structures to subjective experience—or questions of structure and agency, which feminists have long grappled with; (2) his drawing together of culture and economy in a model of social space, including the

notions of different types of symbolic and material capitals and their relationship to class, value and mobility; and (3) his acknowledgement of reflexivity as a methodological keystone to knowledge production, providing a way of interrogating the locations from which we speak. Skeggs notes that this last point has been a “requirement that has always been at the heart of feminist critiques of masculine-dominated research agendas” (21).

These themes are not, of course, territory for direct appropriation but rather one for interrogation. For example, in his early anthropological work on the Kabyle people in Northern Africa in the 1960s Bourdieu theorized that social identity stems from the sexual identity of biological bodies (male/female). He then extended this to the sexual division of labour and posited a universal (hetero) normalizing conception of the family. Since Bourdieu did not introduce socio-cultural notions of gender into his theory of field, habitus and capital, his research approaches capital as if it were gender neutral. However, as McCall (1992) argues, in Bourdieu’s desire to subsume gender as “inseparable from class properties, [which are] essentially defined by the associated field of occupation,” he effectively misrecognizes gender and understands traits such as femininity as natural and essential aspects of personality (Skeggs: 23). Thus, feminist extension and critiques of Bourdieu must include a gendering of the various forms of capital.

Furthermore, contemporary feminists have embraced Bourdieu for enabling them to put the issue of class back on the feminist agenda (20). His analysis of capitals has allowed feminists to move beyond the two dominant traditions of class theory, namely “political arithmetic class analysis, which involves fitting people into pre-ordained classifications

[...] which some feminists showed that measuring people through their father's occupation with no account of their mother's labour was inadequate" and "Marxist analysis of class, in which class is conceptualized as a relationship of exploitation, primarily based on the division of labour" (20), which neglected to include women's domestic labour, which feminists of the 1970s and 80s fought hard to remedy. Pointed attention to issues of class division were then largely transformed into broader feminist concerns around power and difference, particularly questions of gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, dis/ability, which put traditional conceptions of class inequality on the back burner for some time. More recently, there has been a renewal of attention via a feminist mobilization of Bourdieu's analysis of capitals by such feminist theorists as Moi (1991), McCall (1992), Fowler (1997), Skeggs (1997), and Adkins (2003).

In this vein, Angela McRobbie's (2006) study of post-feminist symbolic violence on the U.K. television program *What Not To Wear* serves as a telling example. On this popular TV show, contestants with poor personal style and an out-of-date wardrobe, hairstyle and general appearance are transformed by style "experts" after having been paraded in front of and scrutinized by the audience in their unfashionables and ridiculed via hidden camera by the hosts. Eventually they are redeemed by the experts, who guide her to shop for a more flattering and current "look." The narrative implies that if she were only to fix her body, her clothing and overall presentation, she would find a partner, go on dates, and have a vibrant and fulfilling social life. McRobbie's examination of this show and other like it classifies this type of program as offering "transformation of self with the help of experts in the hope or expectation of improvement of status and life chances through the

acquisition of forms of social and cultural capital” (99). Using Bourdieu’s concepts of symbolic power and symbolic violence as central to the reproduction of class divisions to inform her analysis, she argues that new forms of class distinction have emerged due to the significant movement of women into the workforce, the detachment of women from traditional family roles and their subsequent individualization (100-101).

According to McRobbie, the makeover genre of TV programming and its post-feminist orientation are reifying the reproduction of social divisions as increasingly *feminized*, using the female body as site to mark class distinctions and social categorization.

Moreover, these gendered and classed representations are circulated by way of broadcast media or, in Bourdieusian terms, the cultural field of contemporary media industries. In bringing these issues to light, McRobbie’s analysis underscores this increasing feminization of class divisions and its articulation through the female body, and emphasizes the media field as vital to these new forms of classification.

The aesthetics of cultural production

In acknowledging the importance of aesthetics relative to cultural production, I now turn to Georgina Born’s robust set of theoretical principles, which build from, critique and augment Bourdieu’s cultural field theory—or what Born terms “a post-Bourdieuian theory of cultural production” (2010). As discussed above, Bourdieu’s theoretical and conceptual apparatus are enormously relevant for my research, offering several of the core concepts that I employ. However, another the ways Bourdieu’s approach is insufficient, besides its disregard of gender, is that it fails to acknowledge the aesthetic.

Born developed an “analytics of mediation,” arguing for “a non-reductive account of the aesthetic in theorizing cultural production” (172). She proposes five key themes to be theorized, investigated and analyzed as part of her approach and reinvention of Bourdieu, noting that they are deeply connected to the consideration of aesthetics. They are: “(1) aesthetics and the cultural object; (2) the place of institutions; (3) agency and subjectivity; (4) questions of history, temporality and change; and (5) problems of value and judgment” (ibid.). Born’s approach stems from in-depth ethnographies of two significant cultural organizations: IRCAM (1995), the music institute at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the BBC (2005), Great Britain’s national public television production and broadcasting corporation. In these studies, she probes “the conditions for creativity in the two organizations, the causalities underlying these conditions, and [how] they influence what is produced...” (2010: 173). Her analytical method provided a useful model for my study, and I applied it to my analysis of the aesthetic affinities and sensibilities of the makers, crafters and community participants in terms of their habitus and their own creative labour—or, as Born puts it, “[the aesthetic] as a critical element in the expressive and material labour of cultural production” (177)—as well as the technologies, platforms and marketplaces (institutions) that help makers articulate their practice. This included an analysis of the visual considerations, brand and curatorial practices of Etsy in line with Born’s approach and her assertion that social relations, including production networks, mediate and form part of the aesthetic experience (183; see also Gell, 1998). Moreover, Born argues for “an account of agency as creative invention”(188) and notes the importance of historical specificity and the need for theorizing diachrony when pursuing an ethnography of cultural production. In doing so,

she underscores the significance of “interrogat[ing] temporality and change” relative to “artistic codes and aesthetic formations and discourses” (179), which is similarly helpful in my investigation of the cultural economy of DIY craft.

Furthermore aesthetics are important to consider since they connect to relations of power and structural authority in contemporary capitalism, particularly in the debates of art versus craft and within taste cultures whereby the elevated design quotient of a cultural product is increasingly prevalent in economic models relative to creative practices and consumption. Likewise, this literature suggests that aesthetics are deeply connected to the system of social, technological and economic organization that affects women as cultural producers and, consequently, requires the employment of feminist methods to analyze power dynamics in the cultural economy of craft.

Web 2.0 and participative media

Finally, the literatures of participative media culture and internet studies are vital to my study. The production, circulation and consumption of contemporary cultural economies play out as they do in significant part because of what is popularly known as “Web 2.0” or the “participative web”—the apparent evolution of the socially networked, participative and user-generated capacities of the second-generation world wide web. Forgoing these labels and others such as “the writable web” (Benkler 2006) and “the relational web” (FING, no date), I use “social web” and “Web 2.0” throughout this study, since, in my view, it effectively embodies the social relations, technologies, applications, economies and cultures that are characteristic of the web today and are part of the larger world of

DIY craft.

This evolution was characterized by the change from 1.0 technologies such as e-mail, personal websites, click-through banner advertising and static content, to a dynamic, data-driven platform built on an “architecture of participation” (O’Reilly, 2005). This next generation web includes collaborative technologies and the concept of crowdsourcing (e.g. Wikipedia); self-publishing, content management systems and blogs (e.g. Blogger, WordPress); file-sharing and peer-to-peer sites (e.g. Napster, BitTorrent); the remote storage and hosting services associated with cloud computing; and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter (see also Cardon, 2008). Together, these constituent elements of the second-generation web have had significant social, cultural and economic impact. Various researchers have analyzed these technologies and social networks and found them to have enabled a participatory culture and user engagement, and to have, to use O’Reilly’s well-heeled term, “harnessed” the collective intelligence of the masses.

Jenkins (2008) labels this shift as “convergence culture,” situating the unprecedented convergence of media as much more than a technological shift but as a transformation that affects all aspects of media production, circulation and consumption. He notes that the convergence culture is altering the “relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences” (2008: 34). He details this multi-dimensional shift as including four nodes: (1) the diversification of big media interests across the entire spectrum of media production, from film to television to merchandise to video

games, at a global scale; (2) convergence of technological devices, platforms and appliances affecting the way we interact with and consume media; (3) a cultural shift in creation, engagement and remixing of media content by audience-producers as actors in a participative media culture, including consumer communities and fandoms; and (4) participative action as assembling a collective intelligence affecting production, distribution and the power relationships of mainstream conglomerates versus individual and alternative media practices. The theory of convergence culture emphasizes the cultural logic that has redefined (and is still *redefining*) the way users interact, engage and make sense of their socio-cultural environment and derive meaning through interaction.

Convergence culture is enabling new forms of participation and collaboration, and these have temporal aspects as users assemble and disassemble within various informal networks and cultures of production. Users produce and consume media together, converging and (re)cycling through posts (comprising text, image and video content), discussion threads, comments, tags, links, blogrolls, and other aspects of the social web. This participatory culture reveals certain users and communities as active producers *and* receivers of media content. Described as “multipliers” (McCracken, 2005), “loyals” (Jenkins, 2008), “media-actives” (Frank, 2004), “producers” (Bruns, 2005) or more generally as “connectors” or “influencers,” these users are interactive participants who have a much more involved role in the production of cultural forms than the average person using the web. Such “producers,” to use Bruns’ term, create and assign meaning to content, brands and cultural properties that in turn influences others within their networked orbit, thus demonstrating that consumption in a “networked culture is a social

rather than individualized practice” (Green and Jenkins, 2009: 216). This access is enabled by participative technology and new media forms, with increasing reliance on mobile devices and access to wifi for connectivity. Regardless of format, however, digital convergence and interactivity are putting production capacity in the hands of the user. With the rapid growth in social networks—and particularly Facebook’s dominance—the act of consumption has become a collective process in many ways, with information being shared, circulated and recirculated among communities of shared interest or social relation. This participative media culture constructs shared meaning and produces an aggregated knowledge base, what Pierre Levy called “collective intelligence” (1997).

Levy pioneered this concept as a reflection on the power of communities to gather information and circulate and interact with content as a shared activity, and was of the view that consuming media was a collective process on the web. He argues that the interconnected space of the web has allowed people to galvanize their individual expertise toward meeting a common purpose or shared goal: “No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity” (1997). Jenkins extends Levy’s viewpoint and connects it to convergence culture:

[T]hese new communities are defined through voluntary, temporary and tactical affiliations, are reaffirmed through common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments and are held together through mutual production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge (2008: 35).

This aggregate knowledge or “collective intelligence” is paramount to understanding how individuals and networks affect the power dynamics of the media landscape, as they

accumulate cultural capital that has real implications for cultural economies. Importantly, it also represents the collective conditions for “meaning-making” as embedded within the community, where participants exchange ideas, remake content and appropriate cultural forms to deploy them in new, creative ways. It is this collective meaning-making that is intrinsic to participative media culture contributes to a type of “virtual habitus” and informs participants’ intermediary function within a converging media culture and its economies and labour.

CHAPTER 3

Method and Methodology

Research design

In the planning phase, it is easy to idealize research design and its theoretical frame as tidy and clean. In practice, however, researching complex cultural phenomena, social relations and the economies and technologies that mediate and bind them is anything but. It is messy, contingent, partial and situated (Law 2004).

In his provocatively titled book, *After Method*, John Law develops his notion of “messiness,” as a means to seek knowledge in the social world where things are often in flux, elusive and multiple, intentionally countering a tradition of methods that look for absolute clarity and precision. Rather, he argues for “methodological assemblages” that “detect, resonate with, and amplify particular patterns of relations in the [...] fluxes of the real” (14). Sawchuk (2011) takes up Law’s position and emphasizes its salience for communications and cultural studies researchers in terms of how we can think about methods in an ever-changing, messy world, where we are very much a part of the processes we study and, in our desire to understand contemporary cultural phenomena, “we are constantly stopping the flow of events and activities, and as soon as we write about a subject, it already seems out of date” (339). Accordingly, Sawchuk notes that:

Law (2004) suggests that the chaotic messiness of the social world demands not just one method, but a knowledge of a set of methods [...] that will allow researchers to write about their subjects intelligibly, creatively and rigorously. For [researchers] who must find an approach and appropriate way to conduct

research methods are not just a messy business. According to Law, methods are a *delightfully* messy business that asks us to take pleasure in uncertainty and to confidently learn to be accountable, even if we are not revealing a truth that will hold for all people, at all times, in all places (emphasis in original; 339).

This is true for the study of DIY production cultures, which are a *delightfully messy business* of creativity and commerce, of ever-changing technologies and networks, of identities and standpoints. This framework also resonates with the critical perspective from which I approach methodologies, narratives and theories to offer meaningful, generative insight into the cultural economy of craft. Further, it highlights my commitment to feminist methods where there are certain important parallels, which I discuss in detail further on in this chapter. My research aims to make the process visible, to remain “faithful to experiences of mess, ambivalence, elusiveness, and multiplicity” akin to creative work and “face up to the selective nature of methods, focusing in on the researcher’s agency as a constructor of reality and not hiding behind portrayals of method as mere technique” (quoting Law 2004 in Hine, 2009: 5).

Thus, my dissertation research program draws from ethnographies of cultural production (McRobbie 1998; McFall 2004; Dornfeld 1998; Soar 2002), critical feminist methods (Haraway 1991; Richardson 1998; McRobbie 2010, 2009), and the evolving collection of work that explores the specificities of digital environments as cultural field sites (Boellstorff et al. 2012; Kozinets 2010; Markham and Baym, 2009; Hine 2009). This mixed-method approach to research provides fertile ground for considering how multiple theories and practices intersect, particularly in communication and cultural studies.

As detailed in the previous chapter, I conceptualized this project as a study of a cultural economy, thus containing many moving parts. Therefore, the research design began from ethnographic principles grounded in social research methodologies, including interviews, participant-observation, field site visits and the gathering of documents, promotional materials and other relevant artifacts, as well as auto-ethnographic accounts of my own experiences. I combined these approaches with digital methodologies and immersion in online fieldwork and in the everyday participatory culture of makers. My goal in pursuing these methodologies was to elucidate not just the “how” of this research, but also the “why”—the immersive detail and rich context that characterizes contemporary crafting, its gendered-labour and maker culture in today’s vastly networked and convergent online media era. Mixed-methodology ethnographic approaches provide a “flexible, responsive methodology, sensitive to emergent phenomena and emergent research questions” (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 2). They also allow for “thick description,” a concept adapted by Geertz (1973) from philosopher Gilbert Ryle to not only describe accounts of human behaviour but also to situate them according to their context. This contextual embedding is essential to being able to meaningfully interpret behaviours and “neatly encapsulates the goal of ethnographic research: an understanding of the cultural contexts in which human action takes place” (Boellstorff et al.: 16)—in my case, relay in both the material and digital realms.

Broadly, the research design draws from a series of semi-structured interviews, an ethnographic case study and self-reflexive research. I focused on Etsy as a primary field site—as a corporation, an ecommerce marketplace and a DIY community—pursuing an

ethnographic case study to examine the contexts, networks and practices pertinent to elucidating its role in DIY crafts' habitus. Semi-structured interviews enabled another key dimension of the research design—gathering the perspectives of crafters, makers, bloggers and business people engaged in this economy. Finally, participant-observation and an auto-ethnographic approach to documenting and reflecting on my own professional experience and creative practices were vital to the research design, and consistent with my feminist perspective.

Notably, visual ethnography, design-thinking, and a cultural studies approach significantly informed the research design and process. These approaches underscored the importance of the visual, of taste cultures and of vernacular engagement to analyzing activities in this field of cultural production of DIY craft.

Furthermore, the research design made space for my *process* orientation, which intentionally embraced research-in-progress, research as creation and creation as research (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012), and a variety of visual and creative strategies without knowing for certain where they might lead. These strategies included carrying out visual and conceptual mappings, making sketches, jotting down ideas on sticky notes, in the margins of books, and with Evernote²² and Dropmark²³, taking photos and screengrabs, recalling traces of informal conversations had while sewing, writing out field notes and making other spontaneous recordings of a lived culture. In these ways, I was able to

²² <http://www.evernote.com>

²³ <http://www.dropmark.com>

uncover the themes and patterns of the everyday culture of DIY craft, its participants and economy. They are testament to a research design that gives a place to mixed and multiple methodologies, resulting in an abundant and textured data set. Their inherent messiness enabled productive incursions into DIY culture, women makers, and the production and consumption of handmade goods.

Politics of Access

Being prepared for whatever stitches that might get dropped or needles break as I pursued my research, I was able, in fact, to significantly shift my approach to one key aspect of the project—the case study of Etsy. Early on in the project’s development, I had anticipated gaining access to members of Etsy’s senior management team and visiting the company’s corporate offices and the “Etsy labs” in Brooklyn as part of my fieldwork. I planned to do semi-structured interviews with Etsy’s CEO, Chad Dickerson, and co-founder, Rob Kalin, and other senior Etsy staffers. Given that the company positions itself as being open and transparent, with a fairly flat hierarchy and a CEO who is highly visible and committed to the “member community,” I expected access would not be a problem. I imagined it might in fact be welcomed, given that my research focuses on Etsy’s core community and, as such, could offer useful insight into its business.

The company’s vocabulary of empowerment, transparency, creativity, and “we are all in this together” community mindset saturates its corporate communications, CEO blog posts, events and overall peer-to-peer tone of its vision and mission (this will become increasingly evident in my analysis in chapter 4). Yet, despite this seeming openness, I

encountered difficulties in gaining access to Etsy's leadership and offices. I had taken care to ensure my initial attempts at contact were facilitated through two "warm" intermediaries—the global Etsy Education manager and Etsy Canada's community manager, both of whom I met in person at an Etsy 101 workshop in Montréal. I spoke to the former, who led the workshop, after the event to explain my background and my research. She was a former graphic designer and knew Veer quite well, which provided an immediate and positive connection. She invited me to contact her and offered to connect me to the right person at Etsy to request the interviews and site visit. Yet, my attempts to contact her—both by email and phone—after the event went unanswered. Next, I tried a public relations contact at Etsy, the name of whom I got from the Etsy Canada community manager. Again, after establishing common ground as a former VP and founder of a creative business, now researching indie craft, my request was politely declined. It was clear to me that there was considerable discord between Etsy's "walk" and its "talk," which made me suspicious that the company's messaging was, in fact, hyperbole. Thus, I focused my efforts on analyzing Etsy as a corporatized model from the perspective of an outsider looking in, and focused intently on getting access to real people actively participating in the handmade economy and interviewing and following these women over a period of nearly two years.

This required adapting my mixed-methodology approach. However, weaving together the various methodologies I pursued, allowed me to meet the goals for my research: to uncover the attributes, values and working practices that characterize the cultures of production of women in the indie craft movement; to establish the characteristics of their

habitus and how they accumulate cultural and social capital; and to provide insight into the labour and the gender dynamics that condition the cultural economy of DIY craft. At a broader level, these methodologies revealed nuances in my field research, which provided insight into the structural and power relations at play as I analyzed them according to a feminist framework. By digging creatively and reflexively into the suite of interviews, participant-observation, Etsy as case study, making as personal practice, and the patchwork of digital, visual, material and textual data that comprise this doctoral work, I mobilized old and new methodological and creative processes side-by-side.

On Feminist Methods

This ethnographic study of the cultural economy of craft is grounded in a commitment to feminist methods as essential to research design and knowledge production. I drew from the theoretical writings of feminist scholars who argue for a move away from narrow, reductionist methods and positivism—a view in social science that argues for a position of complete objectivity in research that results in a single truth—calling instead for interdisciplinary modes that embrace critical reflexivity and mobilize gender as central to their methods. These approaches argue for the foregrounding of gender as an analytical lens, recognized feminist subjectivity and voice as valuable, acknowledge situated knowledges (Haraway 1991) and standpoint epistemology (Harding and Hintikka 1983; Harding 1986). They also assert that writing itself is a feminist method (Richardson 1998) and mobilize the concept of “relay” (Henderson 2008) as mode of feminist inquiry and analysis.

In particular, I am guided by the pioneering work of Donna Haraway (1991) and her radical critiques of scientific “objectivity” and its totalizing claims to authority that have substantially shaped feminist methods and analysis of cultural phenomena. Haraway elaborates a theory of partial truths and situated knowledges that reframes the idea of objectivity, challenging science and technology’s claims to absolute omniscience and objectivism. Rather, she argues for “a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates the paradoxical and critical feminist [science] projects: feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*” (188; emphasis in original). Haraway stakes an important claim to feminist research as acknowledging an embodied perspective and employs “vision” as a metaphor throughout to demonstrate her position that “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence or splitting of subject and object” (190). Moreover, Haraway argues for multiple and varied subjective positions that enable “partial, locatable, critical knowledge’s sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (191). Haraway reclaims the partial, situated, contradictory and paradoxical as central to research, a way of embodying feminist objectivity, which, as critical feminist modes of analysis, are key to my methodological approach.

Furthermore, I adopted Laurel Richardson’s feminist approach. It challenges the standard writing model associated with scientific research, including social science (“writing up”

data), as a transparent reporting activity that privileges truth value and objectivity. In *Writing: A method of inquiry* (1998), Richardson posits writing as, instead, a dynamic, creative process, a way to make discoveries and gain knowledge, and

a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limits us and social science (924).

Her approach was not only appealing to me for the liberating possibilities it presented of validating the voice and experience of the writer/researcher, but also because it acknowledges the muting effects of professional academic socialization, and more importantly because writing as a method for inquiry recognizes that language is value-laden and affective in shaping one's view of reality. The words we choose reflect our own knowledge, disciplinary discourse, and subjectivity.

Further, Richardson engages post-modernist theory and its distrust of the superiority of any one method over another and suggests that therefore neither science nor literature can claim absolute authority of method. What is helpful from the Richardson's analysis of the post-modernist position, however, is that "it does allow us to know "something" without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing, albeit recognizing the situational limits of the knower," (928). Feminist cultural studies has strongly embraced this viewpoint along with post-structuralism's conceptions of language as constitutive of social reality through the construction of meaning:

"Language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place

where our sense of selves, our *subjectivity*, is constructed” (929). Thus, writing as method for inquiry mobilizes language according to the writer/researcher’s subjective lens, giving meaning to and serving as a site of exploration and struggle and an attempt to organize the world according to her standpoint.

Feminist methods bring a mode of inquiry that values a multi-dimensional framework—the idea of multiple truths and subjectivities—and requires an interdisciplinary approach that leaves inquiry open to wider possibilities for understanding, in my case, the lived experiences and labours of crafters, and the gendering of the cultural economy of craft. Finally, by making visible my research design and methodologies, I heed Haas’ call that “feminist researchers should not just talk about the politics of online feminist communities and challenge the notions of feminist technologies, but should share their methodologies behind their research” (2009: 80).

Lastly, Lisa Henderson’s (2008) concept of “relay” also proves helpful to understanding contemporary cultural production, given its methodological and analytical purchase as a means to connect the constellation of networks, modes of labour, ethics and identities that encircle cultural production. As a feminist scholar, Henderson developed the notion of relay in relation to queer filmmaking; however, I believe it has equal value when considering other forms of cultural production, such as DIY craft. As a feminist scholar, Henderson situates relay as having critical capacities for assessing the power asymmetries and surrogate strategies in conceiving relations between subcultures and their dominant alternatives.

Relay refers to an ongoing, uneven process of cultural passing off, catching, and passing on, if not always among members of the same team. It is not assimilation, exactly, or hybridity or bricolage, although it shares with those ideals a mediating impulse and lively aversion to the hardened categories of cultural analysis (571).

Henderson's theorization marks—in ways those other terms do not—cultural-economic difference and relation, a particular politics of recognition and the materiality of practice, and the idea that practice matters in non-dominant cultural production. Together, these concepts enable a researcher to build a framework for analyzing cultural production that takes into account material and immaterial practices, ethics, relations and links to feminist, queer and postcolonial modes of critique. In my case, situating contemporary cultural production as relay gives me the capacity to consider agency, temporary formations, the moral politics of alternative cultural economies and micro-entrepreneurship, DIY and indie craft-making in a networked world, and contributes to a feminist analysis of these networks. The idea of relay does not displace the commercial structures or the claims and counterclaims of producers with regard to the simultaneous exploitation and emancipation of independent creative work, but may help to

rematerialize the people and practices—most of us and most of what we do—and our routine navigation of cultural and institutional fault lines as we perform in, on, through, and across the received proscenia of everyday cultural life (584).

On Ethnography

Before going into those precise details of how I pursued my methodologies, though, it is important to unpack the theoretical and historical understanding of ethnography that

guided my work. Broadly, I followed the long-standing tradition whereby ethnographic approaches as method of knowledge production seek to “produce detailed and situated accounts of specific cultures in a manner that reflects the perspectives of those whose culture is under discussion” (Boellstorff et al.: 14). These required immersion in fieldwork and participation in the everyday lived culture of DIY craft—both on- and offline. Moreover, it called for the union of method and theory as deeply intertwined in the in production of ethnographic knowledge. One cannot exist without the other.

I was also inspired by Henderson’s (2008) ethnographic approach. She refers to ethnographic work as being layered, and full of arcs and deviations, the subjectivities of cultural producers and the intimacies tied to projects and their migration, and these also inform my methodological vantage point. She notes that

imagined this way, ethnography’s intimacy—it’s face-to-face character, the engagement it demands and enables—opens up the broad field of cultural practice and change, making visible the sediments of old habits amid productions and transformations in the present. Such a high-contact exploration of structure, practice, meaning, and the reciprocities among them make case studies [such as hers of the film *Desert Motel*] less particularistic than deeply articulated, less novel than conjunctural, less transparent than analytic in their subjectivity and commitment to local speakers (572).

In this way, ethnographic research, which by definition involves a variety of methodologies, allows for flexibility and makes it possible to move beyond narrowly defined categories of “interview” or “survey” to incorporate a suite of approaches. Four methodologies anchor my approach: interviews, participant-observation,, digital data gathering and a case study of Etsy. They are not meant to be wholly discrete; rather there

are commonalities, resonances and parallels among them (Boellstorff et. al.: 11). Notably, “ethnography has been widely and enthusiastically embraced by a range of scholars interested in online sociality because of ethnography’s particular value in an age of networked cultures” (51). This broader affordability of ethnography reinforces its pertinence in the digital age, where the relay between online and offline activities is increasingly evident and contributes to the messiness I’ve referred to, making it , ever more vital to my study.

Adapting Ethnography for Digital Environments as Cultural Field Sites

Digital ethnography has emerged in recent years under various monikers, including “netnography” (Kozinets, 2010), “virtual ethnography” (Hine, 2000), “internet inquiry” (Markham & Baym, 2009) “cyber-ethnography” (Ward 1999), and “multi-modal ethnography” (Dicks, Soyinka and Coffey, 2006). All of these approaches offer valuable insights and arguments on where digital ethnography aligns with, diverges from and adapts conventional ethnography. Importantly, all of them value the cultural artifacts of an online community on par with human interactions or human actors as research subjects. Robert Kozinets’ *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (2010) defines its approach as a “specialized form of ethnography adapted to the unique computer-mediated contingencies of today’s social worlds and as a method of studying the social web and the online cultures and communities that comprise it” (1). He draws insights from anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies and selectively applies their theories and methodologies to marketing and consumer research online. Netnography troubles the traditional notion of a field site as localized in space, and extends

ethnographic cultural analysis, representation and identity construction by examining how it is technologically mediated and contingent. Further, Kozinets argues that netnography differs from conventional “real life” ethnography in four ways: it focuses on a highly mediated and non-physical environment that features limited or no social cues; it allows for unprecedented access to user interaction; operates in an environment that features traceable, archivable and searchable digital data; and must negotiate a less-than-clear divide between public and private spaces of social interaction. Kozinets also advocates that prolonged engagement and deep immersion as a mode of participant-observation in online communities is an optimal part of netnographic methodologies, and that transparency of the researcher’s identity and motives is essential. As such, my own online participation and observation in the indie craft scene began in 2005. I have been an Etsy member since May 7, 2009. Notably, for this work, netnography also acknowledges that data collection and analysis do not happen separately, but rather are intertwined and agile, such that they can be read “deeply for cultural information” (96).

Kozinets’ principles are well suited to my ethnographic study of cultural production of DIY craft, since they allowed me to also consider the practices creative work as imbricated with digital environments, and provide specific approaches to gather data and analyze online interactivity, community-building and other technologically mediated communications. They supported analysis of online culture, community and labour and their digital manifestations, all of which are characteristic of the new wave of DIY craft.

Adapting ethnography in this way also implies additional roles for the ethnographer (Hine 2000), including reader, translator, storyteller and, potentially, producer-consumer. In adapting ethnography as a way to articulate the everyday aspect of online communication, I was also mindful of Radway's (1986) contention that ethnographic consideration of the fluid social groupings that develop around media and leisure will always provide only partial, not holistic, research knowledge.

Individual Research Methodologies

This section elaborates the processes, timelines, activities, specific techniques and questions of access that comprise my mixed-methodology ethnographic approach. I discuss in outline the organization, recruitment and conduct of eight semi-structured interviews and an auto-ethnographic interview; participant-observation and workshop activities; a case study and digital ethnography of Etsy; launching of my own website and research blog, as well as the digital and visual data capture of web content.. I also briefly review the ethics process and required approvals.

Interviews

Beginning in March 2012, I targeted crafters, shop owners, bloggers, and historians, including sellers and buyers on Etsy to take part in semi-structured interviews. I solicited participation in a variety of ways. First, I contacted women with whom I already had a relationship via my ongoing engagement in craft community circles. Next, I asked each of these interviewees to suggest other people who might offer valuable insights into the research—a “snowballing” approach. At the same time, I researched potential participants

who were visibly active as craft community personalities, social media influencers and bloggers, and/or organizers of significant craft fairs and events. Lastly, I targeted Etsy company employees and management (with limited success, as noted). In the end, I conducted eight semi-formal interviews and one auto-ethnographic interview, during which a colleague interviewed me about my own background and experience.

I began by asking why each interviewee had become interested in craft. What inspired her DIY activity and desire to make things by hand? This type of biographical mode of inquiry or oral history has long-standing roots in qualitative research. It

allow[s] researchers to learn about respondents' lives from their own perspective—where they create meaning, what they deem important, their feelings and attitudes (both explicit and implicit), the relationship between different life experiences or different times in their life (Hesse-Biber 2005: 151).

Feminist inquiry has specifically pursued the process of storytelling as a means of anointing women's voices and has validated women's sharing of their personal experiences through story as legitimate and having political significance in the face of pervasive patriarchy (Hanisch 1969). Feminist inquiry values the knowledge and life experience of women and other marginalized groups that might otherwise be silenced or remain invisible. In short, feminist analyses claim women's voices and the personal stories that have been dismissed by those invested in maintaining hegemonic structures. It is with this perspective in mind that I interviewed each woman to relate her experiences and involvement in the cultural economy of craft.

The semi-structured interview is generative because it allows for a more dialogic exchange; it rests on a conversational tone and built-in guide points, yet is a flexible and free-flowing two-way exchange, which can reduce the power imbalance and lessen the formality between interviewer and interviewee. Semi-structured interviews also typically result in longer dialogues and more substantial information gathering, since interviewers can probe for more detailed responses (Gunter 2002: 216). As it turned out, active listening was key to picking up on threads in responses and encouraging interviewees to elaborate. As a reflexive methodology, it was also essential that I recognize my role and authority as an academic, a former creative industry professional and a fellow participant in the craft community. As such, I was aware of my position while also participating in the conversation. In a reflexive mode, subjective language and performance are necessary to access the social and cultural phenomena interviews bring to light, and must be considered as part of the interview data analysis.²⁴

I conducted all interviews face-to-face, with the exceptions of three, which I did as video calls over Skype due to geographical distance. In one instance, I also carried out a follow-up interview several months later to learn how things had changed for the interviewee since she and her partner had closed their sew lounge and shop. I had interviewees walk me through their websites, blogs, Etsy shops, production studios and other aspects of the material practice, networks and physical and digital traces of their craft economy participation; thus enriching the interviews with demonstrations, studios visits and digital

²⁴ See Reinharz, S. and Susan E. Chase (2003) "Interviewing Women" and also Oakley's (1981) seminal work: "Interviewing Women: A contradiction in terms"

tours. I digitally recorded the interviews using Amadeus Pro audio software and archived them on both my local hard drive and in the cloud using Dropbox, in line with the choice indicated on participants' signed research ethics consent forms, which states materials may be archived for "the duration of Wallace's doctoral program or five years, whichever is longer" or "indefinitely" (Appendix A: Sample Consent Form for Participation in Research and Ethics Approval).

A key characteristic of ethnographic research is that it is constantly unfolding. In this way, taking an ethnographic approach to the cultural economy of craft has allowed me to see it as a living, breathing expression of the everyday lived moments. It also raises the important distinction between the "emic" and "etic" understandings of culture in ethnographic inquiry (Geertz, 1973). These two positions refer to insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives and modes of analyses. Interviews are particularly instructive in the ethnographic context because they provide emic insight and interpretation from those embedded in the culture. As a result, semi-formal, conversational interviews serve as a way for the researcher to learn about informants' theoretical and pragmatic insights, not just mine data. My study thus draws both on emic and etic forms of analysis, as an overlay on the various methodologies used throughout.

Participant-observation

Ethnography values "doing" as much as "talking"—that is, participating in everyday activities and being an active part of a cultural community, observing and sharing knowledge, experience and material practice. As an open and flexible research method,

participant-observation was vital to the design and diachronic nature of this study.

Deeply immersing myself in the field gave me multiple entry points for engaging with the maker community, with the participation and observation that took place between members of the craft economy and between myself and those participants.

By positioning myself as participant-observer, I was able to be open to how field encounters might require me to evolve or adjust my research questions; thus acknowledging that cultural research cannot be premeditated and driven only by a hypothesis-proving approach. As Boellstorff et al. (2012) note,

[t]he core method of participant observation allows the investigator to alter ethnographic research midstream in a manner difficult with many methodologies [...]; the adaptability of the method is one reason fieldwork requires significant time investment (54).

Furthermore, participant-observation aligns with feminist research methods, integral to representing women's work, voices and life stories in my study. Indeed, I employed a feminist understanding of participant-observation, valuing the subjective and personal, and highlighting the tensions, contradictions and negotiations that came about due to my observations and interactions with other participants and via my involvement as a researcher, craft economy participant and a woman with creative industries and start-up experience. It required my intentionally resisting the urge to clean up and depersonalize the research, recognizing instead that, as per feminist participant-observation, no researcher can separate herself from personhood. Finally, by applying feminist intentionality to participant-observation I was able to connect to the broader feminist

project by carrying out research by, for and about women. As Rundell and Mandell point out,

despite great variation among feminists, all share the belief that, historically, knowledge has been skewed by androcentric bias within methodologies and methods and that feminist methodologies should seek to correct this (2009: 413).

Although my interests in craft and creative work are long-standing, this dissertation records, reflects and interprets, in part, my serious engagement in and participant-observation of the indie craft scene since 2009. Participant-observation also shaped the selection of DIY craft as my field site and research subject. I began informally participating with crafters by attending sewing workshops, during which casual discussion revealed initial insights into why women began crafting, where it fit into their lifestyle and income, including inklings toward issues of taste and class. I also began to get a feel for the community's norms and conventions, and the intersection of craft with digital spaces, emerging technologies and networks.

Offline participant-observation activities included taking part in sewing and craft workshops at the Emeline&Annabelle sew lounge and café in Montréal starting in November 2010 to August 2012. My participation involved taking an 8-week pattern design and dress-making atelier, an A-line skirt class, a fabric dyeing tutorial, and a modern quilting course, and dropping in weekly during open clinic sewing hours for nearly two years. I have also been part of a regular knitting circle since 2010 and set up and participate in a Montréal sewing co-op, which began in January 2013. I've regularly

attended craft fairs and maker shows in Canada and the United States over the past five years, including Smart Design Mart (Montréal), Brooklyn Flea (New York), Puces Pop (Montréal), Make It Show (Edmonton and Vancouver), the Vermont Quilt Fest (Essex Junction) and Renegade Craft Fair (Chicago). In addition, I attended the Etsy 101 sellers workshop in Montréal in August 2012, visited the multi-purpose craft, studio and retail space, The Lunenburg Makery, in Nova Scotia in October 2012, and participated in the annual three-day Hello Etsy! conference at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in March 2013.

I augmented this physical engagement with near daily, participant-observation in online DIY craft communities from November 2009 to November 2013. Unbounded by geography and difficult to describe in precise terms, defining “community” has been an enduring challenge for ethnographers, a problem that is further compounded when community includes the digital spaces and virtual worlds enabled by the Internet (see Rheingold 2000; Whittaker et al. 1997; Jenkins 2008; Boellstorff et al. 2012). For my study, online communities coalesce in interactive digital spaces on the Internet around the mutual interest of maker culture, DIY craft, and entrepreneurship. I engaged in repeated visits to, and interactions and shared activities with members of these communities, cultivating knowledge and experience through their shared context, language, protocols and culture. My in-depth participant-observation focused on the digital spaces of Etsy.com, including the ecommerce marketplace, blogs, community pages, labs, forums, via home computer and the company’s mobile app. I also extended my Etsy-specific participant-observation to the company’s social networks, which I discuss in more detail in terms of my use of digital methodologies below. Other participant-observation in

online communities included visits to and interaction with crafters on the tutorial site, [Craftsy.com](#); the blog and marketplace, [OhMyHandmade.com](#); an Etsy competitor, [Cargoh.com](#); and the largest online knitting social network, [Ravelry.com](#). Although, with my main focus on Etsy, my engagement on these other sites was limited, however I would visit each one at least monthly to keep a pulse on their activities, social networks and blog content.

Digital Methodologies

A series of digital methodologies augmented the interviews and participant-observation and provided vital additional forms of data for this study. Capturing digital data speaks to the interdependence of online and offline contexts of the everyday life of makers involved in the cultural economy of craft. The digital approaches I employed varied and overlapped, yet can broadly be grouped as follows: digital data capture of web-based visual and textual material, including blogs; established social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and more informal, back-channel forums and chat rooms; and my own research website and blog.

I launched my research website and blog in February 2012 at [jacquelinewallace.com](#). The website served as a place for me to document the research process, aggregate relevant articles and links, and journal my research and private field notes. I captured field notes using the private, password-protected functionality enabled by Wordpress's open source content management software, although in many instances it was more convenient to

capture field notes with pen and paper. I used the public blog to record key moments in the dissertation experience and to keep a chronological record of the project, including updates on work-in-progress, insights and conference recaps on an ad-hoc basis.

Importantly, my site and blog allowed me to provide information (including a prospectus describing the project) and achieve credibility when contacting possible research participants.

Ethnographic research has improved due to the emergence of user-friendly digital tools that have put production capacities in the hands of non-professionals. Digital data capture allows researchers to make digital records of online contexts, practices and discourses. Such data capture does not replace written field notes taken during participant-observation or even traditional audio-visual recordings, but augments such approaches and expands the set of tools at the researcher's disposal. My digital data set includes hundreds of screengrabs of craft-related ads and web copy, interface designs, graphics, product shots, Instagrams, Facebook updates, blog posts and comments, promotional emails from Etsy and other craft marketplaces, and any other pieces of digital ephemera that I saw as relevant to this study.

Screengrabs were captured nearly daily as digital still images, labelled, dated and time-stamped. This was essential because digital data—which provide visual evidence and explanation of cultural phenomena—can change frequently and disappear without notice.

I also used the Internet Wayback Machine²⁵, which captures and archives web pages as they existed on a certain date in time, and allows one to “travel back” to that moment to see the iteration of that particular web page when it was captured. Here, I draw from Hogan’s (2012) conception of the term “digs” as useful to framing the methodological choice of “excavating” such digital records from the web:

those that became too elusive to describe, those better ‘dug up’ and brought to the surface, and those I collected to document my trajectory and, in turn, *create* a (research) trajectory. ‘Dig’ is an edifying concept—as both verb and noun, it conjures the idea of intervention; an action that alters as it reveals. As a verb, ‘digging’ implies the unearthing, uncovering, and in turn, layers and depths of access and meaning (65).

Moreover, the use of digital methodologies that rely on the visual as the primary way of capturing data continues the long history of visual ethnography as a qualitative method (Pink 2007). Recent advances in software and user-oriented publishing tools have greatly expanded the possibilities for visual captures. Yet, when compared with photos, “are most usefully treated as representations of aspects of culture; not recordings of whole cultures or symbols that will have complete or fixed meanings” (Pink: 75). In all, digital capture of textual, visual and audio data required effective archival strategies. To that end, I used a mix of software, including Evernote,²⁶ a web clipping and annotation application, which allowed me to organize and automatically date and time-stamp all entries, and assign

²⁵ <http://archive.org>

²⁶ <http://www.evernote.com>

keywords to them. I also used Dropmark²⁷ and DropBox,²⁸ hosted services, which provided cloud-based content management and storage, respectively.

Lastly, I mobilized the use of social media. This included using Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to gather relevant news, follow DIY craft community members and brands, and engage with community thought-leaders. These platforms also provided a means of networking to source, connect and communicate with interview candidates. They also provided a means to keep in touch and up-to-date with interviewees' activities long after the interview itself had been completed.

Case Study of Etsy

Since Etsy is a key part of DIY craft's habitus in North America, I undertook a comprehensive review of Etsy's ecommerce website. In particular, I looked at its interfaces and ecommerce infrastructure, and its blogs, treasuries and merchandising efforts. I reviewed Etsy shop profiles and community contributions and commentary, as well as promotional emails and social media activities. I also interviewed Etsy Canada's community manager, undertook participant-observation at events and workshops, and gathered sales statistics published both by Etsy and external craft community websites. This case study is discussed in the following chapter, where I describe and analyze Etsy as a corporation, a marketplace, and a community—toward critically examining the

²⁷ <http://www.dropmark.com>

²⁸ <http://www.dropbox.com>

company's model, positioning, and commercial impacts on the cultural economy of craft and its micro-entrepreneurs.

CHAPTER 4

A Handmade Life: Craft's Habitus, Etsy and the Constraints of a Corporatized Model

In chapter 2, I introduced Bourdieu's theories on the judgement of taste as well as his cultural field theory, which situates creative works in terms of their production, circulation and consumption. He specifies the field to mean a mutually constitutive and sustaining set of social institutions, individuals and discourses, and is often employed as a means to mask power relations (1993). It is a social space, where capital is earned and lost in relation to others in the field—where control of resources, reputation, tastes and material and symbolic capitals are in play. In this chapter, I contextualize DIY craft and take up Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural intermediaries, and symbolic capitals and analyze them relative to DIY craft as a field of cultural production. What characterizes DIY craft and what are the particularities of its habitus? Who are its makers and what is their role as cultural intermediaries? How are indie crafters arbiters of taste? How might cool-hunting, lifestyle and identity formation fuel production and consumption within DIY craft as a cultural field? What do they reveal about culture and consumption practices and the reproduction of social inequities?

A significant part of this chapter discusses Etsy as a substantial aspect of contemporary craft's habitus (as marketplace, community, and corporation). Bourdieu might not have been able to anticipate the social web, micro-enterprises and networked technologies as central elements of cultural field sites when he was pursuing his sociological studies in

post-war France, however my research augments the literature by focusing on technology-enabled *informal* production networks as cultural field sites that have, to-date, gone largely unexamined. I draw from my mixed-methodology approach, including interviews, participant-observation, and digital methods and data capture that provide insight into DIY craft's networked culture.

Lastly, in line with my commitment to feminist scholarship, I critically expand my examination of DIY craft's habitus, intermediaries and judgment of taste to explicitly consider gender and feminist concerns, a dimension overlooked by Bourdieu (Adkins and Skeggs 2005; Born 2010) particularly as it relates to Etsy as a corporatized model and to the gendered hierarchies and discourses embedded in its role as marker of distinction, taste and class.

DIY Craft as a Cultural Field

In this dissertation, I argue that DIY craft is a cultural economy embedded within the field of culture as a contested space of power and social relations. This field is not neutral but rather is made up of agents, social structures, habitus and practices that operate as a social system and are imbricated with various types of capital, including social and cultural as symbolic modes of power accumulation and class distinction (Bourdieu 1993; Stevens 1998: 68-69). Thus, by conceiving DIY craft as a cultural field, I was not reduced to analyses that are just about crafters, or practices, or Etsy, or a certain set of politics or tastes. Rather, what Bourdieu's model provides is a larger social space of critique that enables me to explore and unravel the intersections among all of these aspects of craft's

cultural field, including the mix of social, economic, political and cultural dynamics that are in play. Connecting Bourdieu's conceptual and analytical tool kit to more recent studies of cultural production (Stevens 1998; Soar 2002; McFall 2004; Ross 2004; McRobbie 1998, 2002, 2012, 2013) enabled me to draw from these investigations of professional cultural work milieux and consider the convergences and divergences of the new cultural economy of DIY craft—a technologically-enabled, global field of ecommerce and community around handmade goods and the informal networks of women who make them.

What is DIY craft?

The current incarnation of craft began to emerge around the time of the new millennium (Levine and Heimerl 2008; Walker 2007). Of course, the culture, practices and economies of making goods by hand for decorative and commercial purposes date back centuries—from stained glass-making in the 12th century to the Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the 20th century, and the prominence of studio crafts of the 1960s and 1970s (Greenhalgh 2003; Dormer 1997). However, today's craft differs from its predecessors in its relationship to the popularization of DIY. This occurred with the development of large big-box retailers such as The Home Depot and Michaels as suppliers of materials for DIY projects, and of the various commercial media channels devoted to DIY topics (Walker 2008). Television productions of this nature grew dramatically in the early 2000s, especially with the introduction of cable television dedicated to DIY programming. TLC (formerly The Learning Channel) shifted its content from learning to lifestyle with DIY

shows devoted to home improvement, arts and crafts, and interior design.²⁹ TLC's 24/7 line-up of DIY programs found mass appeal among North Americans audiences who were motivated to renovate their kitchen, build furniture or learn to knit by the access to the know-how these programs provided, along with the promised cost savings and the hands-on satisfaction. Similarly, the vast growth of Martha Stewart's branded empire, most particularly her television show and monthly magazine, *Martha Stewart Living*, vastly expanded the DIY market for craft, particularly in North America. Targeting homemakers and career women alike, Martha Stewart constructed a lifestyle brand and a compelling DIY imaginary, with its how-to approaches and accessible materials for making everyday living more aesthetically pleasing. The message was, you can do it, too, and get professional results at an affordable price.

DIY craft has also been influenced by earlier DIY movements of punk and indie music (Wright, M.A. 1998), 'zine-making (Comstock 2001) and the culture of modding³⁰. In this way, DIY added important ideological and political dimensions to its 'indie' ethic, reinforcing a culture that valued self-reliance, creativity and cost-saving, alongside a commitment of personal investment of time, a desire to self-educate and make things by achieving competence or skill (Spencer 2005). It is often referred to as part of "maker culture", which has fueled publications like *Make*:³¹ magazine and *Instructables*³², "how-to"

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Do_it_yourself

³⁰ 'Modding' is a shorthand vocabulary that refers to modifying hardware, software, electronics, or other straight-from-the-manufacturer products to alter or improve performance or intended use. It is often associated with computers or cars and other conventionally male-oriented pursuits.

³¹ *Make*: magazine is the sister-publication to *Craft*: magazine. <http://makezine.com/>

publications that provide step-by-step directions for building everything from home electronics, circuits and robots to toys, games and garden tools. Further, the DIY ethic is distinguished by a significant commitment to environmental awareness (reduce, reuse, recycle) and to language and values associated with alternative economies and patterns of consumption that run counter to those of mainstream culture and mass consumerism (McKay 1998).

Today's DIY craft as a field of cultural production draws heavily from this contextual background. Together, the popularization, specialized media programming and marketing of DIY craft; its ideological underpinnings; and political ethics all intersect with contemporary making. Against this backdrop, my research identifies as the temporality of contemporary craft economy as emerging in the mid-2000s in the wake of the burgeoning social web and its peer-to-peer and participative media technologies. This era followed the rise of ecommerce in the late 1990s and early as exemplified by transactional websites such as eBay, Amazon and PayPal. It also came on the heels of the first wave of blogging (early 2000s) and gained traction as blogs and, later, social networks emerged as increasingly accessible, user-friendly platforms for non-technical interest groups. Now, the craft communities that had formed in various pockets of North America around indie craft fairs, local craft shops or “stitch 'n bitch” groups could gather in significant numbers in the electronic craft spaces that were blogs and social networks, and in an ever-increasing array of online communities such getcrafty.com and craftster.org—some of the earliest DIY craft forums.

³² <http://www.instructables.com/>

The launch of Etsy.com in 2005 provided the ecommerce and storefront technology for crafters to not just connect online, but to sell their handmade wares without needing the technical know-how or significant expense of setting up their own shop. Ecommerce was not just for large retailers anymore; individual crafters could directly access the tools and technologies to establish micro-enterprises. “Not since the ‘second wave’ of arts and crafts, the 1960s revival of handmade goods as part of the hippie lifestyle, has crafting been either so popular or seen as a sustainable income opportunity” (Jakob 2013: 128).

What is distinct about contemporary craft, according to my research, in addition to its connection with DIY, is that it is being rediscovered not as leisurely creative pastime, but as a desirable and viable way to make a living. The members of the class fraction I am studying do not, in large part, identify as hobbyists, but rather as ambitious DIYers for whom craft is a form of entrepreneurship and potential livelihood. Consequently, modern craft is

no longer a sequestered and quaint domestic leisure activity[;] crafts and DIY have redefined their images and social stigmas with progressive agendas of emancipation, individualization, sub-cultural identification and anti-commercialism as well as emerged as a multi-billion dollar industry (Jakob 2013: 127).

Relationship to Studio Crafts

While crafters in my study do not identify as hobbyists, they are also distinct from studio crafters. The latter are crafters who have been formally trained in art schools, typically

specializing in a particular genre—ceramics, jewellery or textiles, for example. Studio crafters usually frame their work in terms of art, formalized techniques and institutional affiliation rather than with a DIY ethos, use-value and entrepreneurial orientation.

Similar to McRobbie's (1998) study of fashion designers, which sought to, in part, remedy a serious lack of research on fashion as a field of creative work or what might have earlier been termed a "sociology of work", academic scholarship on craft has predominantly focused on craft as associated with the canon of art history, situating it relative to art historical periods, genres and aesthetics (eg. Koplos and Metcalf 2010; Dormer 1997; Becker 1982). This work also focused on the tensions and fractures between arts and crafts, whereby art was elevated and prized both economically and symbolically as part of 18th century Europe's classification of visual culture system. Crafts, with their association to the decorative, utility, and the vernacular were relegated to lower value and esteem, a *salon des refusés*—"that cohered only by virtue of their exclusion" (Greenhalgh 1997: 28).

Despite this rupture between arts and crafts historically in terms of status and classification (as well as the ongoing tensions and craft's thrust toward), craft training and pedagogy was a distinct stream of the mid-century modernist art school system in North America (Koplos and Metcalf 2010). Studio craft emerged in the 1950s as a parallel stream of curriculum and studio training for artists or "fine crafters," whose preferred media were fibre, ceramic, wood, glass and metal (Sandra A., interview Oct. 17, 2012).³³

In contrast to today's DIY crafters, studio craftspeople have historically identified with an

³³ I spoke at length with Sandra Alföldy, Ph.D., Professor of Craft History at NSCAD University in Halifax, NS, in an interview on October 17, 2012 and in subsequent informal chats and email correspondence.

artistic mindset whereby they use craft methods to produce originally conceived one-off objects in the studio. Their primary desire is to produce craft objects as a means of aesthetic expression rather than as functional or market-destined products. Fine crafters often teach, provide workshops and write to earn additional income (S. Alfoldy, interview). In contrast, DIY crafters do not necessarily come from art school or have any studio training. They are often self-taught and seek a broad audience for their handmade goods—not traditional collectors or art buyers, but a wide community via Etsy and indie craft fairs—and proudly wear the label and the DIY values associated with being an indie crafter.

“DIYers are largely unafraid to call themselves craftspeople or makers. When you’re dealing with so-called “professionals,” it’s, well, “I’m a textile sculptor or I’m a so-and-so artist.”. The terminology changes dramatically. Professional fine crafts people, like jewellery designers or textile artists, are using craft materials but are refusing to engage with the semantics around craft” (S. Alfoldy, interview).³⁴

Reconstituting the Field: Informal Networks

Albeit limited in number, the studies on production cultures and particular fields of cultural production have to-date largely focused on professional fields of work. For example, Stevens (1998) investigates the field of architecture as a privileged “favoured circle” marked by master-pupil relationships, distinction of taste and accumulation of symbolic capital to maintain power and privilege through high-profile competitions and signature architectural projects and reputation management. The field is marked by

³⁴ For a discussion of how “professional studio craftsman” was qualified in the Canadian craft guilds in the 1960s, see Burnham, H. (1965). “Crafts and Craftsman” in *The Craftsman/L’Artisan*. Archives of Ontario, Ontario Crafts Council, Archives of Canadian Craft, MU5791, Box 46, HZ-1H2

invaluable professional networks that can make or break an architectural career, and have proven vital to the success of eminent architects over time. Soar (2002) critically examines the “insular” profession of graphic design, a “ubiquitous, yet largely invisible, professional practice that nevertheless contributes substantially to the make-up of our visual culture” (vi). As a field of cultural production, graphic designers maintain professional affiliations, networks and credentials. They work as essential cultural intermediaries in the production of visual communication in such organized professional milieux as ad agencies, corporations and studios. McRobbie, for her part, investigates British fashion design as a field of cultural production and professional work. As an historical, cultural and sociological view of the profession, she traces the careers of young designers, analyzing fashion education, trade and industry and the precarious livelihoods of young women in this commercial sector.

This focus on professional fields of cultural production bind these earlier studies and enabled them to look to formalized professional, institutional and social structures to mark the contours of their cultural fields. Investigating institutional education and curricula, professional associations, commercial organizational cultures, apprenticeship or guild systems, and trade and regulatory bodies are but some delineating structures of professional realms. DIY craft as a cultural field lacks these formalized structures that might more expressly outline its contours, including formalized, accepted educational qualifications and the associated benefits of such institutional cultural capital. This, arguably, makes informally networked fields of cultural production harder to study as they are more distributed and rely on advancements in communications technology,

ecommerce infrastructures and mediated social networks. However, as my research indicates, they provide new insights into Bourdieu's theories and concepts and advance scholarship on contemporary cultural production and conceptions of work. In addition, informal fields of cultural production push contemporary research to consider how the cultural field can account for new technologies, socially networked forms of capital, as well as informal ties and connections. These more dynamic and tangled webs have been woven into the realm of contemporary craft and micro-entrepreneurship and require a thoughtful consideration of how they form and reform in the field of DIY craft in its various guises.

Let me stress that I am not reducing the formal-informal, or professional-amateur, distinction to the duality so often used in production studies related to, for example, user-generated content or peer-to-peer technologies. DIYers and craft entrepreneurs are not amateurs: they are motivated cultural producers, who happen to fit outside the normal confines of a professional field in the Bourdieuan sense and as pursued in the scholarly work I describe above. There is a distinct lack of research on informal networks of cultural production, however, particularly those in which women are the overwhelming population of producers, which underscores the importance of my study as a feminist intervention.

What do I mean by informal networks then? Based on significant fieldwork, these formations represent networks of relationships, collaboration, information-sharing and community largely facilitated and certainly amplified by the internet and, more recently,

by social networks. They lie outside conventional, official employment contracts, organizational contexts and professional structures. For DIY crafters, these informal networks are cultivated online through blogs, discussion forums, social networks, and the development of community and commerce through venues like Etsy. They are also extended offline via craft fairs, community gatherings and co-work spaces. They are both social and business relationships, including networked connections to suppliers, distributors and technology infrastructures, alongside links to service providers such as accountants, business lawyers or IT specialists. These informal networks of social relations, business services, and handmade community support enabled by networked technologies often represent temporary, provisional and dynamic linkages or connections that articulate and disarticulate relative to various factors such as seasonal production, project-based needs, craft fairs or sales initiatives, or even the integration of new products, technologies or practices.

It is here that Wittel's (2001) concept of "network sociality" provides a useful update to the Bourdieuan framework of the cultural field by taking into account informal networks of cultural production. Wittel argues that, in contrast to the collective belongingness that characterizes authentic community, network sociality sees social relations as predicated on the exchange of proprietary information in the expressly commercial context of technological individualism that is typical of 21st century capitalism. The idea of network sociality, then, helps to explain, in part, the inner workings of DIY craft. It also serves to augment Bourdieu's field theory by making room for the additional considerations of structuring institutions, such as Etsy, that control technology, marketing and

merchandising mechanisms, and data ownership of online platforms. The concept also offers a useful marker for accounting for cultural production and social connectivity in today's digital era, particularly since it encompasses the commercial interests and power relations at work. As the world's largest platform for the distribution of handmade goods, Etsy's profit-making abilities depend on the labour of DIY crafters and micro-entrepreneurs as product suppliers, actualizing the kind of network sociality about which Wittel theorizes.

However, I argue that network sociality operates in productive tension with a feminist understanding of subjectivity and community and consequently limits the idea's usefulness for helping to understand the female-dominated field of DIY craft. Do network sociality's commercial and corporate underpinnings inherently and completely preclude notions of community and belonging, or is it possible that the field might include social spaces for women to connect and share their experiences and stories? My research indicates that this seeming contradiction highlights how exactly female cultural producers of DIY craft have, in fact, created "cyberspaces of their own" (Bury 2005), while also responding to the conditions of network sociality when operating and growing their craft enterprises. While network sociality describes many of the actions of women as cultural producers of DIY craft, these same women also produce authentic community and sharing online through blogs, forums and chats, and offline at craft fairs, crafts nights and informal gatherings. In certain ways the social relations of DIY craft intersect with the commercial network sociality model, as crafters fuel business for and patronage of each other's shops. At the same time, the community is genuinely collective, offering support,

information-sharing and care in sometimes paradoxical or contradictory ways. That all these things can be happening at once in this field of cultural production reinforces contemporary feminist scholarship, which argues that

the female subject of feminism is one constructed across a multiplicity of discourses, positions, and meanings, which are often in conflict with one another and inherently (historically) contradictory. [...] [I]n other words, [they point] to a conception of subject as multiple, rather than divided or unified (de Lauretis 1987: x).

The multiple subjectivities that women crafters bring to the social spaces of community and commerce serve to demonstrate how numerous meanings are at play and interact in DIY craft as a cultural field.

Entering the Circuit of Culture

In light of the presence of multiple subjectivities, how might we better understand the influential role crafters play as intermediaries within what Richard Johnson calls the “Circuit of culture” (1986/87, Figure 4)? As I introduced in chapter 2, Johnson’s model complements Bourdieu’s cultural field analysis by allowing for a more granular breakdown of cultural processes and the role of intermediaries, so that the conditions of production, circulation and consumption, and their interplay within what Johnson calls “lived cultures”, can be brought to light. He reminds us that we must understand “the specific conditions of consumption” as well as the capitalistic conditions of production and that these conditions “include asymmetries of resources and power, material and cultural” (47).

Particularly important at this stage of my analysis is to recognize the production component of the circuit, paying close attention to the “encoding” aspect of Hall’s (1980) well-known “encoding/decoding” dyad, which has been largely neglected in scholarly analyses which have instead privileged the decoding aspect through reception studies and concerns with discourse and representation (Soar 2002). By focusing on encoding, I recognize with at least equal credence, the vital cultural processes and significant practices of actors participating in the making as critical to the installation of meaning among handcrafted goods and its discourses. This position underscores the significance of ‘work’ as an equally cultural (and sizeable in terms of investment of time) aspect of everyday life and essential to meaning-making. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 2, it signals the important distinction between the “production of culture” as simply the output of culture goods as a seemingly preordained result of an economic imperative, and, in contrast, proposes a more considered view of “cultures of production”, which recognizes the role and agency of cultural intermediaries and the influence of their habitus, and its associated values, norms, and constructed meaning as vital *input* to cultural production (Negus, 2002: 115; see also du Gay and Pryke 2002).

Craft’s Cultural Intermediaries

“Indie crafters” (Waterhouse 2010), “DIYers” (Alfoldy 2012), “handmade designers”³⁵ (Russo, no date), “renegade crafters”, and “the handmade nation” (Levine and Heimerl 2008) are just some of the monikers today’s cultural producers of craft embrace. As

³⁵ <http://socialmedia-culturalcommunication.org/museums-handmade-design-diy-citizenship-and-s>

cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu 1984), these women lie at the heart of indie craft production and maker culture. They use traditional craft techniques but employ a modern, unconventional and, often, subversive style, context and subject matter compared to their counterparts in so-called traditional or mainstream craft, which doesn't identify with the DIY ethos, aesthetics or politics of "the third wave of craft" (Jakob 2013; Wagner 2008). Cultural intermediaries have been broadly understood to-date as "those in media, design, fashion, and 'para' intellectual information occupations, whose jobs entail performing services and the production, marketing and dissemination of symbolic goods" (Featherstone 1991: 19). Moreover, cultural intermediaries are influenced by the nature of their habitus and imprint meaning via their creative activities and practices, attaching signification to cultural products, rather than acting as passive conduits in the creation of culture. Identifying the role and agency of the crafters as cultural intermediaries illuminates the influences, such as network sociality *and* community as viewed through a feminist lens—alongside tastes, dispositions and lifestyle preferences (Bourdieu 1984; Soar 2002) that are cast into the creative practices and affect the production of handmade goods.

My research indicates that the informally networked and entrepreneurial nature of modern indie crafting requires these women to play multiple roles in the circuit of culture. This differentiates them from intermediaries in formalized work contexts that have a more defined role and work among a professional team of specialized skills and a fairly stable set of social relations. As do-it-yourself cultural intermediaries, these women really do it all. From a production standpoint, they research suppliers, select the relevant

materials, and physically make their products in home studios, garages, extra bedrooms and, in some instances, co-work spaces and ateliers. One of my interviewees, DIY fashion and jewellery maker, Angie J., speaks of experimenting with her very first fringe necklace design, testing different types of materials, styles, clasps and chains for what would become one of her signature products (Figure 6). She tells of being influenced by an eclectic array of interests, including British fashion of the 1980s, Western Canadian prairie culture of her childhood and the fashion blog turned online magazine, *Rookie*³⁶, which has attained a cult-like following among fashionistas and celebrities alike (Angie J., interview Oct. 10, 2012).



Figure 6. *Fringe necklace by Angie J.* Source: Etsy.com

Anne D. explained that it was her passion for old-world Hollywood—discovered through

³⁶ Rookiemag.com is the blog started by teenage fashion maven, Tavi Gevinson. She gained enormous popularity and became a fixture at couture fashion shows and high-profile events such as New York and Paris fashion weeks.

watching movies with her sister—that inspired “Dot & Lil”, the name she chose for her company, along with the packaging aesthetic and clever names for soaps and bath products she makes (interview, Sep. 19, 2012). Like my work at Veer, where understanding the cultural references, sources of inspiration and speaking the language of graphic designers was essential to creating a devoted following for our products and key to our internal culture that informed our production, the DIY crafters in my study are highly attuned to popular culture and its imagery, trends in fashion and aesthetics, and the politics of presentation and self-representation among their fellow makers, including the need to accumulate and preserve symbolic capital—all of which informs their production.

Entering the Short Circuit

Soar (2002) innovates a model called “The short circuit” (Figure 5), which adapts Johnson’s earlier circuit of culture model that, broadly, signifies as operating within the “lived cultures” of an unspecified public of consumers at large—to instead refer to the very particular and insular culture of the graphic design profession. When Johnson positions the notion of lived cultures as referring to “the existing ensembles already active within particular social milieux and the social relations on which these combinations depend”, he is noting the “specifically cultural conditions of production”, which draw from the “reservoirs of discourses and meaning” that serve as “raw material for fresh cultural production” (1986/97: 47). Soar establishes that the cultural intermediaries in his study—graphic designers—can thus

“be located as a producing and consuming cohort which acts, at least in the latter realm, as an autonomous, or self-addressing entity. Here the members of this group draw sustenance from their own ranks, i.e. *from the work of other cultural intermediaries*” (2002: 14-15; emphasis in original).

In this way, Soar further developed Johnson’s circuit by recognizing the intra-networked nature of intermediaries and their effect on the moments of production, circulation and consumption. Soar envisions a private internal loop,

one in which the cultural intermediaries act as producers and consumers, where [...] it is faster, suggesting that the cultural capital so carried is channeled back around to the intermediaries long before it works its way into, and through, the public domain” (16).

Although Soar argues that, in the case of graphic designers, the short circuit “is perhaps detrimental to the functionality of Johnson’s larger, more conventional circuit” (16), I would argue that, in the case of DIY craft’s cultural producers of handmade goods, both circuits are palpably in motion, yet operating at distinctly different cadences. The short circuit’s faster pace enables a subset of more prolific craft entrepreneurs to creatively self-sustain, generate new production ideas and accumulate cultural capital among their intra-networked peer group. This occurs through a host of cultural readings and a type of “insider knowledge” that emerges from their more advanced attunement and consumption of their peers’ work; a cultivated understanding of the quality and type of production that garners entry and attention into the top juried indie craft fairs or that will make Etsy’s front page and features; collaborations with other “short circuiters”; and the effective ability to be credibly viewed as a tastemaker and influencer by on- and offline

communities of peers within the short circuit. In this way, these members operate in a more rarefied taste culture and social realm. The accelerated nature of the short circuit means that these intermediaries as producers and consumers take risks, innovate patterns and designs, are at the pulse of the release of new fabric or yarn collections and consume their peers' blogs, Facebook posts, Tumblrs³⁷, Instagrams and other cultural para-texts with vigour. Like designers, they draw inspiration from popular culture, and are tuned to scenes, "looks", décors and cool-hunting as sustenance for their work. They are smaller in numbers and yet may often represent the face of DIY craft as distinct from so-called "mainstream" craft. The larger circuit of culture includes, of course, a broader swath of DIY crafters and micro-entrepreneurs, but also represents a larger public craft constituency of less rarefied crafters, hobbyists and aspirational makers who buy into the ethos of indie craft. They are compelled by the idea of buying handmade as an effective political-economic choice to counter mass-production, underscoring the reliance of the handmade economy on drawing from its own community as consumers of buying indie (a point I will return to further on in this chapter).

DIY Craft's Habitus: Etsy, a Case Study

A corporatized model

As "the global marketplace for all things handmade," Etsy has become a significant part of DIY craft's habitus, playing the role of a structuring institution. In this section, I investigate Etsy—as a corporation, marketplace and community—critically examining the

³⁷ For example, interview participant and clothing and jewellery designer, Angie J., posts regularly to her Tumblr at: <http://iheartnorwegianwood.tumblr.com/archive>

company's model, positioning and impacts on the cultural economy of craft and its micro-entrepreneurs. I am particularly interested in foregrounding the modes of technological, rhetorical, aesthetic and commercial interests in play and analyzing their effect on gender and power relations, as well as looking at the accumulation of economic and symbolic capitals that Etsy's model promotes. Further, through illustrative examples, participant-observation, digital data capture and available sources of statistical information, I chart Etsy's growth and attempt to unravel the ways in which the platform produces, mediates and reproduces cultural forms, taste distinctions and discourses, to see how they reflect the experience of actual crafters—the women I investigate in detail in the next chapter.

Starting up and transforming craft entrepreneurialism

Etsy was founded in 2005 in New York by the male start-up team of Rob Kalin and technology developers Chris Maguire and Haim Schoppik. Working with Jean Railla from Get Crafty,³⁸ the three 20-somethings built the website in slightly more than two months and launched it to the public on June 18, 2005. Unlike Get Crafty (Railla's original site), which was a text-based forum for users to discuss their craft projects, Etsy was conceived as a marketplace from the beginning—an eBay for crafts. The platform would enable crafters without the technical skill or start-up capital to have access to user-friendly tools to build their own web presence, to leverage the marketplace technology and open a digital storefront to sell their handmade goods. Etsy significantly lowered the bar to entry

³⁸ <http://www.getcrafty.com>

and has been heralded as “indelibly transforming craft entrepreneurialism” aligned with what has been called “the rise of micro-entrepreneurs.” (Jakob 2013).

Since 2005, the advent of the Web 2.0 online environment of user-generated content, cloud computing and social networks has enabled web-based marketplaces such as Etsy to grow at an exceptional rate. In fact, Etsy reported sales of US\$895.1 million in 2012, an increase of 70.3 percent from \$525.6 million in 2011 (see Figure 7).³⁹ The company was expected to surpass \$1 billion in sales in 2013, having reported a more than 5,000-percent sales increase from 2008 to 2012.⁴⁰ Headquartered in Brooklyn, New York, Etsy employs 450 people around the world. According to Etsy’s published statistics for 2012, the platform has more than 22 million members, 850,000 active shops and 18 million listed items, and the growth shows no signs of stopping.⁴¹ Etsy receives a 3.5-percent revenue share on every sale and also collects a \$0.20 fee on every product listing. Etsy’s business model is unique in the world of craft. Unlike juried craft fairs, Etsy is open to all and provides instant access to a global market. Additionally, as long as a seller’s products fit into Etsy’s categories of handmade, vintage (minimum 20-years old) or craft supplies, then a seller may list an unlimited number of items, with no constraints on quality.

³⁹ Etsy 2012 Year in Review: <http://www.etsy.com/blog/news/2013/notes-from-chad-2012-year-in-review/>

⁴⁰ [http://www.simplyzesty.com/Blog/Article/June-2013/Etsy-To-Surpass-\\$1-Billion-In-Sales-In-2013](http://www.simplyzesty.com/Blog/Article/June-2013/Etsy-To-Surpass-$1-Billion-In-Sales-In-2013)

⁴¹ Etsy 2012 Year in Review: <http://www.etsy.com/blog/news/2013/notes-from-chad-2012-year-in-review/> and “At a Glance” <http://www.etsy.com/press>

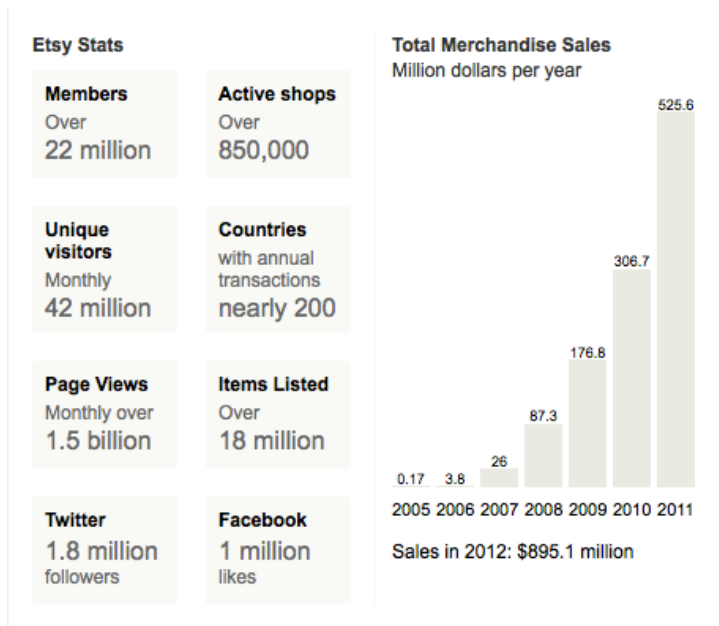


Figure 7. 2012 Etsy Year-end Statistics. Source: Etsy.com

Etsy has been profitable since 2009 and thrives on the commerce of a virtual army of craft entrepreneurs, a convergence of technology and the economics of mining the “lots of little” business model.⁴² In this way, Etsy exemplifies what Chris Anderson has called the “long tail”:

Our culture and economy are increasingly shifting away from a focus on a relatively small number of hits (mainstream products and markets) at the head of the demand curve, and moving toward a huge number of niches in the tail. In an era without the constraints of limited shelf space and other bottlenecks of distribution, narrowly targeted goods and services can be as economically viable as mainstream fare (2006: 52).

At least according to its own sales results and statistics, Etsy is proving the commercial viability of micro-economies as a business model.

⁴² “At a Glance” <http://www.etsy.com/press>

Etsy's visual rhetoric, branding and professionalization

A brand represents “the promise, the big idea, and the expectations that reside in each customer’s mind about a product, service or company” (Wheeler 2006: 4). According to this perspective, users develop a certain loyalty, trust and affinity to a brand’s perceived attributes. If successful, brands become synonymous with the name of the company and its reputation. With that in mind, it is important to note that a brand is *designed*; it is the result of a purposeful rhetorical strategy, architecture, visual aesthetic and naming conventions that make it distinct. Brands are, of course, vital assets to organizations and may represent significant economic and cultural value. They are also products of corporate and professional efforts to develop a consistent, recognizable visual self-representation and vocabulary.

Etsy’s brand identity—its look and voice—is a significant factor in DIY craft’s habitus. As such, it contributes to the field’s visual landscape of cultural symbols and influences matters of distinction, taste and the accumulation of capitals. Given the creative identities and aspirations of Etsy buyers and sellers, Etsy is keenly aware that constructing a visual rhetoric and a professional, yet approachable, aesthetic and brand is important to cultivating trust and connecting with its audience. The name Etsy, itself, is a fabricated word because, as founder Rob Kalin tells it:

I wanted a nonsense word because I wanted to build the brand from scratch. I was watching Fellini's 8 ½ and writing down what I was hearing. In Italian, you say “etsi” a lot. It means “oh, yes.” And in Latin, it means “and if” (Lammle 2011).

Neologisms are ubiquitous in Internet branding. They represent the result of strategies to make names memorable, to impart quirkiness and a cool-factor, and to address the practical concerns of finding an available web site domain name. Kalin's desire to "build the brand from scratch" leaves a wide-open canvas to craft a brand without potentially unwanted associations or assumptions. These choices are deliberate and must be recognized as contributing to the company's rhetorical strategies, affecting its discourses and Etsy's influence on the habitus of DIY craft. At Veer, I faced a similar challenge in building a brand from the ground up, wanting to stand out in the crowd of stock photography agencies we were competing with. We choose "Veer" as the company name and brand for strategic reasons. By not having the word "images" or "stock" or "photos" in our brand name as did many of our competitors, we could stand for a much broader brand promise of "design" and "look what you can do", an aspirational-quality and connection with our community. We could offer broader merchandise, including apparel, paper goods and designed objects. And, practically, "veer.com" as a domain name was both financially within our reach for purchase and was a compelling short and memorable web site address.

Interestingly, although perhaps not unsurprisingly, as Etsy has grown, it has increasingly focused on developing a sophisticated image and visual representation, consistently applied on the website's interface, as well as at Etsy events, and through marketing communications and social media channels. Figure 8 presents an early example of the site's navigation, which demonstrates a folksy and less sophisticated use of typography,

interface conventions, icons and navigational categories by which the company organized the user experience.



Figure 8. *Etsy site navigation and interface* (June 30, 2005)⁴³. Source: Wayback Machine.

Figure 9 (below) represents the most recent site design, released in November 2013. It presents a clean, sophisticated visual aesthetic with a page-wide rotating graphic to communicate Etsy's brand messaging and marketing. It is clear that the user interface has been professionally designed, given its effective use of typography, colour and white space. The placement of the search box in the top centre of the navigation directs the user's focus such that she can quickly and easily find the search option. Broad browsing categories, positioned just below the search box, are likely driven by data and research on browsing and purchasing behaviours, as would be consistent with a corporatized ecommerce model and consistent with my experience at Veer of using search data and keyword terms as "business intelligence" data to inform web marketing tactics and targeted profile-building of customers.

⁴³ Internet Archive Wayback Machine, retrieved March 22, 2013

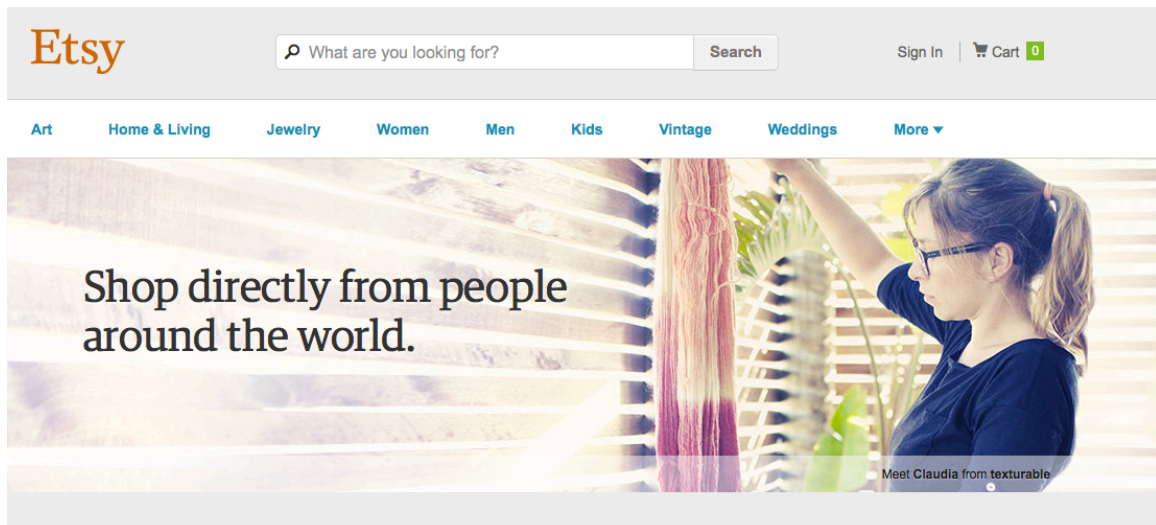


Figure 9. *Etsy site navigation and interface (November 2013).*⁴⁴ Source: Etsy.com

The professionalization of the site’s design enables interactivity; however, it is important to remember that since Etsy was built on a corporatized model, the interactivity is constrained by the objectives and design choices that align with the company’s financial, brand and marketing goals. Although Etsy users can produce “Treasures” of unique items, “Favorite” shops or products, or join “Circles” to follow social connections’ activities, and sellers can list items, and categorize and assign keywords to them as they see fit, both buyers and sellers are ultimately constrained by Etsy’s design choices, proprietary technology and marketing tactics. Zizek (1997)

called attention to the flip side of interactivity, which he called interpassivity: the ways in which the available choices have already been made for the user. The user is invited to enjoy the chosen features, but the level of choice is not necessarily high. The perspective proposed by Zizek highlights the terms and conditions of user experience—the ready-made scripts and settings users are invited into, but that are rendered invisible by the rhetoric of interactivity (in Paasonen 2012: 29).

⁴⁴ Etsy.com homepage screengrab, retrieved November 2013

The site's look and feel represent Etsy's visual, technological and discursive rhetoric, which itself is aligned with the company's desired positioning, modes of interactivity and commercial interests. Purposeful branding, professionalization of its aesthetic and deliberate discursive strategies also contribute to a grander Etsy "promise"—largely contained in the company's strategic focus on *community* as key to its commercial logic and reinforced at virtually every touch point with its audience.

The Etsy promise: reimagining commerce through community

Hello Etsy at Pratt: Reimagine the Marketplace will address the future of consumption, new methods of production, alternative approaches to work, and more purposeful ways of doing business. Together, we will discuss building the creative economy of the future — one that is connected, human-scaled, joyful, and lasting. We hope to prove that business does not have to be brutal to be successful and fulfilling (promotional material, Hello Etsy! conference, March 22-24, 2013).

In March 2013, I attended Etsy's third annual Hello Etsy! conference, held at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, a highly-respected liberal arts university with a sought-after program in art and design. According to Etsy, it was a sold-out event⁴⁵. There were five hundred DIY makers in attendance—mostly white women, by my estimation—who packed a restored 1920s-era theatre for three days worth of talks and presentations. There was a distinctly hipster vibe, evident in the vintage-chic dress and composure of attendees, and the choice of local food and entertainment from Brooklyn's well-known hipster scene. For example, each morning and at breaks, the audience was enlivened by The Blue Vipers of Brooklyn, a bluegrass and jazz trio who fit the hipster "look" typical of this subculture

⁴⁵ <http://www.etsy.com/blog/news/2013/what-i-saw-at-hello-etsy/>

of thrift store meets urban cool. Lunches and snacks were “handcrafted” by local Brooklyn vendors and the totes bags and giveaways were produced by Etsy sellers.

The event was a valuable component of my participant-observation research. My attendance also represented a strategic effort on my part to get closer access to the company management, given I had been denied by direct approaches. I went as a paying attendee to the three-day event, which was organized around four themes: Reimagining economy, Reimagining work, Reimagining consumption and Reimagining community. The conference opened with a welcome address by Etsy CEO Chad Dickerson, during which he focused on the “human-side of doing business” and shared a series of anecdotes, including recapping the plot of Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 movie *Modern Times*, a satire about a future in which man is enslaved by machines. Dickerson also discussed Gandhi’s belief in “production by the masses, not mass production,” and shared a few short vignettes of Etsy sellers from around the globe. He concluded with the following statement:

I believe that today we are moving from the era of Chaplin’s impersonal, dehumanized work into a new world where spending time with people you care about, quality of life, and making money can all be connected under a new way of doing business. We’re in the early stages of re-humanized work, and the new industrial revolution is bringing people back to the forefront. Let’s make business more personal, more beautiful, and more joyful (participant-observation, Hello Etsy!, March 22, 2013).

Panels on the four themes followed, morning and afternoon over the next two days, featuring economists, psychologists, a Buddhist monk, a lifestyle coach, successful start-

up founders, authors of popular business books, and advocates of the sharing economy, “sacred economics”⁴⁶ and so-called “enlightened wealth.” Surprisingly, not a single panel included actual Etsy sellers or makers of any type, nor were Etsy employees or teams included.⁴⁷ In fact, Etsy staff members were undistinguishable at the event, except for those assisting with registration and conference logistics, who wore company t-shirts. The conference had an Oprah-like motivational-inspirational tone, which the various speakers continually reinforced. There were no Q&A sessions, and networking and conversation with other attendees were limited to lunch time and coffee breaks.

All the other attendees I spoke to during those periods were either current Etsy sellers or crafters interested in opening an Etsy shop. When I asked what they thought of the conference, their general view was that, although the conference was highly interesting and generally inspiring, they were surprised at how little opportunity there was to engage with other makers, to learn how to improve their shop’s performance or get direct-from-the-Etsy-mouth insight into and practical tips on how to maximize the benefit from the site’s search functions, carry out marketing or hear about upcoming policy changes (personal conversations, Hello Etsy!, March 22-24, 2013). Later, one of my interviewees—maker of stuffy historical dolls at her shop *Late Greats*⁴⁸—whom I had originally met at Hello Etsy!, noted that the conference was all about “feel-good effect” and provided few opportunities to actually interact and share experiences with other Etsy sellers or improve

⁴⁶ <http://www.sacred-economics.com>

⁴⁷ Etsy Teams are self-organized regional or interest-based groups open to all Etsy members, who can sign-up via the Etsy website: <http://www.etsy.com/teams>.

⁴⁸ <http://www.etsy.com/shop/lategreats>

her shop. When I asked her whether she had responded to the survey Etsy had sent out after the event, she said,

When I was there I was like “oh it feels so good”; it felt really nice and it was just fun to meet people. That was the best part for me ... meeting people and just talking at lunch and at breaks. I wrote [in the survey] that I think that the entire thing should be workshops; every single thing should be workshops. If you’re getting all these people together, we shouldn’t just be sitting listening to a bunch of so-called experts who aren’t even making stuff. There’s a reason we’re all there. It’s because we’re all hungry and we want to absorb and interact and learn what we can do better (Chen R., interview, Apr. 17, 2013).

In large part, the Hello Etsy event represented a microcosm of Etsy’s keenly crafted rhetoric and strategic emphasis on a discursive “company line.” In the many examples of the company’s discourse, including copious marketing communications materials, that I have gathered over the last two years, community and togetherness are consistently represented as Etsy’s promise and branded as its *raison d’être*. The company routinely heralds these two ideas as a pathway to a new type of economy and a new definition of success, one that Etsy positions as a partnership between the company and its members. This is evident in the company’s mission (Figure 10).

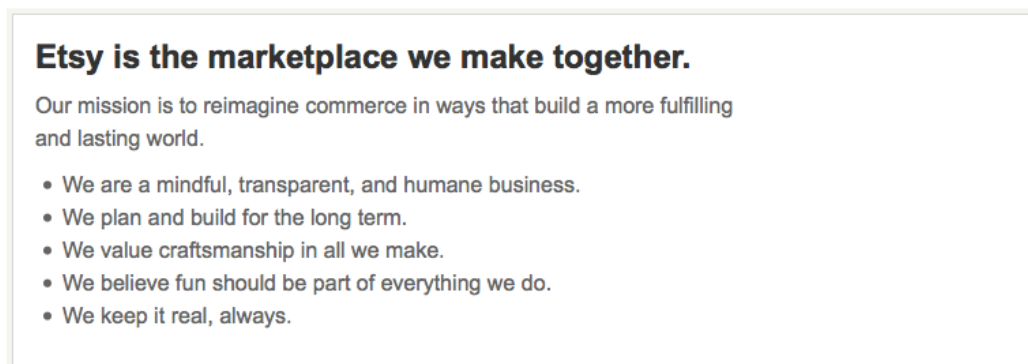


Figure 10. *Etsy mission statement*⁴⁹ Source: Etsy.com

⁴⁹ <http://www.etsy.com/about/>, accessed Feb. 22, 2012

The company also lists three additional corporate objectives and values immediately below this mission: (1) Connect & Exchange: Build relationships in a marketplace that reconnects producers and consumers; (2) Value Authorship: The people behind what we buy make commerce meaningful; and (3) Start Your Own Business: Learn about selling on Etsy⁵⁰. Together, these elements make explicit the company's vision and values. These types of structuring discourses are common practice among corporations as part of strategy and planning as well as means to orient employees toward a common goal and direct the company's brand and communications. We used this approach in my work at Veer, where I led the crafting of our mission and vision statements and our 'look and feel' and brand strategy. It became part of new employees orientation and I traveled to each of our offices in Canada, the United States and Europe to do presentations with our teams. If successful, as we were at Veer, a company gains equity in terms of both economic capital as profit and symbolic capital as affinity with its brand and products, however ultimately such strategies are driven by the bottom-line.

Over the course of my research, I have archived hundreds of Etsy promotional emails and social media posts as well as gathered an extensive repertoire of the company's printed materials, including items like the *Start Selling on Etsy* brochure, the *Etsy Sellers Handbook*⁵¹, and the *Etsy Teams Handbook*. As promotional and recruitment tools, they advocate "turning your passion into a business by joining our thriving global community", specifying, in concert with the mission statement, that:

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ <http://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2013/the-seller-handbook-archive/>

Etsy is an online marketplace—one that we make together, where the people involved are just as important as the unique items brought and sold, [...] which means putting people at the center, connecting buyers and sellers around the world via personal interactions, and helping our community make a life, not just a living (*Start Selling on Etsy* brochure).

These materials emphasize Etsy’s “community outreach and approach to collaborative education”⁵², promoting Etsy-produced events, workshops, videos and shared-interest teams that, according to the company, “will help you succeed.” Etsy’s focus on community and its members is a strategic and calculated rhetorical act, routinely reinforced in the company’s vast marketing communications, often disguised as “education”, “toolkits for success” or as part of a discourse of corporate transparency, commitment to sustainability and an ethos of changing the world through creative expression and a “reimagined economy.”

Moreover, Etsy adeptly uses Web 2.0, social media and blogs as means to reinforce the company’s mission and rhetorical strategies. Etsy.com houses no fewer than eight blogs, thematically organized under such titles as “Featured shop,” “Editors picks,” “Etsy news,” “How-Tuesday” and “Shopper Stories.” Two recent Etsy blog posts were headlined “Putting an (ethical) ring on it,”⁵³ which focused on vintage rings and designs that use upcycled materials as ethical options, and “The business of collaboration,”⁵⁴ a story about how when one Etsy maker had reached the end of her personal capacity to produce felted

⁵² *Start Selling on Etsy* brochure, acquired at Etsy 101 workshop

⁵³ <http://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2013/choosing-an-ethical-diamond-ring/>, published Nov. 18, 2013

⁵⁴ <http://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2013/the-business-of-collaboration/>, published Nov. 19, 2013

toys and decorative objects another connected her to a small, local business that could do custom pre-cuts of the all-important fabric. Interestingly, neither post was written by an Etsy staffer, but rather by a “member of the Etsy community.” The byline of each post included a link to the writer’s profile and shop, which implied they were makers that operated an Etsy storefront. However, when I clicked on the links, neither writer had an actual shop. In fact, both were professional creatives—one the West coast editor of *BUST* magazine and the other a designer and creative director whose work has been shown at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum and featured in *The New York Times*, among other institutions of significant cultural capital. This disjuncture highlights the company’s investment in the rhetorical strategies of marketing and branding under the guise of “community,” while clearly supporting, through professionalization, the objectives of growth and profit-making that are part and parcel of Etsy’s corporate model and its position as a structuring institution in DIY craft’s habitus. Further, there is tension between the ethos of DIY and handmade as being more “humane, ethical and joyful” and the increasing professionalization of Etsy’s strategies and tactics.

Etsy: production and reproduction of gendered hierarchies

When Etsy hit 30 million members worldwide in the summer of 2013, CEO Chad Dickerson referred to Etsy as “a community website where people happen to sell things... [and] Etsy is a company that is part of the community”⁵⁵. This consistent focus and growth of Etsy as community reprises the substantial body of academic writing (Jenkins,

⁵⁵ Notes from Chad, Aug. 7, 2013: <http://www.etsy.com/blog/news/2013/notes-from-chad-10/>

2008; Bruns, 2008; Tapscott and Williams, 2006) that has probed the emergence of new economic models in light of the convergence cultures of the Web 2.0 environment. In many ways, DIY craft has benefited from the community-building capacities of the amplified web. Not only could former analogue communities expand and network with other like-minded crafters, providing the sharing of knowledge, inspiration and generating greater visibility for craft and its practices, but also they were able to do so on a global scale. At the same time community-building as economic model benefits from

its ability to render international marketing and distribution networks accessible to sole traders and micro-enterprises. In turn, the capacity afforded by the internet to easily find, even across oceans, small-scale producers has driven the demand for the products of these business operators” (Luckman 2013: 259).

Furthermore, Etsy as a community marketplace of micro-enterprises blurs the line between professional and amateur craft, and complicates discussions of labour more generally. Although makers are indeed compensated when they make a sale on Etsy, the number of transactions, income generated, ratio of labour invested to price charged, and net profit (after supply and operating costs are deducted) can vary greatly. Some sellers treat sales as a part-time occasional bonus of their creative efforts, while others generate a full-time income via the Etsy, therefore undermining any clear-cut amateur-professional division that having an Etsy shop might connote. While this is characteristic of the new craft economy, it also harkens back to the history of craft, its domestic and maternal influences and the informal acquisition and transmission of skill that have always been part of craft. Moreover, I note that questions of gender are not necessarily represented in the professional-amateur discourses of the digital economy. Consequently, craft as micro-

enterprise must be explored beyond technological utopianism. To this end, Susan Luckman notes, “As feminists (among others) have been strongly arguing for at least the last half century, whether an activity counts as amateur or professional, craft [or art] is highly gendered [...] and generally Othered” (260). In the next chapter, I consider this question relative to the individual crafters I interviewed, however as I proceed with the case study of Etsy, it also highlights the need to further examine the gendered-aspects of Etsy as a corporatized model.

Accordingly, Etsy is indeed a highly gendered institution—as both a corporation and technological distribution platform, despite its overwhelmingly female workforce of micro-entrepreneurs. Its male start-up team conceived Etsy from the start as a technology endeavour, in the same kind of masculinized late-night coding frenzy as mythologized in the launch of Facebook by Mark Zuckerberg. As founder Rob Kalin recalls,

In early April of 2005, I sat in an orange chair facing an open window. It was nighttime and the lights were off. I was back in Brooklyn after a brief residence in Paris, and I was about to sketch the initial ideas that would become Etsy. Working with three friends – Chris, Haim and Jared – Etsy went from these ideas to a site live on the Web in about two months.⁵⁶

This triumphalist attitude reinforces a type of heroic, masculinized rhetoric that differs greatly, as we will see in chapter 5, from the experiences of women crafters.

⁵⁶ Etsy’s First Five Years: <http://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2008/etsys-first-five-years/>

Further, gendered access to financial capital also marked its beginnings. Etsy was seeded by substantial venture capital and backed by influential power brokers as part of the company's board, including Andrew Wenger of Delicious and Caterina Fake of Flickr⁵⁷. In 2008, Etsy took in an additional \$27 million in venture funding from existing backers Union Square Ventures and Hubert Burda Media, and a new partner Jim Breyer at Accel Partners. Rob Kalin described Breyer as

one of the “elder wisemen” of the investing world. Except he's not that old. He's an outstanding investor who has many times shown he can see into the heart of matters, finding and supporting businesses that tap into underlying and disruptive change for the common good.⁵⁸

Kalin went on to make the case that Breyer is well positioned as a board member of Facebook, Marvel Entertainment and Walmart to provide important leadership to Etsy. With the exception of Caterina Fake, the Etsy board of directors comprises male business and technology veterans⁵⁹—wealthy male power brokers and shrewd financial dealmakers, who are looking for substantial return on investment. This fact underlines both the gendered venture capitalism and masculinized investment culture behind Etsy. This male-dominated traditional business structure and financial positioning toward (most likely) an eventual initial public offering sits in stark contrast to the approximately 88 percent of Etsy sellers who are women of a median age of 39 with a total median household income of \$44,900, 10.2 percent lower than the national average.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2007-06-12/etsy-a-site-for-artisans-takes-offbusinessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice>

⁵⁸ Etsy's First Five Years: <http://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2008/etsys-first-five-years/>

⁵⁹ See Etsy's corporate profile here: <http://www.crunchbase.com/company/etsy>

⁶⁰ https://www.etsy.com/blog/news/files/2013/11/Etsy_Redefining-Entrepreneurship_November-2013.pdf

With the exception of a newly hired female Chief Financial Officer,⁶¹ Etsy's management team⁶² is also predominantly male, including the CEO, Chief Technology Officer, General Manager of Etsy Wholesale, and Chief Operating Officer, who lead the commonly masculinized functions of business and technology. We also see conventional gendering of roles with more female staff in marketing, community and service positions. Although the company's messaging focuses on its role as a handmade community, at 82 percent the bulk of Etsy's staff comprises male engineers and programmers⁶³ who develop new features, tools and software for the website and mobile applications. Consistent with the company's rhetoric and stated desire for transparency, the Chief Technology Officer publishes a blog, "Code as Craft," with articles featuring "the engineers who make Etsy make our living making something we love: software."⁶⁴ Yet, although 88 percent of Etsy's buyers and sellers are women, its technical staff is overwhelmingly male—a divide not uncommon in the ecommerce industry that serves to emphasize larger systemic issues about how girls are socialized relative to science and technology within the structuring institutions of education and highlights the hyper-masculinized culture of coding.

However, the situation is particularly problematic for Etsy, given that women are the vast majority producing and consuming the company's goods. It seems Etsy is aware of this gender imbalance, but whether this is due to feedback from its community, or because of an internal focus on this issue, possibly driven by optics, is not discernable. In 2012, the

⁶¹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/meet-the-new-cfo-of-700-million-etsy-2013-1>

⁶² <http://www.crunchbase.com/company/etsy>

⁶³ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/meghancasserly/2013/02/08/double-standards-how-etsy-upped-its-female-engineers-by-500/>, accessed Nov. 25, 2013

⁶⁴ <http://codeascraft.com/about/>

company partnered with New York's Hacker School⁶⁵ and created the Etsy Hacker grant, "a needs-based scholarship for women engineers who enroll in the program, which is designed to increase hands-on coding experience."⁶⁶ The program resulted in more female applicants for engineering jobs at Etsy; however, it is not clear how this affected hiring or the overall gender composition of the company's engineering staff. Yet, what is clear is that an inequitable balance has been preserved in key leadership and decision-making roles, including technology development. Without women at the boardroom table and senior management, the company inevitably upholds masculinized modes of decision-making and power structures. The male-centric corporate structure further suggests a flaw in Etsy's positioning of itself as an empowering platform for women as makers and micro-entrepreneurs when "gendered offline hierarchies have been shown to be reproduced in digitally mediated and networked environments" (Blair, Gajalla and Tulley 2009: 12; see also Queen 2009; Nakamura 2002).

Disposition and Taste: Cultural Capital, Class and the Consumption of DIY Craft

Jenny Hart revolutionizes the embroidery industry with her Sublime Stitching. Nikki McClure sells thousands of her cut-paper wall calendars. Emily Kircher recycles vintage materials into purses. Stephanie Syjuco manufactures clothing under the tag line "Because Sweatshops Suck." All are united in the movement capturing the attention of the nation, the handmade nation (back cover pull-quote, Levine and Heimerl 2008).

Having explored Etsy as a corporatized model and analyzed its strategies as a gendered structuring institution and significant site of economic growth in the cultural field of DIY

⁶⁵ <http://www.hackerschool.com>

⁶⁶ <http://torontostandard.com/technology/how-to-hire-women-in-tech>

craft, I turn now to a complementary aspect of Bourdieu's socio-cultural analysis: that of accumulating symbolic capital among crafters and influencers within the socially networked and mediated "star system" (of which Etsy is an important part) that distinguishes these tastemakers and acts as a marker of class. Bourdieu theorizes that as social subjects we cultivate a "set of [...] preferences that are related to our class position, education and social standing" (1984: 172-73). Thus, the relationship between one's cultural consumption habits, tastes and lifestyle preferences leads one to accumulate cultural capital that has a certain symbolic value. Bourdieu differentiates social capital (networks of social relations and influence) from cultural capital, where the latter refers to intellectual, aesthetic and cultivated taste and preferences that are esteemed within a particular cultural field. Naturally, both types of symbolic capital constantly interact, can reinforce each other and are indelibly in circulation in the field of DIY craft. The "Jenny Harts" of the indie craft scene (whom I discuss later) are capturing the attention of the handmade nation: their cultural capital has elevated them to the rank of arbiters of taste and hipness, supported, in no small part, by the mediated image-machine of publishing, and amplified by the social web, which underpins this cultural economy to mutual benefit.

Cultural Capital and Craft's Star System

Applying the concept of symbolic capital as an analytical lens to fields of cultural production is, of course, not new. It is important, then, to acknowledge historical antecedents in cultural research. By revisiting some of these earlier studies, I can further unpack Bourdieu's conceptual insights and see how DIY craft converges and diverges from these models of symbolic capital in relationship to distinction, taste and, ultimately,

class in the Web 2.0 environment. For instance, McRobbie (1998) devotes significant attention to investigating the role of the fashion trade press in her study of British fashion design. She highlights its role in establishing the standouts in fashion's star system and the influence it has over individual efforts to acquire the cultural and social capital needed to achieve success in the UK fashion industry. In particular, she notes that despite its largely female workforce, UK fashion is a highly-gendered industry that celebrates the "individual genius," most often male ingénue who embraces self-promotion, performance and the spectacle of fashion to his advantage. He becomes a trade press darling, leaving talented females, who are often socialized that it is unfeminine to crave the spotlight, in the shadows. For example, McRobbie notes that British designers Alexander McQueen and John Galliano were heralded in the UK as "two working-class boys made good" (79). This is testament to a gendered and classed model that is

devoted to producing creative individuals as names, and even stars, of the fashion world and who, as Bourdieu [...] has shown, emulate the star system of high culture with its emphasis on the "rarity of the producer" (Bourdieu quoted in McRobbie, 48).

In the cultural economy of advertising, Liz McFall (2004) hones in on the "creative"—art directors, copywriters, graphic designers, typographers—as influential cultural intermediaries and tastemakers who invest in accumulating cultural capital as key to their identity, habitus and credibility among their peers. She notes that they self-define by their creative ideals, anti-establishment sensibilities, and acts of non-conformity. Further, their organizational habitus reflects their creative lifestyle, attitudes and education, and reproduces their ideals and preferences, such that they are the purveyors of cultural

knowledge and on-the-pulse trends. Even their dress reflects their taste and disposition; they dress casually with a creative flair to counter the buttoned-up culture of the “suits” and the associated business discourse, which they believe undermines their creative integrity.

These patterns of behaviour are seen as necessary to enable creatives to perform as “sovereign consumers,” “cognoscenti” who can provide taste leadership through their specialist knowledge of new trends in film, television, music, media, products and services (McFall, 74).

Lastly, Garry Stevens, in his study of the social foundations of architectural distinction, argues that the field of architecture is not a vague professional domain, but a contested field of power where there are forces at work to control resources and reputations, where “architects compete for status as great creators” (1998: 75). As cultural producers, architects operate within what Stevens calls “the field of restricted production” (83) of commissioned projects. They are elevated in status and prestige from simple builders, who produce standardized homes for the masses. Stevens emphasizes the importance of symbolic capital as intellectual, aesthetic and cultivated taste, with architects socialized to see their work as seeking to attain the highest design quality, distinguished by artistic integrity and judged by symbolic criteria rather than economic success. In fact, he notes that there is a certain disdain among architects for economic criteria: great architects do not sell out. “[T]aste cannot be bought ... and, thus, an attachment to symbolic capital implies a denial of the economic” (91) in order to make a commitment to artistic integrity, what Bourdieu has referred to as economic disinterest (1993; see also McRobbie 1998: 6). Stevens demonstrates that architecture is a closed circle, requiring a sizeable amount of

symbolic capital to enter: “one must become cultivated, learning all the myriad of practices and tastes that mark one as worthy to pronounce on those very practices and tastes” (111). Furthermore, maintaining autonomy is of utmost importance to the profession as a whole; therefore, the architectural intelligentsia keep the barrier to entry high by maintaining the rarity of architecture’s cultural capital. This has ensured that only those with the “right mental apparatus, the right schemes of appreciation, the right codes to decipher it” (114) are able to appropriate architecture’s discourse, codes and styles, keeping the power relations in a steady state of symbiosis.

The cultural economy of DIY craft reflects a particular taste culture, where a cultivated sensibility, hipster aesthetic of vintage-cool and the ability to garner and promote a particular (self) image and type of “indie cred” is central to maximizing one’s cultural capital. Unlike the fashion industry with its large, commercial trade press and vast magazine publishing industry, contemporary crafting has sparked a small, but tasteful group of printed volumes (self-published or produced by independent or art house presses) that expressly feature current and rising stars of the craft community. Faythe Levine and Cortney Heimerl’s (2008) *Handmade Nation* book and Levine’s documentary film of the same name are perhaps the best known, and established Levine’s own cultural capital as a craft practitioner, curator and poster child for “captur[ing] the heart of the movement” (x). The book includes interviews with 80 crafters from various corner of the United States and reflects a female-led authorship, unlike what is commonly seen in other fields of cultural production. Levine’s book stands alongside such other recent publications as Jo Waterhouse’s *Indie Craft* (2010), Sabrina Geschwandtner’s *KnitKnit*

(2007), Maria Elena Buszek's *Extra/Ordinary* (2011), and Joan Tapper and Gale Zucker's *Craft Activism* (2011), in which "dozens of superstars of this grassroots phenomenon share their experiences, tips, and advice on living, teaching, and promoting a more meaningful DIY lifestyle" (7). What is common among these books is that they feature profiles of many of the same so-called superstars of contemporary craft, such as Jenny Hart,⁶⁷ Nikki McClure⁶⁸ and Magda Sayed of Knitta.⁶⁹ This, in turn, reinforces the individual tastes, attitudes, behaviours and a hipster aesthetic of a subset of crafters whose embodied cultural capital is amplified by these mediated representations.

The peculiar potency of this sort of capital lies in the fact that—to reiterate one of Bourdieu's phrases—owners of the other forms of capital are only what they *have*, whereas the possessors of embodied capital only to be what they *are* (Stevens, 63; emphasis in original).

For instance, Hart of Sublime Stitching is featured in nearly all these publications—her cultural capital reinforced and rarefied with each profile. Hart's success has translated into a vibrant business selling embroidery patterns and kits to a new generation of needleworkers. As one of my interviewees noted, "a chic modern sewing shop is not complete without Sublime Stitching kits and patterns" (Emeline V., interview, March 7, 2012). Hart's embroidery weaves together traditional decorative techniques with unexpected subjects and ironic statements, such as her stitched and sequined panel of the Christian religious figure St. John the Baptist, entitled "All the girls wept tears of pure love"

⁶⁷ <http://sublimestitching.com/>

⁶⁸ <http://www.nikkimcclure.com/>

⁶⁹ <http://knitta.com/>

as though he were a rock star, or her kitschy-cool embroidered portrait of a young Dolly Parton (Figure 11). Further cementing Hart’s cool-factor is the piece she did as

an open assignment from *Nylon* magazine, where artists were invited to create their “dream bill concert poster” featuring any line-up, any venue, at any point in history. I chose the Staple Singers opening for Iggy Pop (Figure 12) in the nursery ward where I was born at the time of my birth. (Waterhouse, 40)



Figures 11. “Dolly Parton” by Jenny Hart. Figure 12. “Iggy Pop” by Jenny Hart. Source: Waterhouse (2010)

Hart’s inclusion in *Nylon*, an idiosyncratic and gritty fashion and pop culture magazine with a particular emphasis on music, marks her as a rare crossover outside DIY craft circles to a more popular and masculinized venue, yet further accentuating her as a tastemaker and arbiter of cool. With craft’s long-standing roots in “women’s work,” it is perhaps not unsurprising that the field’s star system elevates women as tastemakers; however, when comparing DIY craft to other culture industries (film, fashion or architecture, for example), it is a standout in terms of a gendered hierarchy that

predominantly endorses female producers with symbolic capital. This suggests a more feminist understanding of mutual support and community consistent with a history of independent and self-publishing of women's work.

Digital Media, Tastemaking and the Impact of Etsy

DIY craft's small trade press reflects the cultural intermediaries and members of the short circuit whose tastes, attitudes, and aesthetic sensibilities have made them stars within indie craft community. However, *it is the move online made possible by networked technologies and the vast expansion and accessibility of digital media* that has really transformed indie craft's star system and its relationship to taste and class. Blogs, social media and the global prominence of Etsy as an ecommerce platform with over 22 million members and close to 1 million digital shops, have dramatically altered the circulation of symbolic capital and the modes of its acquisition. Based on my field research, they foreground which representations rise to the surface and are reproduced as particularly fashionable, cool and, arguably, fetishized under a hipster aesthetic⁷⁰ and aspirational taste culture of a largely white, upwardly mobile, urban middle class.

⁷⁰ "Although 'hipsterism' is really a state of mind, it is also often intertwined with distinct fashion sensibilities. Hipsters reject the culturally-ignorant attitudes of mainstream consumers, and are often be seen wearing vintage and thrift store inspired fashions, tight-fitting jeans, old-school sneakers, and sometimes thick rimmed glasses. Both hipster men and women sport similar androgynous hair styles that include combinations of messy shag cuts and asymmetric side-swept bangs. Such styles are often associated with the work of creative stylists at urban salons, and are usually too "edgy" for the culturally-sheltered mainstream consumer. The "effortless cool" urban bohemian look of a hipster is exemplified in Urban Outfitters and American Apparel ads which cater towards the hipster demographic" (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=hipster>, accessed Dec. 16, 2013).

Early on, blogs represented a means for any individual to self-publish. While this is still true, a grouping of DIY and craft blogs has gained prominence as highly trafficked destinations for those interested in a certain look—a stylish aesthetic that includes handmade wares as desirable items. Blogs such as Apartment Therapy,⁷¹ Design*Sponge,⁷² and Poppytalk,⁷³ to give three illustrative examples, began as venues for individual bloggers to share their finds and DIY projects. However, they have subsequently grown into venerable sites of mediated consumption of what’s on-trend in modern craft and design. These sites, while maintaining the personalized feel of their founders, who have become significant tastemakers in their own right—Brooklyn-based Grace Bonney of Design*Sponge has been called “The *Martha Stewart Living* for Millennials” by the New York Times,⁷⁴—have also taken on codes and conventions closer to those of fashion journalism. By featuring the work of current and rising DIY craft stars in profiles, top 10 lists, gift guides and regular columns, these sites serve to validate the aesthetic choices, tastes and attitudes of these makers and add to their accrual of cultural capital and visibility among a consuming audience.

Etsy also plays a significant role in the distribution and accumulation of symbolic capital among DIY crafters. The company prides itself on being the global marketplace for handmade goods and is adept in deploying rhetorical, visual and technological strategies to situate itself as a cultivated tastemaker positioned as an alternative to mass-production,

⁷¹ <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com>

⁷² <http://www.designsponge.com>

⁷³ <http://www.poppytalk.com>

⁷⁴ <http://www.designsponge.com/about>

mass-marketing and mainstream consumer culture. I would argue that, via its site design, merchandising conventions, blogs and other marketing strategies, the company represents a mediating force and actualizes its role as gatekeeper of distinction and of a hipster aesthetic and taste culture. This emerges from both its internal organizational habitus, and from how the company encodes its messaging, merchandising and marketing to its sellers and buyers.

Etsy is headquartered in what might be considered the epicentre of hipsterdom: Brooklyn, NY. The borough known for its gritty, working-class roots in the shadow of polished Manhattan is consistent with what Lloyd (2006) characterizes as

declining neighborhoods that are reborn as either gentrified or hipster districts reflect an initial choice by men and women to move to, or remain in, the city, which is often interpreted as a lifestyle choice though it is also a response to opportunities for work and access to social and cultural networks” (quoted in Zukin 2011: 163).

Etsy’s offices are located in the DUMBO neighbourhood on the Brooklyn waterfront in a large, converted warehouse. Its physical space (Figure 13) and organizational culture reinforce the hipster aesthetic and attitudes that creative entrepreneurship can make a difference in the world, including the return to the handmade, slower modes of production and a culture that values employees’ own desires to express their creativity and autonomy at work. Etsy’s open office space, labs and DIY craft days for staff, chef-provided Eatsy meals, yarn-bombed décor (Figure 14), and a place to work that “values individuality and variety,” where employees are “empowered and expected to be

themselves,”⁷⁵ all reflect an organizational habitus consistent with “cool, creative companies where young, Mac-yielding talent wants to work.”⁷⁶ I recognize these attributes as they compare to my own experience at Veer where our organizational culture reflected a relatively flat hierarchy, open office environment, creative spaces for design work, brainstorming and strategy, alongside leisure spaces for play, socializing and meals. We held tightly to a mission “to inspire creativity” and “cultural fit” was key to hiring new employees, meaning alongside specific job skills, we valued creative sensibilities and leisure pursuits, and a type of vocabulary and cultural references that would be a mode of shared cultural knowledge and behaviour.



Figure 13. *Etsy Office* Source: Etsy.com

⁷⁵ <http://www.etsy.com/careers>

⁷⁶ See “The Office Matters”, a profile of “what it’s like to work at Etsy”
http://www.avc.com/a_vc/2010/09/the-office-matters.html



Figure 14. *Etsy yarn-bombed décor*. Source: Etsy.com

As was true for McFall’s ad creatives, Etsy’s habitus reveals the company’s internal culture in which employees embody certain values, lifestyle preferences, tastes and attitudes. These, in turn, are attuned to Etsy’s mission to “make something meaningful everyday”⁷⁷ among a staff of educated, predominantly young, white, middle-class, knowledge workers⁷⁸ whose decisions, skills and creative ideals are woven into Etsy’s brand image and business approach. By strategically crafting a deliberate company culture—an inculcation of a distinct habitus—Etsy’s staff identify as creative peers with its buyers and sellers, who, according to the company rhetoric and tagline, are all part of “the marketplace that we make together.” Yet, the staff are the ones who hold the power and privilege to determine the distinctions of what “fits” with the aesthetic and taste culture that is showcased by Etsy to the consuming public.

⁷⁷ <http://www.etsy.com/careers>

⁷⁸ As evident on Etsy’s Career Page which includes photos of all staff around the world: <http://www.etsy.com/careers>

In particular, Etsy’s visual, technological and rhetorical strategies that are manifest in the company’s web site design, merchandising, blogs and other marketing conventions serve as means to establish a distinctive taste culture and hipster aesthetic of what “makes the grade,” naturalized by Etsy as indicative of a desired image and stylish sensibility.

Without going into great detail on all the technical affordances due to limitations of time and space, the site’s design supports a user interface that visually showcases four points of entry, including “Handpicked items,” “Featured shop,” “Recent blog posts” and “Recently listed items”, alongside the search box at the top of the homepage and category-based navigation links on the left⁷⁹. “Handpicked items” (Figure 15) is the most prominently featured area on the homepage—above the fold and front and centre in the site’s design.

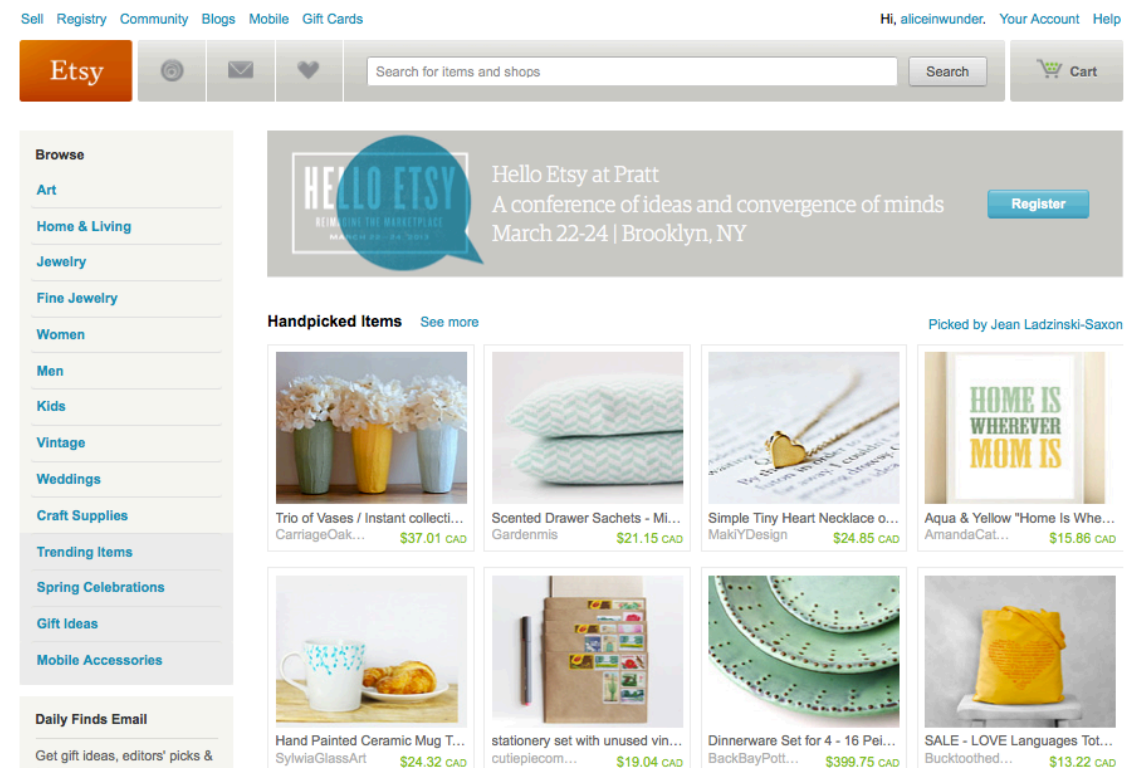


Figure 15. “Handpicked items” feature on Etsy home page. Source: Etsy.com

⁷⁹ As visible on the Etsy.com homepage, accessed March 3, 2013.

These showcases are often thematic—seasonal items, or wares reflecting a certain colour spectrum or aesthetic associations to popular culture, like 1920s, art deco-inspired items showcased when the *Great Gatsby* film was recently in theatres⁸⁰. The design focuses on items for sale as visual representations that reinforce a cohesive aesthetic—selected by Etsy as what’s on trend and considered stylish among the hipster “fashionista” in terms of dress, home décor and depicting a creative lifestyle through handmade and vintage wares. Etsy’s individual category pages, such as Home & Living, Jewelry, Women, Kids, Vintage, Weddings or Craft Supplies are linked from the left navigation on the home page through to designed interfaces and visual merchandising that again feature a series of images on the category’s landing page that are unified and professionally designed to entice browsers to buy into a fashionable imaginary. The homepage features and category page displays are not populated by a random algorithm to give equal credence to all products on the site, but are finely curated by Etsy digital merchandising and marketing staffers (identified as “handpicked by a named Etsy member”), whom, as discussed above, make their choices based on the taste culture that is inculcated as part of Etsy’s habitus and reflective of their own cultural capital as sanctioned members. Etsy’s web site copy, blogs, promotional emails, Facebook posts, Instagrams, and Pinterest boards all further this same aesthetic sensibility and discourse in terms of encoding a similarly curated product selection, messaging and merchandising, which are then promoted through multiple channels of communication to relay the representations and rhetoric that fit Etsy’s desired image. Indeed, much of the same content is reproduced across the various

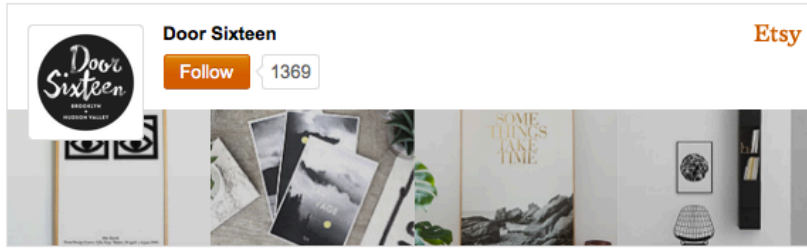
⁸⁰ <https://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2013/great-gatsby-style/>, accessed Aug. 15, 2013

mediated channels to reinforce this positioning. Furthermore, shop owners that are featured in Etsy blog profiles, on “Tastemaker” pages or member-curated “Treasures” of Etsy products that make the homepage, follow the personal taste and sensibilities consistent with Etsy’s markers of distinction and aesthetic judgment. For instance, Anna Dorfman, well-known social media personality and book designer by day, posted on her Brooklyn-based home décor blog, *Door Sixteen*⁸¹, that she was recently invited to be an Etsy Tastemaker⁸². She has created a series of curated galleries that feature handmade products from Etsy sellers that follow the stylish, geometric and Scandinavian-inspired design aesthetic (Figure 16) for which she is known. She notes, “I have a bunch of lists set up already, but my favorite one to look at is my black + white collection. I want *all* of these things...”⁸³ Etsy benefits by trading on Dorfman’s brand and cultural capital among her vast social media and blogging networks and promotes the refined hipster aesthetic she is known for to its buying audience.

⁸¹ <http://www.doorsixteen.com>

⁸² <http://www.doorsixteen.com/?s=etsy+tastemaker>, accessed Dec. 31, 2013

⁸³ *ibid.*



When you follow Etsy Pages, the stuff I add to my lists will show up in **your activity**. I never used to follow people on Etsy because I didn't really understand the point, but now I get it. MORE STUFF TO BUY!

I have a **bunch of lists** set up already, but my favorite one to look at is my **black + white collection**. I want these things...

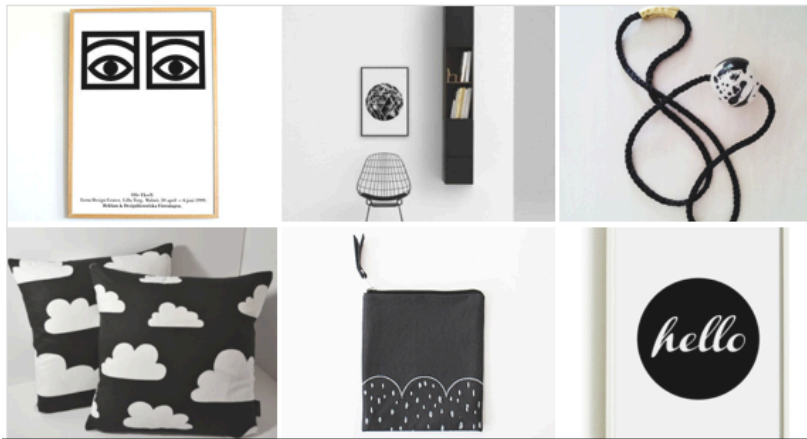


Figure 16. *Door Sixteen* Etsy Tastemaker page. Source: DoorSixteen.com

However, when you scratch beneath the veneer that Etsy has carefully constructed, the bulk of items for sale do not adhere to the hip, fashionable aesthetic that the company projects. Delving a layer deeper than the curated category pages, features or thematic galleries revealed that many of Etsy products are mediocre in execution, “down-home” and kitschy, even strange or banal. This disjuncture of taste even spawned a satirical blog called *Regretsy*, created by comedienne April Winchell, who chronicled “the worst of Etsy” from 2009 to 2013. An article in *Wired* magazine⁸⁴ describes the blog as follows:

⁸⁴ “Regretsy closes, the world mourns the end of DIY meets WTF,” <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-02/01/regretsy-closure>

Regretsy comments on some of the “objets d’art” found on Etsy with a superbly snarky tone, under the strapline “where DIY meets WTF”. Highlights include pieces of art, such as an oil painting of a couple copulating inside a burger bun, called Sex Burger;⁸⁵ a vulva-faced zombie ornament;⁸⁶ a custom unicorn hoodie;⁸⁷ and a cat hairball necklace.⁸⁸

Although Winchell closed the site in February 2013 to concentrate on her comedy and acting work, the Regretsy blog was wildly popular for its entertainment value (earning Winchell a book deal with Random House). While Regretsy showcased the extreme vulgarity at one end of Etsy’s offering, it also helped to make plain the taste gap and to emphasize that the bread and butter products on Etsy aren’t consistent with the image Etsy has strategically constructed. A search on Etsy.com for “home décor”, for example, resulted in a such products as painted mason jars, an American folk art-type “Welcome” sign, a thistle and pansy door wreath, and throw pillow made of country rose fabric. The reality of Etsy’s inventory of goods *aren’t* what hipsters identify with, which highlights Etsy’s employment of distinction as a markers of taste and class wielded at the symbolic level. The Etsy imaginary, advanced through the many strategies I’ve discussed thus far, is targeted at and reproduced by a largely white, upwardly-mobile, urban middle class, as the company’s coveted demographic. These are producers and consumers who identify as cultural intermediaries and with the hipster aesthetic and lifestyle as a manifestation of class and taste boundaries. They are contrasted by a class fraction of less sophisticated, more folksy, middle-America and working-class craft producers on Etsy. By suppressing the “regretsy” and foregrounding of the fashionable, Etsy “appropriates, materially or

⁸⁵ <https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/116299541/>

⁸⁶ <https://www.etsy.com/listing/116032968/>

⁸⁷ <https://www.etsy.com/listing/101087903/>

⁸⁸ <https://www.etsy.com/listing/42043025/>

symbolically, a given set of objects or practices [...] as the mechanism by which privileged groups can maintain their cohesion and distinguish themselves” (Stevens: 71), putting Bourdieu’s concepts of distinction and taste in action.

Buying In: Consuming Craft as Lifestyle and Marker of Class

This identification of craft with the hipster aesthetic and lifestyle as a manifestation of class and taste distinction is also inherently tied to consumer culture and its emancipatory promises. As Rob Horning notes, the promise of consumerism is that individuals can

transcend the horizons of the self—traditional roles, limited class mobility, geographic isolation—thanks to free choice in the ever-diversifying marketplace, which would allow us to express our uniqueness through the material culture we assembled for ourselves (2013, online⁸⁹).

Increasingly, modern consumerism affirms identity-formation as invested in personal taste as a marker of self-actualization and mode of subjectivity. This identity is sustained by buying into (Walker 2010) consumer products and experiences that produce a sense of individualization constantly reaffirmed by consuming behaviours that reinforce one’s cultural capital or in Horning’s words ‘the accumulation of cool’. As we’ve seen, Etsy’s carefully crafted discourses and representations of fashionable taste culture, arguably, fetishize the hipster aesthetic and the company’s commercial success relies on the aspirational DIY culture that buys into the ethos of “modern handmade” and the imaginary of its taste culture. Owning something mass-produced from a big box retailer does not elevate one’s cool-factor or align with the principles of craft’s habitus. Rather,

⁸⁹ <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/marginal-utility/the-primitive-accumulation-of-cool/>, accessed Jul. 13, 2013

today's hipster is invested in the seductive intersection of where “cool offers a new fusion of social and cultural capital with demonstrable competencies in consumption—knowing what to buy, and when, and how to seize opportunities to display it” (ibid), thus fortifying the system of distinction, judgment and its relationship to consumption and class as a producing-consuming loop of a handmade ethos and taste culture.

Conclusion

Informed by the explanatory power of Bourdieu's cultural field theory and his concepts of habitus, intermediaries and symbolic capitals, in this chapter I have situated the growth and contemporary importance of DIY craft as a field of cultural production, charting the structuring institutions, intermediaries and discourses that distinguish indie craft and the cultural dynamics of its habitus, politics, taste culture and gendered relations of power. My research contextualized the rise of this new wave of craft from its emergence in the early 2000s due to the popularization of and media attention devoted to DIY programming. I also revealed its ideological underpinnings and “indie” ethic, including a commitment to values that counter mass-production and the passive mass-consumption mainstream culture, as vital constituting forces. The convergence of the new networked technologies of Web 2.0, participative media culture and digital storefronts that enable micro-entrepreneurship, and especially the launch of Etsy in 2005, dramatically accelerated the growth of indie craft, particularly in North America. Further, I have argued for a reconstituting of Bourdieu's cultural field analysis to account for the distributed networks of informal connections and technologies that make possible new,

flexible modes of cultural work and entrepreneurialism, and are integral to contemporary craft. In contrast to professional fields with more clearly demarcated and formalized structural boundaries and social relations, DIY craft is a dynamic field that articulates and disarticulates with various technologies, institutions, informal ties and socially networked forms of capital. The distributed nature of DIY craft depends on individual crafters weaving webs of connection with proprietary technologies, ecommerce infrastructures and corporations such as Etsy, and participating in aspects of network sociality to operate and grow their micro-enterprises. These dynamic and tangled webs are in constant motion and not without productive tensions and subjectivities. Among these are feminist notions of community: how community members offer support, collaboration and patronage that interact with the network sociality model and, concurrently, make evident the interplay between community and commerce to demonstrate how multiple meanings are at work in DIY craft as a cultural field.

By focusing on the role and agency of crafters as cultural intermediaries, my research has revealed that they are active in attaching signification to cultural products and attuned to popular culture, tastes, trends and cultural references, and the politics of presentation and representation among their fellow makers—all of which informs their production.

Moreover, I argue that both the circuit of culture and the short circuit are palpably in motion within the field of DIY craft, yet operate at different cadences, specifying the short circuit an accelerated loop, serious craft entrepreneurs can use it to creatively self-sustain, generate ideas and new products, and accumulate cultural capital among their peer group. Their well-honed insider knowledge and identification with a rarefied taste culture and

social realm accentuate their sensibilities as producers-consumers. They become recognized and celebrated as tastemakers and have a cultivated understanding of what makes the grade for promotion at Etsy, on blogs and social media, elevating them in craft's star system. The larger circuit of culture represents a broader craft constituency, including aspirational makers who buy into the ethos of indie craft as a value-based political-economic choice. This in turn propels the craft economy, emphasizing its reliance on its own community as its consuming public.

Through a detailed case study of Etsy, as a corporatized model and substantial part of DIY craft's habitus, my research charts the company's growth and significant economic success in transforming craft entrepreneurialism in the Web 2.0 era. Notably, my investigation exposes a highly gendered corporate institution that reproduces masculinized gendered hierarchies in its financial, technological and management structures and power relations, in sharp contrast to its overwhelmingly female base of cultural producers. Further, I critically analyze the company's pervasive use of celebratory rhetoric, unravelling its keenly crafted messaging on "re-humanizing work," "community" and "togetherness" as structuring discourses, noting that these prove to be full of hyperbole and contradiction, in relation to the actual experience of crafters. By paying attention to Etsy's use of an increasingly professionalized and designed "look and feel", and the interactive mechanisms on its website, I uncover that Etsy conveys a stylish and modern sensibility through its brand, and by extension, reveals the affinities and aspirational desires of its audience—Etsy sellers and buyers. Yet, my analysis exposes that the visual, discursive and interactive conventions that Etsy executes are strategically

constructed to reinforce the company's desired positioning and commercial interests. It also became clear during my research that, although they imply choice and interactivity, these approaches are ultimately constrained by Etsy's design decisions, proprietary technology and marketing tactics. An extensive analysis of the circulation of cultural capital among DIY craft's tastemakers also revealed Etsy's substantial role as arbiter of taste and distinction, whereby the company strategically foregrounds what representations rise to the surface and are reproduced on its website, through its discourses and on its mediated channels as particularly fashionable, cool and, arguably, fetishized under a hipster aesthetic. Etsy employs its distinction and aesthetic judgment as a marker of taste and class, suppressing products that do not fit its ideals or the taste culture of the largely white, upwardly mobile, urban middle-class producer-consumer the company covets, and thus disavowing class implications of the "regreetsy" or less refined aesthetic of its bread and butter products (and consequently, makers) as inferior.

By analyzing Etsy as a structuring institution and key component of DIY craft's habitus, it is clear that, despite its celebratory rhetoric and "commitment to community," the company's operations, policies, marketing, and merchandising and aesthetic distinctions ultimately serve its commercial imperative. Etsy does not substantively address questions of labour, the gendered nature of its production workforce or the actual material experience of making and running a craft micro-enterprise. Its own *Hello Etsy!* event did not offer any window for discussing these issues. The significant disjuncture between what Etsy promotes and the actual experience of crafters—women micro-entrepreneurs and cultural intermediaries—along with the difficulties in gaining access to Etsy

management for interviews, reaffirmed my intention to speak with the women actively participating in the handmade economy and interviewing and actively following them. The following chapter investigates DIY craft from the perspective of the people involved in it as makers, recognizing the materiality of practice, agency and uniquely gendered reality of modern craft. Through a detailed exploration of the interviews I conducted, I present and discuss women's everyday experiences as interwoven with running a sewing lounge, jewellery design business, or bath and body products micro-enterprise, for example. It includes insight into how multiple subjectivities, standpoints and partial truths might factor into women's contradictory or negotiated experiences of entrepreneurship along with a critical look into the precarity of DIY craft as a feminized sector of cultural work.

CHAPTER 5

Craft's Feminized Labours: Women, Making and Connecting

In this chapter, I use the accumulation of my interviews, participant-observation and self-reflexive experiences, as assembled through my field research, to address my main research questions, lending insight to the seemingly paradoxical turn to the handcrafted economy of DIY craft in the age of digital media while stitching together the many nuances, tensions and politics of this gendered field women's cultural production. I do so while teasing out the economic, social, cultural and technological dynamics that characterize the contemporary moment of indie craft. At the same time, I pay attention to the particularity of women's experiences and voices—unlike the bulk of ethnographies of cultural production—as a means to locate and relocate feminisms and their tensions in craft production, circulation and consumption in the material as well as virtual realms.

I begin by introducing the group of women I interviewed as part of my research. These women are central to my project because their experiences—of craft production, entrepreneurship and community—provide evidence, cultural specificity and personal insight that shape my analysis and critique of the contemporary DIY craft economy. I then move to an account of what motivated them to start crafting, and a brief discussion of the renewed interest in craft and the handmade in the digital age. From there, I explore the increasingly blurred lines between craft, work and lifestyle as a significant outcome of digital culture and the new forms and conditions of work that characterize its impact on

DIY crafters. For crafty women, these include new modes of connecting through making as amplified by the mediated and networked communications of blogging and social media. Finally, I examine craft production and its feminized labours, including micro-entrepreneurship, immaterial and affective labour, and the precarious feminization of work in this sector.

Crafty women

A portrait of my participants

Angie Johnson designs fashion-forward clothing and accessories under her brand *Norwegian Wood*. Owner of *Late Greats*, Chen Reichert crafts “historical stuffy dolls,” such as Coco Chanel, George Washington and Albert Einstein. Anne Dardick is a soap maker and crafter of bath and body products under her vintage-inspired brand *Dot & Lil*. Maker of “handcrafted eco jewellery” at *Days of August*, Marie-Pier Labelle is a Montrealer living in Australia. Emeline Villedary is the former co-owner of *Emeline & Annabelle*, the Montreal sew lounge and DIY craft workspace, as well as a sewer of women’s and children’s clothing and interior décor items and mother of three. Jenna Herbut is a crafter and owner of *Make It*, a craft economy marketing and promotion company that holds twice-annual indie craft shows in Vancouver and Edmonton, Canada. Lastly, Dr. Sandra Alföldy is Professor in Craft History at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD University), and author of two books on fine crafts (2005, 2007). Below I’ve included select examples of their work (Figures 17-22).



Figures 17–22. Examples of select interviewees' work. Clockwise from top left: Drape vest by Angie J. of *Norwegian Wood*; Bath salts by Anne. D. of *Dot & Lil*; Obi belt by Emeline V. of *Emeline&Annabelle*; Vancouver Make It show by Jenna H. of *Make It Productions*; Tie necklace by Marie-Pier L. of *Days of August*; and Historical stuffy dolls by Chen R. of *Late Greats*.

Woven together, these crafty women make up my group of interviewees⁹⁰. With the exception of Dr. Alföldy, they range in age from 25 to 38 years old and are based in Canada, the United States and Australia. Beginning in March 2012, I interviewed my seven participants and followed their activities in their Etsy shops, on their social media channels and blogs, and continued several of the conversations over email or, informally, at craft fairs. After my initial interview with Emeline V. in March 2012, I interviewed her

⁹⁰ For summary chart and list of interviewees, see Appendix B.

again in October of that same year when she and her co-owner had closed the *Emeline & Annabelle* sew lounge for both financial and personal reasons. In all, my corpus represented a total of nine interviews comprised of the six women who characterized themselves as craft entrepreneurs and who form the bulk of my evidence given their day-to-day immersion in craft entrepreneurship (Angie J., Chen R., Anne D., Marie-Pier L., Jenna H. and Emeline V.), a craft historian (Sandra A.), and an auto-ethnographic interview between myself (Jacquie W.) and my colleague and member of my PhD cohort, Mary Elizabeth Luka.

Crafting: then and now

Girls' introduction to craft in childhood is, of course, not new. It dates back to a time when embroidery, needlework and the skilled ability to adorn textiles and beautify domestic surroundings was at the heart of young women's education in the privileged classes. Daughters were taught how to sew and embroider a sampler, which signified both a material and symbolic closeness with the maternal in an act of bonding and transference of skills. Rozsika Parker (2010 [1984]) traces the history of young maidens' learning embroidery and other needlework back many centuries to the medieval era and Victorian times, linking it to "high positions" or, in some cases, upward mobility, and to a view of marriage in which obedience, femininity and "the defense of women's chastity was desirable" (74). She notes that "embroidery for ladies [was advocated] as a means of avoiding the temptations that lay in idleness" (ibid.). This focus on handwork as a feminine pursuit served also to confine women to the home and prevented them from

accessing formal education. Parker critiques this situation as a means to oppress and limit women's intellectual abilities.

More commonly, middle-class women were also historically taught as girls to sew, weave, knit and do piecework—not for aristocratic ideals, but because they had to work and contribute to the functioning of the home and family. This unpaid domestic labour similarly confined these women to the home, upheld such labour as part of the construction of femininity and marital roles, and social expectations. It engendered what Mary Wollstonecraft described as “blind obedience,” through which “the construction of feminine characteristics sanctioned middle-class women's subjugation and economic dependence and [explained] *why* women embraced the constraints of femininity” (Parker: 139).

Indeed, from childhood beginnings, craft has been an integral element of many young women's upbringing throughout time in Western society. Drawing from the modes of feminist inquiry I outline in chapter 3, which values women's storytelling, voices and how they create meaning, I began my interviews by asking why each respondent had become interested in craft. What inspired her DIY activity and desire to make things by hand? Interestingly, many of the women I interviewed attributed their early interest in making to experiences in childhood, to familial influences, particularly those of their maternal relationships. Most often, mothers and grandmothers provided the initial impulse to begin making. As two of my interviewees point out:

It didn't happen consciously. It happened gradually while growing up. My grandmother was a seamstress and my mother was a seamstress. My grandmother never threw anything away. She always kept everything. She had this huge cupboard of treasures: ribbons, buttons, zippers. She would unseam and keep everything, if the fabric was still good. Essentially, I grew up with a "doing by hand" mentality. I learned to craft with recycled things. We've always been "Martha Stewart-type people" (Marie-Pier L., interview, June 19, 2012).

My mother was a sewer and she was very agricultural having grown up in a small farming village in wartime France. Their entire community was very self-sufficient. Her father was a butcher. They grew all their own vegetables. They made their own clothes. They did what they had to do to survive. My mom taught me how to sew, how to make preserves, how to both make stuff out of necessity, but also how to make a home that was welcoming and beautiful. For my parents it was important for my sister and I to be surrounded by those kinds of values. I still use her old Singer sewing machine to this day (Emeline V., interview, March 7, 2012).

The respondents spoke of the intimacy of mother–daughter relationships, of watching and learning at the knee of a grandmother, of there being a sense of closeness and magic to learning to knit, sew, crochet or make gifts such as candles, jams or other homemade goods. Many respondents said they had always been "crafty" and mentioned the "everyday quality" of the making that went on in their households while they were growing up:

Craft was always part of my childhood. My mom was very crafty. She sewed, knitted and crocheted and, when I was really little, she made all my clothes. Her sewing room was her space—the only room in the house that was really hers. I always found it to be a bit magical. It was fun. There was always a ton of fabric and thread and bits of ribbon and buttons in mason jars. There was a large corkboard with all kinds of patterns and photo of projects she planned on making. And, she taught me how to sew there, how to read a pattern and cut things out, and how to properly press things. I sewed simple clothes and toys into my teens, often making gifts for my grandparents, cousins and friends. (Jacquie W., auto-ethnographic interview, Oct. 17, 2012).

My mom has always sewn. When I was growing up she worked for Annalee, which is a doll company, and also for a company called Mutt & Mittens making dog toys. My sister and I would get five cents for every dog that we turned right side out and stuffed. Sewing was always something we did. I started making my own stuff when I was very young, as far back as I can remember... (Heidi Kenney, interviewed at Renegade Craft Fair, Chicago, in *Handmade Nation*, Levine, 2008).

The recognition of the felt shared experience of making and the nostalgia of growing up learning how to sew or knit or crochet as part of the everyday and domestic life were common among my interviewees:

I grew up in a really small town of about 300 people. I had been doing Barbie clothes and embroidery since I was around four, and when I was nine my mom taught me to sew clothing. I also took classes through the 4-H Club, which was a staple of growing up in the Prairies. It was the original *Craftster*⁹¹ [laughs] (Angie J., interview, April 17, 2013).

Lastly, as one interviewee noted, “I have a history of people making things with their hands in my family. It is imprinted in my genetics for me to be a hands-on person” (Chen R., interview, April 17, 2013). From learning to craft from mothers and grandmothers, contemporary women share these influential beginnings of their fore sisters; however, the indie makers I interviewed differ in that they grew up in a moment of change. In the wake of the first and second waves of feminism, the women I met had not faced the housebound oppression and feminine mystique of earlier generations. Today, young women’s relationship to craft combines these early influences and feminist achievements

⁹¹ Founded in 2003, “*Craftster—no tea cozies without irony*, is an online community where people share hip, off-beat, crafty diy (do it yourself) projects. The term “Craftster” means ‘crafty hipster’ and is also meant to be an homage to the pioneer peer-to-peer sites Napster and Friendster” (<http://www.craftster.org/about.html>, accessed May 13, 2012).

with new technological affordances, new modes of work and a set of political ideals that brought renewed interest in craft.

Contradictions: renewed interest in craft and the handmade in the digital era

In the age of cloud computing, mobile apps, and Facebook, how is it that we have seen such a resurgence of interest in craft and in making goods by hand? When I returned to the academic environment after working in the creative industries for many years, I rekindled an interest in crafting as a material contrast to the intellectual work and immaterial labour my studies required. I found pleasure in fabrics and textures, and began making modern quilts. I see the collective desire to reclaim handicraft as a response to the amplified pace and immateriality of today's "always plugged in" digital culture and the expectations of unbounded work environments, which bleed work into social life and leisure time. I wanted to feel fabric in my hands and rub yarn between my fingers, which would spark an idea for a project and then, by stitching together the many pieces, I would experience a sense of tangible accomplishment.

For many years I didn't do anything crafty. I went to university and started my career working in the digital design world. I traveled a lot for work and, in some ways, it became my life. Then I was feeling really disconnected from doing anything handmade. After I moved to Montreal and started the Ph.D., I had a strong pull to reconnect with making things again. And, serendipitously *Emeline&Annabelle* sew lounge opened up in my neighborhood. It was about connecting to a sense of creative expression. It was really satisfying to see flat fabric come alive and become something else, making something that I could feel and hold in my hands. It was also a somewhat meditative practice that gave me time to process work through my thoughts on academic and professional matters (Jacquie W., auto-ethnographic interview, Oct. 17, 2012).

These lived experiences are what feminist scholar Anne Cvetkovich (2012) has found in her research on “the value of process and the art of daily living” (xi). In her combined personal memoir and critical essays on the many facets of life that affect academic experience and its professional pressures, she explores craft as an “embodied practice” and highlights the aesthetics and materiality of craft as providing an antidote to the very disembodied nature of digital work and its pervasiveness in everyday life. Cvetkovich also describes crafters as being highly attuned to the senses through colour, touch and the repetitive working of materials, all of which allow for pleasure and being focused on the present moment (see also Wallace and Cvetkovich 2013). Emeline V. drew out similar themes in our interview:

I physically get enjoyment out of [sewing]. I enjoy creative problem solving. I like being different. I like the process of doing it. It’s meditative. It’s calming. It’s the same reason I like to cook. There is a beautiful simplicity to it that counteracts the digital craziness of social media and our modern lives (Nov. 21, 2012).

And yet, paradoxically, part of craft’s resurgence is in fact due to advancements in technology. Garth Johnson of *Extreme Craft*⁹² affirms this contradiction: “would there be indie craft without the internet? It may sound strange that a bunch of people who are trying to reclaim handicraft are using technology to do so, but it’s undeniably true” (Levine and Heimerl 2008: 30). Today, crafters are connecting as much as they are making, with the two going hand-in-hand. The integration of the internet into daily routines and craft practices has “fostered diversity though friendly competition, resulting in a gloriously messy tangle of blogs, forums, projects, email groups and social

⁹² <http://www.extremecraft.com/>

networking sites” (31). Added to this are mobile media and social networks that make it easy for crafters to produce an abundance of Instagram photos and hashtagged projects and that have extended craft from offline, individual spaces and studios and into everyday mediated conversation, with the influences and inspirations that brings.

I post to my Instagram⁹³ and Tumblr⁹⁴ nearly everyday, sometimes multiple times a day. Like right now, I’m producing my next collections so I show work-in-progress and the new fabrics and designs of my clothes on Instagram. But, it’s also a ton of work that needs constant updating. When I need a break from my production, I’ll go online to catch up with my social networks and the blogs I follow. I feel lucky because when I started *Norwegian Wood* [in 2007] fashion blogging was just becoming popular. Because I was an early adopter with blogging and connecting with the fashion bloggers that I really liked, I got to know the bloggers because, I guess, they didn’t have that many readers back then [laughs]. I picked blogs that are still around and became really successful, like Susie Bubble from *Style Bubble* and Michelle from *Kingdom of Style* in the UK, and Tavi from *Rookie* and Janine Jacobs from *Coveted* in the US. I feel connected even when I’m alone in my studio. It’s like a kind of fashion bloggers support group and whole network of social media contacts, and also a place to share and collaborate (Angie J., interview, Oct. 10, 2102).

As discussed in chapter 4, with global marketplace platforms such as Etsy providing an affordable and accessible ways for makers to sell their handmade goods, crafters can now operate ecommerce enabled micro-enterprises and access to a global market, which has cracked open craft entrepreneurship widely. By bringing together these seemingly contradictory facets of contemporary craft—the notion of embodied practice as antidote to disembodied digital work and the ecommerce, promotional aspects, and social networking of the Web 2.0 era—we begin to see some of the dynamics and productive tensions at play in resurgence of craft in the digital era that today’s crafters experience.

⁹³ <http://wigrm.com/angienorwegianwood>

⁹⁴ <http://iheartnorwegianwood.tumblr.com/>

Making is connecting⁹⁵

Craft/work/lifestyle

In his opening remarks at the 2013 *Hello Etsy!* conference, Etsy CEO Chad Dickerson described the “people-powered economy Etsy is creating.” It is not, he said, “just about commercial activity, but about the humanity involved in making a life, not just a living” (participant-observation, March 22, 2013). This statement reflects the new economic reality in which, for many workers, particularly those in the cultural industries, there is no longer a pronounced divide between working life and everyday life, including leisure and social time. Rather, the line between where work begins and ends is blurred. It has become a kind of porous membrane, like a thin piece of muslin. Dickerson’s “making a life” is steeped in discourses of creativity as self-actualization, fulfillment, and social consciousness, and emphasizes the connections from network sociality and being part of a community. This was my experience working at Veer. We lived the “work hard, play hard” ethic of a start-up, so it was not uncommon to be at the office until midnight and then back again for 8 a.m. Our culture encouraged work as socialization and spending leisure time at the office, where we ate company-supplied meals and had the requisite pool table, video games and in-house massages. Furthermore, every staff member was allocated a small number of stock options and was therefore an “owner” of the company—an entrepreneur whose work directly contributed to its success and who would potentially cash in should the stock options ever vest. Media and technology start-

⁹⁵ This heading is, in part, inspired by the title of David Gauntlett’s 2011 book (see full reference in Works Cited)

ups and creative industries companies often feature a culture that combines work and lifestyle: fellow employees are not just co-workers but friends who work late together and then go for a beer.

In describing of this type of work/lifestyle dynamic, there is a tension between what some authors see as the emancipatory potential of free-form work environments, which seem to “represent a soulful future for work” (Robert Reich quoted in Ross 2004: 55) and what I call the “dark matter” of creative work environments. This includes the “precarious realities and constraints of ‘emotional labour’ that extend to the tensions around agency, negotiation, gender politics, and power relations relative to the intensity and demands of a startup culture” (Hogan and Wallace, 2013; see also Ross 2004; Dorland 2009; Banks 2006). It also demands that we pay attention to aspects of youth and gender, since the demands of work as lifestyle are more easily sustained by young creative workers who have not yet taken on family commitments, and happily blend work, life and leisure to achieve creative fulfillment, develop friendships and invest in career growth. Angela McRobbie, British cultural studies scholar and feminist researcher on women and cultural work, notes that the work/lifestyle discourse is part of the “rhetoric of entrepreneurialism” that governments and companies use to exploit young people’s (and young women’s in particular) ethos of self-reliance and a commitment to creative ideals. The young women in her study, who were aspiring fashion designers, identified with creative labour as a means of self-actualization (1998: 103). What emerged in McRobbie’s feminist cultural study of the UK fashion industry was a “new cultural worker”:

[These women] represent a new kind of woman worker, highly qualified, but subject to a great financial insecurity and instability in employment, to the point that most are unable to consider taking time off to have children. The necessity of co-operation and collaboration to their livelihoods seems inevitable (188).

Analyzing what was happening in the fashion industry, McRobbie found the changing face of creative work in and the gender dynamics of a feminized sector. In particular, she noted that the increasing pressures that women were experiencing in the professional sphere was having an impact on choices they made in their private lives.

My research affirmed that the blurring of work and lifestyle for many indie crafters as micro-entrepreneurs is an extension of what has been happening in companies in the creative industries for some time now. A portion of DIY crafters are either current or former employees in this sector who have managed to quit their day jobs. My interview respondents Angie J. and Marie-Pier L. came from commercial fashion and the film industry, respectively, and carried over to craft those industries' approach to work as lifestyle, which had been part of their original professional formation. Others continue to work by day and pursue their craftwork at night, many in hopes of transitioning one day to full-time creative entrepreneurship. Anne D. spoke of "being obsessed with soap making" and that it "was her life" (interview, Sep. 19, 2012). She expressly chose flexible daytime work that would allow her to devote her creative energies and leisure time to production and to networking with fellow craft entrepreneurs until the point that she could "take the leap" to full-time making.

I found a job as a nanny so that I could control my own hours. I was working with this family where the grandparents were very involved with the kids so I could

make my own schedule for two years until I was able to do this full-time. I started with them 40 hours per week and by the end I was only working 10-15 hours per week, so I was able to make it work for me. I don't know what I would have done otherwise (Anne D.).

Chen R. noted:

I am trying to transition to making *Late Greats* my full-time gig, but I still pick up contract work and teach and tutor English to foreign students. My partner is in grad school and my business doesn't make enough for us to quite make ends meet. It's tough juggling both kinds of work, but, hopefully, my craftwork will eventually be enough (interview, Apr. 17, 2012).

Youth, gender and life stage were also factors for indie makers in terms of establishing craft/work/lifestyle as an unbounded way of life. Six out of eight interviewees (including myself) are young women with no children, who consistently mixed work, and social and leisure time together in service of creative fulfillment and growing their businesses and careers. Angie J.'s studio mates are fellow makers, whom she met through her involvement with the local craft community. She also previously owned an indie art and craft retail space with her husband and has been a longtime co-planner with friends and fellow makers in Montréal's DIY craft scene of the annual Smart Design Mart, a juried craft fair held twice annually. "My work and life are one big creative mash-up," she remarked during our interview. She also went on to say that "when I'm working on a new collection, I practically live at the studio" (interview, Oct. 12, 2012).

The blurred line between work and life also results, at least in part, from the "always on" aspects of communications technology, smart phones and social media. Indie crafters, who often work alone or with only one or two others, view staying consistently connected to informal networks and communities through online forums and social media as both a

personal and professional necessity. There is a constant stream of posting to Facebook and Twitter or of sharing photos on Instagram that showcase not just new products but everyday life happenings, well outside of traditional working hours. The interviewees noted that their being connected evolved from making virtual connections for craft production and business purposes to those people becoming friends. They all said that these connections were vital to their social circles and the affective relationships that emerged from these media.

To meet virtually 10,000 other people on the *Dish Talk* forums, there is no way I could ever do that without the technology. I came to know a lot of the active people on that board. We are now friends on Facebook and it's switched to being social because I am no longer in the information gathering stage of starting up my business and figuring out my soap recipes (Anne D.).

I've met so many people over the years on the internet. It's vital to my business in so many ways. I honestly wouldn't have a business without it. Like I said about the fashion bloggers, they picked up and featured my work early on and it made a big difference. Even now, I follow people on Twitter or Facebook and then I just say "hey, I really like your blog, can I send you some clothes, I think you're cool." And if they don't reply, then I don't read their blog anymore because I hate them [laughs]. Seriously though, I'm virtually always online or on my iPhone sharing and posting to Twitter or Instagram. It's just part of working for yourself as a maker. There are no 9 to 5 days. I somehow have a ton of followers on Pinterest too. It's kind of an ecosystem of connections for both my work and my social life—my best friend is a fashion designer [Etsy seller Supayana⁹⁶] I met online through social media, who came to visit me in Montreal and ended up staying! (Angie J.)

The devotion to craft as work/lifestyle—including the resulting social networks and the fact of always being “plugged in”—is largely taken for granted as necessary and even desirable among participants in DIY craft cultures. It is further reinforced by the rhetoric

⁹⁶ <https://www.etsy.com/shop/supayana>

of influential companies such as Etsy, which seek to “transform the economy, reimagine work and find more purposeful ways of doing business that will build the creative economy of the future—one that is connected, human-scaled, joyful and lasting” (Hello Etsy event program). However, as feminist scholar Tara McPherson notes, this merged work/lifestyle and the need to be “always on” are deeply entangled with discourses of electronic culture, which “simultaneously embody prohibition and possibility” (2009: 383). As a result, they

[let us] feel we can control our own movements and create our own spaces, shifting our roles from consumers to producers of meaning. Such moments of creation and making can be quite heady and personally powerful, but we’d do well to remember that this promise of transformation is also something the web (and electronic culture more generally) concertedly packages and sells to us. From my “personal” account on numerous web pages to my DVR to countless makeover shows on cable, electronic culture lures us in with its promises of change and personalized control. This is not to say that such control is not sometimes substantial and meaningful, but neither is it value free or necessarily progressive. Although transformation and mutability may be inherent in digital forms, an aspect of their *ontology*, transformation is also a compelling *ideology* that can easily stitch us back into the workings of consumer capital (383; emphasis in original).

Etsy and the broader DIY maker culture are deeply invested in the “promise of transformation” that I discussed in chapter 4 as the ideological underpinning for the work/lifestyle arrangement. This promise is what sustains many makers in their willingness to work unbounded days and nights. It is why they are constantly negotiating the embodiment of “prohibition and possibility” that McPherson describes, which is characteristic of craft as a feminized sector, as my research reveals.

Cultivating kinships online

Blogging and social media are among the networked technology developments that have enabled user-friendly self-publishing and convergence culture (Jenkins 2008), which I discussed in chapter 2, and have contributed more broadly to the work/lifestyle culture of contemporary indie craft and of creative work. Emerging in the early-2000s, alongside mega-media properties such as *Martha Stewart Living* and television programs such as *Trading Spaces* were blogs devoted to crafting and DIY. Today, blogs are part of mainstream consciousness, but early craft bloggers had a formative influence on indie craft and maker culture, which in many ways continues to the present moment.

Through participant interviews as well as my immersion in digital craft circles, my research uncovered that, in fact, early craft blogs have had a lasting influence on crafters as both producers and consumers. Craft blogs were initially marked by a mix of topical show-and-tell posts on a recent craft project, and broader musings about life, family and personal experiences. These posts had an amateur quality to them, which is perhaps not surprising, given that both the production and consumption of blogs was in its infancy in the early 2000s. The diary format of blogs allowed for a more personal, approachable and authentic style—one that certainly differed dramatically from mainstream craft magazines or commercial books, with their high production values, polish and editorial rigidity.

As an illustrative example, Amy Karol of *Angry Chicken* began blogging in February 2005.⁹⁷ A longtime quilter based in Portland, Oregon, Karol's early posts discussed quilts she was working on, showing work-in-progress photos along with descriptive text, and wove in numerous stories about quilting with her mother. In one post from her first years as a blogger, she shared candid shots of her young daughter, Sadie, busy making a mess in the kitchen in an apron Karol had made for her. In another, she wrote about upcoming Easter plans and included a series of photos of vintage illustrations of Easter bunnies and eggs. Her most recent posts focus on her new knitting project and teaching her daughters to sew. Karol is a crafter, but she is also a mother, partner, daughter, worker and volunteer. Through her blog she lets interested readers into the intimacies of her life and her work.

This kind of public chronicling and visibility enabled by web-based publishing was a marker of early blogs *en général*. Unlike political blogs or ones providing alternative information and critiques of mainstream news, craft blogs primarily offered an opening to the experiences of women, craft-oriented and otherwise. Moreover, they refracted the multiple subjectivities of women's lives and foregrounded the extent to which female communities evolve around aspects of women's daily lives as mothers, consumers and workers. As one of my interviewees stated,

Blogging and the connection to the internet was really important to me. When I was pregnant with my first baby, I found this blog out of Portland called *Angry Chicken*. It changed my world. She was an interior designer with two kids. The need to share something with people was important and blogging ended up

⁹⁷ <http://angrychicken.typepad.com/>

replacing the making of things, so blogging became the making. It was all about the self-expression. This was 2005. *Angry Chicken* reinforced that the homemade and the handmade was important to family life and you could stay at home and you didn't have to have the big career. I was very naïve and idealistic at that time. Big revelation. Other women were doing this. There was a network of women. It was amazing to me that there was a whole world. It wasn't here geographically, but it was accessible (Emeline V., interview March 7, 2012).

This early craft blogging—both the production and consumption—was largely non-commercial. Posting tutorials and step-by-step how-tos on craft activities and the day-to-day activity of women's lives was, instead, a way of both sharing and connecting with a broader community. Deborah Bowen (2009) argues that blogs as hosted journals exemplify a new discursive tradition of women's writing that was evolving on the internet. In contrast to private, analogue diaries kept under lock and key, blogs require an element of performance, knowingly served up for public consumption. Bowen suggests that “women are drawing together and using the concepts of space, style and medium as a tripartite foundation for a new online discursive tradition in online autobiography” (310). She extends Cixous' (1990) notion of *écriture féminine*, arguing that the multiple and combination of interfaces offered by the internet gives women a way to develop an “e-criture feminine”—a feminine writing in electronic format that “embraces and embodies these ideals with polyvocality, relationality and, in the new cyberworld, hypertextuality” (ibid.).

The interplay of these qualities is evident in the blogging activity among my interviewees and among the craft and DIY blogs I regularly encountered during my daily routines of

participant research. *Posie Gets Cozy*⁹⁸, the blog of Alicia Paulson—launched in September 2005, is emblematic in this regard. Paulson describes herself as loving to make things by hand, starting in childhood where, along with her sisters, her mom taught her everything from cake decorating to sewing, from macrame to embroidery. She studied English and creative writing in college, but “never stopped trying to find time to make crafts”⁹⁹. As an adult, she moved to Portland, Oregon and where she worked as a book editor, a job she ultimately quit to start *Posie: Rosy Little Things*, a “one-woman production studio where I created handmade one-of-a-kind gifts, handbags, accessories, crochetwear, and original sewing, embroidery, and craft patterns”¹⁰⁰.

Echoing Emeline V.’s remark from above, Paulson’s making and blogging have gone hand-in-hand as a kind of craft itself. She has gathered a dedicated following of crafty readers, who draw inspiration from her imaginative projects, stories and recipes, which are accompanied by professional-quality photography. Although, Paulson has become well-known in DIY craft circles for her regular craft chronicles as well as her sewing and embroidery kits and patterns, which she sells online, it is her public vulnerability and relate-ability that punctuate her e-criture feminine. On her blog, Paulson has also shared her reflections and recovery from a severe accident when she was hit by a truck while crossing the street, a weaving together of writing, craft and affect as part of her recovery:

⁹⁸ http://rosylittlethings.typepad.com/posie_gets_cozy/

⁹⁹ <http://www.aliciapaulson.com/pages/about-me>, accessed July 15, 2013

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

I had six surgeries over the next nine months to reconstruct my foot, and spent many more months in bed recovering. I began embroidering almost constantly during this time and it profoundly affected me, allowing me to heal both physically and emotionally. It was almost a year before I was able to walk again by myself¹⁰¹.

Paulson also shared her deeply personal heartbreak of having an adoption fall through after she and her husband had been planning for the baby's arrival for many months.

Over the nearly eight years that Paulson has been blogging regularly, her dedicated following has grown significantly, and it is not unusual for her posts to receive hundreds of comments. Most recently, she has recounted a successful adoption of a baby girl and the joy of everyday moments with her new daughter, alongside the craft projects—quilts, crochet work, and handmade toys and dolls.

This type of feminine discourse—episodic, anecdotal and revealing accounts, which contrast masculine linearity and rationality—is a hallmark of indie craft culture, as I found through my interviews and during my participant-observation visits to numerous craft and DIY blogs. Six of my interviewees are regular bloggers. For example, Marie-Pier L. of *Days of August* has blogged about her “treasure hunts” to find recycled and vintage materials, such a typewriter keys, old tortoise shell knitting needs and gears from vintage watches, for her eco jewellery collection. During our interview, she showed me a post about a trip back to her hometown of Montreal from Adelaide, Australia (where she now lives) where she wrote about making “prototypes with my mom” of pleated silk tie statement necklaces, which would become one of her signature products. In the post, she

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

described how the first prototype was made with one of her late grandfather's favorite ties, linking to photos of them together and sharing a childhood memory of him, marking a special connection to her family roots. (interview, Jun. 19, 2012).

Overall, my respondents told me that they deemed writing and reading craft-related blogs as integral to making, acting as an interdependent loop of embodied material practices that feed on one another and mark women's self-expression as much as their creative expression. Bowen further describes this environment of blogging, affect and its hypertextuality as constitutive of e-criture feminine, noting that "the world wide web itself is a series of interlinked and interlocking media, paralleling what Lippard calls 'a certain antilogical, antilinear approach also common to many women's work...fragments, networks, everything about everything'" (cited in Bowen, 318).

The blog of *Emeline&Annabelle*, the former Montréal sew lounge and craft space, exemplified this type of structure and discourse—its polyvocality, relationality and the showcasing of women's multiple experience and identities—that blogging makes possible for crafters¹⁰². Both founders posted regularly to the blog and each had her own voice. Blog posts announced new workshops and the latest fabrics that had arrived at the shop. They also celebrated workshop participants' finished DIY projects and profiled the staff or new products. They effectively used hyperlinking to augment posts with additional content, media and archived material, and connected to many other craft blogs, Montréal

¹⁰² The blog is now archived and available online for browsing at <http://www.emelineandannabelle.com/news/>.

“locals” and tangents of interest to their largely female audience. In this way, Emeline and Annabelle expanded and layered their discourse and underscored that “hypertext is a medium more conducive to feminist discourse than printed text, because it allows multiple versions of a story to develop and be told simultaneously” (Bowen: 318). Moreover, the blog affirmed “the female aesthetic”, where Emeline and Annabelle offered readers hyperlinked “allusions to intra- and extratextual material, enhancing this type of autobiography with information that provides [the reader] with further information about her character, likes and dislikes” (319).

But, most often, the blog was a place for Emeline and Annabelle to share details of their lives—as mothers, businesswomen, daughters, friends, wives and crafters—and to create community. Their posts engendered the varying and complex layers of virtual engagement through which women seek to connect with each other in diverse ways and varying degrees. As Emeline noted while the blog was still running,

I like to think we’ve created community. The blog seems to be a gateway to us. It’s in some ways a combination of my and Annabelle’s old blogs [before we opened the shop]. We share a lot. Mostly our struggles. Ironically, the blog is not really about sewing [laughs]! (Emeline V., interview, March 7, 2012)

The blog featured fun and humour-laden posts such as the weekly Friday Sendoff, Either::Or and Weekend Recap. In one Weekend Recap, entitled “If only...,” Emeline shared the following:

This week is killing me. I got seized with a bout of insomnia on Saturday that made me think of all the loose ends I have in my life. I’ve got that looming

triathlon on Saturday, and really, all I want to do is sit outside with the girls (you're all invited) and drink wine and laugh about all the things we don't dare speak of. It's normalizing to know that others feel the same doubts, have the same insecurities as you. How sometimes we really dislike our family, we wish we'd made different choices—like worked on a kibbutz or traveled to India; how we wish we'd studied fashion or learned a foreign language.

Don't get me wrong, I've lived my life with very few regrets and feel proud of the choices I've made—the tough ones and the no-brainers. But I've been cursed from birth with an overactive imagination and have the constant “if only” question in my head.

The game goes a little like this “If only I {...}, I'd be happier”:

If only I *had a new computer*, I could blog from home and write better posts—hence, be happier

If only I *had a big ass DSLR*, I could take better pictures, have nicer “memories”—hence, be happier

If only I *lost another 20 lbs*, I could more proudly wear side boob (reference back to E::O) feel sexier—hence, be happier

If only I *had a semi-detached house in NDG*, I could entertain my friends, decorate my home to truly reflect me – hence, be happier

If only I *had more money*, I could not stress out over daily expenses and feel like a damaged parent – hence, be happier

Ridiculous, right? My left brain knows that this stuff wouldn't make me happier. That happiness is a decision you make, to be content with what you have. Trust me, my mother drove that home to me many many years ago.

But you know what? Despite my better reasoning, a new outfit *does* make me feel happier. Perfectly groomed eyebrows and glossy nails do too. And while we're at, driving a shiny Subaru Outback does too.

What about you—what ridiculous notions of happiness do you have?¹⁰³

¹⁰³ <http://www.emelineandannabelle.com/news/daily/weekend-recap-if-only/>, posted September 4, 2012

The post garnered numerous comments from women in the Emeline&Annabelle community. They sympathized and shared their own “if only” sentiments. For example,

If only I hadn't spent the last decade of my life doing something I hated? What if I were a cheesemaker in Vermont? What if I had done x, y, z today, yesterday, last week? The only solution? Free craft night ;)

Community and the personal reverberated in this virtual space (with craft making as a constant subtext and shared interest), with the anxieties and doubts of women's everyday lives as relatable affects. Both the sharing and reciprocation were made meaningful through the multiplicity of voices and experiences in the community, including words of encouragement and support:

Hmmm... I think turning 40 should help you overcome some of those “what-ifs” ;) I totally get the over active brain. But really, after 40, you start giving yourself a break. At least I did! ;)

These excerpts illustrate “two important premises of *écriture féminine*: First, that women must have writerly freedom [...], and second, that women must reach out to one another, drawing together in order to create a common discourse made up of any number of different voices” (Bowen: 322). This was further reinforced when Annabelle posted about the painful experience of miscarriage. During our interview, Emeline acknowledged that the fact that Annabelle felt comfortable doing this was indicative of the relationship the pair had with their community:

I know that when Annabelle posted about her miscarriage that was very heavy, but at the same time that's what's going on.¹⁰⁴ It was very therapeutic for her to post it. What about community in terms of the hard stuff and not only the rah rah stuff.

For her to feel that she needed to express that and the blog was the venue that she was going to use. That assumes a lot of respect for the people in the community and that they can handle it (Emeline V., interview, March 7, 2012)

Together, this section presented aspects of my research that reinforce the many dynamics that knit together women's experiences, voices and struggles of a turn to craft in the digital age—from blurred lines of craft moving outside the traditional domestic sphere and into work as lifestyle enabled by digital technologies, to the development of blogging and social media as vital to women's e-criture feminine, expression and meaning-making.

Post-Fordism, gender and immaterial labour

From blogging as a mode of making and connecting among women craft entrepreneurs, I now move to the discussion of broader changes of “women's work” relative to craft as Handmade 2.0, drawing from feminist critical theory and conceptions of immaterial and feminized labour that characterize new, flexible modes and conditions of work in the digital age. With the increasing movement of the economic base away from material and factory-based labour toward intellectual and creative work in the last 20 years, scholars have written on questions of immaterial and affective labour and issues of precarious labour under the umbrella of post-Fordist production. Particularly influential in this regard has been the work of those associated with Italian *Operaismo* School, including Hardt and Virno (1996), Hardt (1999), Lazzarato (1999), and Hardt and Negri (2000).

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.emelineandannabelle.com/news/annabelle/buh-bye-2011/>

In *Reflections on Feminism, Immaterial Labour and the Post-Fordist Regime* (2010), McRobbie unpacks the work of Hardt and Negri and their contemporaries in an effort to outline the many changing conditions of work, including the decline of labour unions via Thatcherism and New Labour in the U.K. and neo-liberalism in the U.S. and Canada; the aspirations of young working-class people for a better life; and business's need for increased cognitive capacity from its workforce, as automation, computation and outsourcing to developing nations for inexpensive, unskilled labour grows. To this latter point, she notes that greater autonomy and decision-making power has been afforded to knowledge workers in the post-Fordist production era than previously, and has been further enabled by networked communications and new modes of production.

The combination of this brain power along with new communications technology means that capitalism is able to deliver high degrees of customization and design in its commodities to increasingly diverse and lifestyle-conscious groups of consumers, including the now more mobile working class (McRobbie 2010: 64).

This demand is produced by members of an affluent consuming public who are invested in expressing their individuality through exclusive lifestyle products with a high design quotient. The thesis of post-Fordism and immaterial labour also highlights the increased agency of workers where they can play “more participatory and intelligent role[s] in the workplace” (64) due to the decline of routinized factory labour and increase in knowledge-oriented positions. This has created an environment in which corporations rely on workers' ideas and innovation capacity, which requires increased collaboration and interactivity among workers. This climate has also created conditions in which

[W]orkers can now also become entrepreneurs themselves[;] no longer must they be seen only as employees or mere wage labourers and of course this chimes well with the growth of freelance or precarious self-employment among young people or with new forms of micro-entrepreneurialism associated with growing cultural and creative and media sectors of advanced capitalism (65).

In this way, the turn to craft in recent times has been praised as a fast-growing sector and new economy darling, and positioned as an upbeat career option in increasingly precarious economic times (Jakob 2013). Indeed, with the overall state of the global economy in peril as evident with recent recessions, government bailouts and roll-outs of stimulus packages among developed nations, creative, flexible, production-based labour predicated on innovations in communication and information technology is often touted as an empowering way for workers to negotiate the economic turmoil faced by traditional enterprises and carve out new forms of livelihood.

Despite the usefulness of the work of Hardt and Negri, and others, to theorize important elements of contemporary post-Fordist work conditions, McRobbie finds considerable fault with this field of political discourse for its complete “failure to foreground gender, or indeed to knit gender and ethnicity into prevailing concerns with class and class struggle” (2010: 60). Moreover, she notes that the role of women (and particularly young women) working in urban-based cultural industries and their contribution to the rise of post-Fordist production have gone largely unexamined. To remedy this, her article critiques the gender-blindness and interrogates the formative work by those associated with the Italian School on immaterial labour and precarity by questioning its sole focus on class,

decoupled from any consideration of gender or ethnicity, “for understanding contemporary work and imagining a radical political future” (61). Rather, McRobbie suggests that gender and ethnicity—more than class—represent more meaningful sites and forms of struggle, critiquing Hardt and Negri’s myopia about class as unproductively constraining, since it precludes the very real need to reflect on gender and sexuality in the post-Fordist era of work, in which the “feminization of work” has become an increasingly important consideration.

Feminization of labour

To bring notions of gender to the foreground in analyses of the changing world of work and to challenge Hardt and Negri’s “class-dominated and gender-essentialist analysis” (65), McRobbie charts the history of the women who began to enter the workforce in large numbers in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, rather than erasing women’s role in the transition to post-Fordist production, she emphasizes that the feminist movement in developed countries directly contributed to this shift by fighting for gender equality and the rights of women to work and earn their own incomes. This, in turn, expanded the possibilities for women, who saw their options increase as the economy moved away from high-paid, skilled industrial jobs, which adversely affected working-class men. In general, McRobbie notes, the post-Fordist economy and the conditions of its work have favoured the skills and flexibility of female workers, alongside feminism’s achievements toward women’s increased independence and career opportunities has led to what she terms “a feminization of the workforce” (65). She credits:

[A] combination of the impact of feminism and sexual-revolution providing birth control and wider opportunities to women has meant the aspirations of young women have grown exponentially from the 1970s onwards. Increasingly they could earn their own living and achieve a disposable income which in turn meant being able to enjoy leisure time and the freedoms of the movement which the delay in age of marriage and delay and having children created, i.e. holidays and travel (66).

These expanded options coupled with the changing nature of work in a post-industrial economy are entangled with what many scholars have termed immaterial and affective labour (Lazzarato, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Virno 2004, Gill and Pratt 2008; see also Hochschild 1983). Affective or emotional labour in contemporary globalized capitalism is labour that produces affects or emotional influence: the worker is expected to perform flexible, informal acts of communication that mobilize underlying human faculties, including affect (Virno 2004: 91). Affective labour is also typically associated with feminized labour—the overall nature of work becoming more service-oriented and communication-based emphasizing affective work traditionally performed by women. It is often linked to sectors predominantly staffed by women, including the fashion and beauty industries, DIY and the service sector. Here again, Hardt and Negri do not interrogate immaterial and affective labour by foregrounding gender and McRobbie faults other research of cultural industries workers that follow the Hardt and Negri argument (see Wissinger 2007 and Neff, Wissinger and Zukin 2009, for example), which take “an often depoliticized and enthusiastic account of the contemporary meaning of affective and immaterial labour in the fashion and beauty industries, and more generally in the service sector” (69).

Rather, McRobbie argues that a more reflexive and current feminist critique of this type of immaterial, emotional labour would acknowledge the influence of the constant stream of aspirational messaging in women's magazines along with the hyper-sexualization and feminized consumer culture and its effects on young working women as producing a kind of anxious freedom. Such research would also consider the "neoliberal underpinning of immaterial labour and forms of biopower which shape up amenable kinds of subjectivities, giving rise to a new kind of society control" (69). The irony is that the perception of increasing autonomy and upward mobility for women working in creative economies is shored up by a cool-factor, celebratory tone and emancipatory rhetoric, as we saw in the Etsy case study in chapter 4, that together give the illusion of control and advancement. This perception, in turn, motivates the feminized workforce to put in more and more hours and willingly perform the emotional labour required by an unbounded workday, entrepreneurial career management and persona.

Coupling the feminization of work with the immaterial labour associated with the transformative promise of the Web 2.0 environment, Weigel and Ahern (2013) go as far as to argue the following:

Today the economy is feminizing everyone. That is, it puts more and more people of both genders in the traditionally female position of undertaking work that traditionally patriarchal institutions have pretended is a kind of personal service outside capital so that they do not have to pay for it. When affective relationships

become part of work, we overinvest our economic life with erotic value. Hence, “passion for marketing.” Hence, “Like” after “Like” button letting you volunteer your time to help Facebook sell your information to advertisers with ever greater precision.¹⁰⁵

DIY craft as a precarious feminized sector

In this final section, I weave together key findings and arguments that emerged from my research to shed light on the dynamics of DIY craft as a site of precarious feminized labour. They are informed by McRobbie’s analysis above and the feminist literatures I examine in chapter 2, which relay to a number of interrelated and conjunctural themes that I unpack in light of the changing conditions of work in the post-Fordist era, its affective and immaterial labour, and the feminization of work relative to the cultural economy of craft. These include: (1) crafty women’s complicated relationship with feminism; (2) the relativity and tensions of middle-class privilege in DIY craft entrepreneurship; (3) motherhood and the myth of entrepreneurial flexibility; (4) the complexities and contrasts of craft’s empowerment discourses, self-promotion and the demands of immaterial labour; and (5) creative self/entrepreneurial self conflicts and the politics of maker culture. Again, I draw from my interviews, auto-ethnographic experience and immersion in physical and digital craft communities in stitching together these insights.

1. Crafty women’s complicated relationship with feminism

The DIY crafters of this economy are highly educated women, having benefitted from the work of second-wave feminists to enable access to post-secondary education for young

¹⁰⁵ The New Inquiry: <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/further-materials-toward-a-theory-of-the-man-child/>

women. Etsy reports that 52% of their sellers are college educated¹⁰⁶. The respondents in my study all hold post-secondary degrees. As I described earlier, they are relatively young and come from first world countries with developed economies, including Canada, the United States, and Australia¹⁰⁷. They expected to go to university and then pursue a professional career status, including acquiring the symbolic capital and economic advantage that come with earning a degree. As a whole, they spoke to the importance of professionalization, career and being financially self-sufficient as an economic necessity and vital to their identity.

Although, they generally recognize that feminism's achievements have paved the way for these expanded opportunities, they did not express overt feminist politics or specifically identify as being a feminist, for that matter. Rather, for these crafty women, feminism is somewhat passé, not relevant to their day-to-day work and craft. Unlike other recent movements, such as riot grrrl, with its clear feminist politics and practices, today's DIY crafters acknowledge feminism for its historical significance, but lean toward discourses of female empowerment and self-reliance as part of their individualized creative identity. For example, when asked whether she identified with feminism, Anne D. commented as follows:

¹⁰⁶ https://www.etsy.com/blog/news/files/2013/11/Etsy_Redefining-Entrepreneurship_November-2013.pdf

¹⁰⁷ My sample is generally consistent with the median age of a seller on Etsy, which is 33 years old: <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2007-06-12/etsy-a-site-for-artisans-takes-offbusinessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice>

I think handmade is tied to these things that women have done forever and ever. There's a whole history of women and craft and handmade goods and domestic life. Today, craft is a way to be your own boss and for women to start their own businesses. It's empowering, but I don't consider myself to be a feminist *per se*. It's more about making something and realizing you can sell it and try to make a living at it (interview, Sep. 19, 2012).

2. The relativity and tensions of middle-class privilege in DIY craft entrepreneurship

Having been immersed in the indie craft scene for several years now, both online and in person at craft fairs, workshops, weekly sewing clinics, and Etsy's major annual conference and seller education seminar, I can affirm that the women of DIY craft are predominantly middle-class and white. This is true of my ensemble of interviewees and also evident when looking at the influential bloggers and tastemakers, who have been elevated by contemporary craft's star system. This is an economy of fairly privileged and educated women with extensive social capital and networks, who have the time and disposable income required to pursue crafting. To this point, McRobbie notes that

some might argue that, already saddled with student loans to pay back, it is only the already privileged and thus mostly white young women, who will be confident enough to take on more bank loans to start off creative businesses, although there are a few exceptions (2010: 72).

Emeline and Annabelle are white women in their thirties. To fund the start up of their DIY craft enterprise, the two partners received loans and advance credit of nearly \$60,000. They were industrious in taking advantage of economic development programs in their district that had favourable repayment terms and interest rates (Emeline V., interview, Mar. 7, 2012). Their middle-class privilege—both have full-time working partners—

combined with their self-described sense of self-reliance gave them the confidence to get the loans and start their business.

However, in my second interview with Emeline, which occurred after she and Annabelle had closed their business because their lease was up for renewal and it no longer made financial sense to keep the shop open, she reminded me that although they had the confidence to get the loans, they were now saddled with nearly \$30,000 in outstanding debt when the business did not work out as planned.

No one talks about what happens if your store isn't successful. We are now working other part-time jobs and juggling our family responsibilities—not to get ahead, but to pay back this debt. Although I don't regret starting Emeline&Annabelle, I would have been further ahead financially to stay employed in design with a steady company, getting a regular salary and benefits (interview, Nov. 12, 2012).

Robb and Watson (2010), note that, in general, women are more likely to start small businesses in retail and service sectors, which typically have much lower returns and higher failure rates than other sectors, such as technology, and that the average female-led small enterprise closes within three years (2). This fact runs counter to what otherwise might be assumed about middle-class crafters: that their financial position is secure.

Although statistical data is limited and not specifically available for craft micro-enterprises, the relative position of middle-class privilege may enable DIY crafters to start a craft enterprise, however long-term viability and the ability to scale beyond the capacities of an individual or co-ownership to greater production capacities and higher

revenues remains problematic. Given the high failure rates, it is inevitable that many women will end up with loans to repay, or, operate in a hand-to-mouth situation that remains precarious.

3. Motherhood and the myth of entrepreneurial flexibility

Unlike the women in McRobbie's (1998) study of the U.K. fashion industry, who were uniformly young, unmarried and without children, the craft economy is divided between independent, self-reliant young women who have no children, or are intentionally waiting to start a family, and the mompreneur, "a sub-group of female entrepreneurs who operate at the interface between paid work and motherhood" (Ekinsmyth 2011: 104).

Marie-Pier L. noted that "I am focused on my business for now. I can't imagine having kids and being able to do all the work I need to do. Not that it's out of the picture for the future, but definitely not in the plan for right now" (interview, Jun. 19, 2012). For those with children, my research uncovered contradictions between craftwork as seen as flexible and compatible with motherhood and the precarious economic realities of craft entrepreneurship¹⁰⁸.

In describing, the motivations behind opening the sew lounge, Emeline notes that:

I had this desire to create a space where we could make things and try to make a living out of it. And not a huge living but something that could contribute to the family. It came from an idealistic space of creating work that was flexible, which we both now know is a load of crap. You are a slave to the client, to your business.

¹⁰⁸ Out of my respondents who are craft entrepreneurs, only one of them had children, therefore for this section I also draw from observations made on the many craft blogs written by mompreneurs, such as Amy Karoll of *Angry Chicken*, whom I discussed earlier in this chapter.

At the same time, you're flexible but then you're not flexible at all. It is also expected of you in the family because you are self-employed and thus you are the so-called flexible one. Also because I'm not earning a 'real' living [laughs] and so I had to be flexible to pick-ups, drop-offs, sick kids, appointments and stuff around the house (interview, March 7, 2012).

Emeline's experience speaks to the multiple roles and social expectations of mothers and unpaid reproductive and domestic labour that are taken for granted as part of the familial make-up. Further, the "myth of flexibility," associated with of entrepreneurial activity for women with children underscores that, without the means to offset family responsibilities with additional childcare or a partner who takes on primary care responsibilities, these responsibilities continual to fall to the mompreneur. The craft economy perpetuates this myth of post-Fordist flexibility through rhetoric about how flexibility is empowering, family-friendly and encourages the joy and freedom that comes with being self-employed and running one's own small creative enterprise.

The experience of Terry Johnson, producer of custom-monogrammed goods and owner of the Etsy shop *shopmemento*¹⁰⁹, is a further example of the tensions that exist around the self-employment of craft entrepreneurship's offering flexibility and accommodating work and family.¹¹⁰

Two years after setting up her online shop, Terri Johnson had the kind of holiday season most business owners dream about. By Thanksgiving 2009, orders for her custom-embroidered goods started streaming in at a breakneck pace. And the volume only increased heading into December. Johnson was hardly feeling festive, though. To get the merchandise out the door, she worked nonstop, hunched over the embroidery machine in her basement, stitching robes, aprons, and shirts until

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.etsy.com/shop/shopmemento>

¹¹⁰ <http://www.etsy.com/shop/shopmemento>

just a few days before Christmas. “I was barely seeing my family,” she recalls. [...] Trying to keep up with orders on her own was threatening to turn Johnson’s business into a one-woman sweatshop.¹¹¹

In probing the flexibility and emancipation discourses of creative micro-enterprises, Lisa Adkins (2002) suggests that rather than freeing women to pursue their creative passions, self-employment of this type lends itself more readily to a retraditionalisation of gender roles and hierarchies. Unlike men in these types of enterprises who often have greater mobility to meet clients and network, women in these businesses, particularly if they have children, are more domestically implicated and can experience the false flexibility of entrepreneurship, as Emeline V. mentions above. This begs the question as to whether the micro-entrepreneurship of DIY craft as feminized sector is reinforcing a re-traditionalization of gendered labour roles? The premise follows from the notion that despite the fact that “there is the veneer of equality [in cultural economies] on the basis of the sheer volume and presence of young women with good qualifications and with huge amounts of energy and drive”, the conditions of women engaged in creative micro-entrepreneurship might, in fact, be “worsening in contrast to what women might expect from a job with set hours and legal entitlements in regard to family life” (McRobbie 2010: 74).

¹¹¹ <http://www.wired.com/design/2012/09/etsy-goes-pro/all/>

4. *Craft's empowerment discourses, self-promotion and the demands of immaterial labour*

Indie crafters must navigate constant change and negotiate creative satisfaction with physical and emotional labour.

I wanted to do something more creative. (Angie J., interview, Oct. 10, 2012)

I wanted to be my own boss and set my own schedule. (Anne D., interview, Sep. 19, 2012)

I can happily spend hours and hours making jewelry and promoting my shop, while in my old job I was constantly watching the clock. (Marie-Pier L., interview, Jun. 19, 2012)

A consistent theme and motivation for many indie crafters is the desire to lead a more creative life and to have their work reflect this, as my interviewees suggest. This type of DIY ethos differentiates craft entrepreneurs from hobbyists. The former view both their career aspirations and creative making practices as means of self-actualization and fulfillment through hard work and self-sufficiency born of a DIY philosophy. They identify with the creative self and perform this identity as their primary connection to their work, despite the fact that the creative aspects of making are often overshadowed by the day-to-day activities of running a business, with which most crafters have no real experience.

I was completely unprepared to start a business. I didn't even know how to register a business name. I knew that I needed a real creative outlet. My work as a camera person in film seemed like it would be very creative, but in fact it's was just really technical. Starting *Days of August* finally let me focus on creating...making my jewellery designs and cool housewares. I got to scratch my creative itch [laughs]. But, I had to learn bookkeeping, inventory, how to charge taxes—everything. I don't have the money to hire someone else to do the business stuff, so I needed to learn that my business is a business and I'm an employee of it. It's a lot to juggle. (Marie-Pier L., interview, Jun. 19, 2012)

Along with long hours of production tasks, bookkeeping, shipping and inventory management, and a myriad other tasks, DIY crafters devote a significant amount of time to the immaterial labour of maintaining and promoting their digital storefront on Etsy: shooting and editing product shots, inputting keywords and producing effective metadata to increase the chances their products will be found through the search function. By constantly freshening up their products, they stand a better chance of having their wares appear in Etsy's "Recently added" section on the homepage, since the search algorithm generates results based, in part, on a product's "recency ranking" (Etsy 101 workshop, Montreal, August 14, 2012).

The objective of crafters' efforts in this regard, then, is to help their products stay near the top of Etsy's search and browse functionalities. Otherwise, with more than one million shops and more than 18 million listed items¹¹², they will get buried and traffic to their Etsy shop will dry up. This means creating Treasuries, "an ever-changing, member-curated shopping gallery,"¹¹³ which requires listing, tagging and captioning items from your own and others' shops under a theme. However, these galleries may not be too self-promotional (only one item from a seller's own shop may be included), in line with Etsy's direction to "Be diverse! No more than one item per shop."¹¹⁴ Not following this guideline, means sellers will decrease the likelihood Etsy will feature their Treasury on the

¹¹² 'At a Glance': <http://www.etsy.com/press>

¹¹³ <http://www.etsy.com/treasuries>

¹¹⁴ <http://etsy.com/treasury/new>

homepage. With these parameters, promotion on Etsy therefore, relies on social reciprocity and networking, as sellers cross-promote each other's wares. The company benefits from the significant immaterial labour of its sellers, who spend hours building galleries, marking items as "favourites" and social networking—all in all acting as an huge unpaid workforce in support of Etsy's marketing and data capturing activities, the results of which Etsy further mines for its promotional and sales efforts. Although there are no published numbers for Etsy members' immaterial labour, Susan Faludi, in her essay *Facebook Feminism, Like It Or Not* (2013), reports on a similar phenomenon on the social media giant: "Nearly 60 percent of the people who do the daily labor on Facebook—maintaining their pages, posting their images, tagging their friends, driving the traffic—are female, and, unlike the old days of industrial textile manufacturing, they don't even have to be paid or housed."¹¹⁵ Unlike Facebook participants, Etsy sellers are in part serving their own micro-enterprises; however, the sheer volume of labour pushed to the community is troubling given the vast economic benefit that does not trickle down to individual sellers. Etsy's revenues for 2013 were forecasted to top \$1 Billion dollars¹¹⁶, whereas its sellers see only a minute percentage of that revenue, with some making only "hundreds of dollars a year"¹¹⁷. My interviewees report annual incomes of thousands of dollars to Angie J., as the most financially successful, noting, "I made nearly \$50,000 last year, which supports my husband and I. The rest goes right back into the business"

¹¹⁵ http://thebaffler.com/past/facebook_feminism_like_it_or_not

¹¹⁶ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-11-12/etsy-tops-1-billion-in-2013-product-sales-on-mobile-lift.html>

¹¹⁷

http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2013/11/08/etsy_economic_impact_report_etsy_cr_afters_generate_895_million_in_annual.html, accessed Nov. 22, 2013

(interview, Oct. 10, 2102). Also, given that Etsy’s member base is 88-percent women¹¹⁸, Etsy’s immaterial labour force is vastly more gendered than is Facebook’s and reflects craft’s feminized labour reality.¹¹⁹

Further, the actual experiences of the indie crafters I interviewed are countered in popular publishing on women, craft and entrepreneurialism. Popular books such as *Craft Inc.: The Ultimate Guide to Turning Your Creative Hobby into a Successful Business* (2009) and *Mom Inc.: The Essential Guide to Running a Business Close to Home* (2012) celebrate the dream of being self-employed, doing what you love, and escaping the cubicle or long hours in menial service work.¹²⁰ The publishing industry positions these volumes as sage guides to being able to “make a living at [insert artistic passion here]” (Ilasco 2009: 8). These craft entrepreneurship books and the innumerable blogs of the same genre are replete—as are the makeover lifestyle genre of television shows McRobbie critiques—with aspirational messaging about creative self-actualization, work as personal fulfilment, having control over decision making and pseudo-feminist empowerment:

It won’t be long until you experience the unbeatable joy of making that first sale, the empowerment of seeing your name on your very own business cards, and the thrill of opening your favourite glossy and spotting your work gracing its pages. Suddenly, you’ll find that the creative business that you’ve slept on for years will now keep you up at night, giddy with excitement. And while your old career simply put food on the table, your new crafting career will feed your soul. With

¹¹⁸ https://www.etsy.com/blog/news/files/2013/11/Etsy_Redefining-Entrepreneurship_November-2013.pdf

¹¹⁹ <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2007-06-12/etsy-a-site-for-artisans-takes-offbusinessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice>, accessed Nov. 21, 2013

¹²⁰ I learned of these books during my interview with Chen R., who suggested I read them as part of my research.

Craft. Inc. on your side, you will be prepared to successfully take this creative leap! (Ilasco 2009: 8).

In a similar vein, Etsy publishes a series called “Quit Your Day Job” on its blog, which features successful members of the Etsy community who have transitioned to making a full-time living from their craftwork. In one of the most recent editions, Etsy featured Yokoo, a maker of stylish hand-knit scarves and hats.¹²¹ According to the blog post, the Atlanta-based crafter has sold more than 2,000 items through her Etsy shop since she opened it in July 2007. The post notes that “she’s still going strong with her solo operation, fuelled by her superhero knitting and crochet talents.”¹²² We learn that prior to choosing to craft full time, she worked in a copy shop, a seemingly mundane job when contrasted with devoting her time completely to making beautiful knitwork. There is some mention of the behind-the-scenes work of editing her product photos; however, readers get no sense from the post of her work hours, stress level, material costs, marketing and self-promotion time, financial situation, or potential family responsibilities or other affective labour. When asked how she decided she was ready to quit her day job, she responded, “I can’t honestly say I was especially prepared to part with the steady comfort of full-time employment. Much of my transition was a result of necessity. The economy was in a steady decline, as were my hours, so I really didn’t have much choice. With this rising tide of insecurity also came resentment, which later morphed into audacity, then eventually freedom.” In this way, even in a failing economy, the precariousness and uncertainty of

¹²¹ “Quit Your Day Job: Yokoo”: <https://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2013/quit-your-day-job-yokoo/>

¹²² *ibid.*

freelance or self-employment is positioned as offering more desirable potential and freedom than does traditional employment.

Popular discourses, marketing rhetoric and the overall ethos of the handmade economy emphasize that creative work is inspiring and brings genuine fulfillment. Anne D. remarked, as did Terry Johnson above, that between business operating tasks and production work, only a fraction of her time is actually devoted to creative aspects of making:

There's a lot of labour involved. Wrapping soap takes way longer than making it. And a lot of our stuff has quite labour-intensive packaging, so the making gets overshadowed by all these other activities that have to happen around it because sitting and wrapping a thousand bars of soap is not particularly creative. It's like factory-work (interview, Sep. 19, 2012).

On the topic of the popular discourses surrounding craft and entrepreneurship, including the notion of idea of quitting your day job, Anne D. remarked,

The leap is tough for a lot of makers. I think it gets very romanticized. But, it's not just in the handmade world. If you look at founding stories for start-ups, they get hugely romanticized because usually it is very painful, underpaid and extremely nerve-racking. And I think that a lot of the people that they profile in the Quit Your Day Job thing...well, I would bet that they are making subsistence wages. I have done that too and it is fine, but, if you look at it from the perspective of someone new [to craft entrepreneurship] reading that profile and who thinks this is what they really, really want. Well, I'm not sure it gives them a full picture or actually gets looked at from a business perspective (interview, Sep. 19, 2013).

5. Conflicts of the creative self/entrepreneurial self and the politics of maker culture

For today's DIY crafters, the tensions between "creative self" and "enterprising self" are further complicated by the politics of handmaking and maker culture as valuing the creative self and disavowing financial success as a type of Bourdieuan economic disinterest (1984).

There is an interesting split in the handmade community because there is this whole idea that a maker lives from what they love, but what doesn't get talked about a lot of the time is that when that starts to happen, a lot of people, even within the handmade community, no longer see as much value in it. In order to get to the point where you can actually live from this thing you love, you have to make it into a business. It has to become more than just this thing you love. Interestingly, at that point it's automatically devalued by some people. It's like: "Oh, but that's not a creative pursuit anymore." Where's that line? (Anne D., interview, Sep. 19, 2012).

Moreover, the tensions extend to questions of how big a craft micro-enterprise can be before it no longer fits the romanticized ideal of handmade as quaint and principled.

Anne D. continues:

And then in terms of scale. How many bars of soap do I make by hand until the community no longer sees me as handmade? And then, where is the equipment line? What kind of equipment can I get until my product is no longer seen as handmade.

There is this whole sort of romanticized idea. It's not a marketing slogan. These products are genuinely made by hand. There is love and care and attention to ingredient choice—all kinds of things. But, where is that point when you make more than is acceptable to the handmade community and you start to be a target for criticism? (interview, Sep. 19, 2012)

Nonetheless, the handmade economy is esteemed as an alternative economy, one that stands in sharp contrast to nameless, faceless big box retailers and offshore

manufacturing. It brings what eco-jewellery maker, Marie-Pier L., called a *retour à la terre*—back to nature—to production and consumption as driven by a more enlightened ethic, environmental concern, value in artisanal practices and re-humanizing of buying and selling directly from makers. Thus, does craft as a feminized sector uphold a more morally conscious approach? The question arises under the view that craft micro-enterprises are female-led and women's more collective approach is perceived as more conducive to running businesses in a less cut-throat manner than the traditional masculinized approach and might imply that women are less aggressive and perhaps more ethical in their practices (Larner and Malloy 2009).

While it may be true that women in general are supportive of one another as they make their way in the world of DIY craft, it seems there are limits. Anne D.'s experience suggests that there may be a gendered reaction to female entrepreneurial success once it reaches a certain scale—as though such accomplishment breeches an unwritten code of the feminized handmade community—revealing tensions that arises regarding competitiveness and financial interest as masculinized and counter to values of an alternative economy.

More broadly, describing the craft economy as a discrete alternative to the mainstream is problematic in and of itself because DIY micro-enterprises are tethered to that primary economy, including wholesalers, supply distributors and, as we've seen, Etsy as a global for-profit enterprise and structuring institution. Further these dynamics reveal that the connotation of handmade as part of the craft economy in that sense, then, is an equally

unsettling. Etsy's own positioning and policies complicate the definition of "handmade," as Anne D. noted above, when looking at the scale of craft enterprise. The company was built on the idea of a marketplace that directly connects individual makers with individual buyers, thus skirting traditional retail models and facilitating alternative commerce As Walker (2012) notes:

From its start in 2005, Etsy was a rhetoric-heavy enterprise that promised to do more than just turn a profit. It promoted itself as an economy-shifter, making possible a parallel retail universe that countered the alienation of mass production with personal connections and unique, handcrafted items. There was no reason to outsource manufacturing, the thinking went, if a sea of individual sellers took the act of making into their own hands.¹²³

Etsy's rhetoric implied a more human and, consequently, feminized model of business, where an artisanal ethos that celebrated the value of handmade over mass production separated the site from conventional retailers. The company's policies contradict this sensibility, however. For example, Etsy strictly forbids sellers from having employees, using specialized equipment or outsourcing any aspects of manufacturing. The penalty for breaking these rules is that sellers can have their shops suspended or shut down completely.¹²⁴ Interestingly, the community itself enforces these policies, since members can report suspicious sellers, which are then followed up by Etsy's Marketplace Integrity and Trust & Safety department.¹²⁵

¹²³ <http://www.wired.com/design/2012/09/etsy-goes-pro/all/>

¹²⁴ For an illustrative case, see: "Etsy Shop Suspended"
<http://www.handmadeology.com/etsy-shop-suspended-what-you-need-to-know/>

¹²⁵ <http://www.etsy.com/blog/news/2012/a-closer-look-into-marketplace-integrity/>

Although intended to maintain the integrity of the handmade marketplace, these policies have ironically contributed to the precarious state of potentially successful sellers. Terry Johnson, the custom-embroiderer and self-proclaimed one-woman-sweatshop, “feared that if she hired help, invested in new equipment, or rented a commercial space, she might run afoul of the Etsy policies and get kicked off the site.”¹²⁶ However, could she have hired one or two employees, she might have in fact produced and earned more, while maintaining a better balance between her family and other commitments. The net result of these policies, then, is that they put a limit on the growth potential of a craft enterprise and the ability of a maker to scale up her business and production.

Chen R. further acknowledges the problem of Etsy’s policies as detrimental to women’s craft enterprises.

Etsy will kick you off if other people are making your stuff. The people I’m using to help me sew are for wholesale contracts, but I’m also not going to advertise that I have people helping to make my stuff. I’ve also heard they will kick you off because when you are listing items, they kind of trick you. In the new listing form, you have to check if this item was this made by you, an individual working for you or by an outside firm. If you answer the wrong thing, they will investigate you. It depends on what you’re selling, but even if you answer “a member of my shop” and you aren’t a vintage supplier, then they can penalize you. You have to be super-careful. (Chen R, interview, Apr. 17, 2012)

Anne D. highlights the implications of Etsy’s enforcing its proprietary and intellectual property rights, which can be viewed as contributing to the potential precariousness of

¹²⁶ <http://www.wired.com/design/2012/09/etsy-goes-pro/all/>

women craft entrepreneurs through masculinized, neoliberal, privately owned technologies:

If I had to guess, it seems impossible that anyone at least in my category [Bath & Body] is making more than \$50,000 a year on Etsy. And that's not terrible if it's a part-time thing, but in terms of building it as your sole business model, all the sales data, customer names, analytics and back-end code—it is entirely proprietary to Etsy. If they ever pull that platform and you're making \$50,000 in sales, all your customer contact information, all your past sales, all the data behind your shop could just disappear. I'm just not comfortable with that being my only sales channel. Etsy could be acquired and could be completely changed (Anne D. interview, Sep. 19, 2012).

Etsy's ideological stance on what constitutes a "handmade" product precludes its feminized labour force from growing and scaling their business, while the Etsy corporation continues to grow in leaps and bounds, as per the sales figures I noted in chapter 4.

As a strategy to scale their craft businesses and retain their customer data, several of my interviewees also have their own ecommerce enabled websites, sell at craft fairs and wholesale to retail shops or corporate clients. Interestingly, Etsy launched Etsy Wholesale in beta in 2012 as a first step toward connecting Etsy sellers with large multinational retailers such as Nordstrom and West Elm. This is a seemingly contradictory move, given the company's ideological investment in "economy-shifting" and in promoting handmade as being counter to mass production by directly connecting individual sellers and buyers. Etsy Wholesale has drawn some criticism from the Etsy community, the members of which lament the company's moving away from handmade values by taking

on mass-market retailers as bedfellows, and by doing so signaling that handmade and craft may just be the latest marketing trend co-opted by big business. What remains unclear is how any of the financial benefits of this move trickle down to individual craft entrepreneurs or whether it is just the beginning of mainstreaming Etsy into conventional models of retail and neoliberal capitalism.

Conclusion

It is clear that the dynamics of making, connecting and building micro-enterprises are deeply gendered aspects of the new wave of indie craft and its cultural economy. By paying attention to the particularities of women's voices and experiences, the research I presented in this chapter revealed that the enterprising young women of my study cultivated an interest in craft as children in the somewhat traditional lineage associated with craft's feminine and domestic roots. However, in returning to craft as young adults—as makers and entrepreneurs—the opportunities and access are afforded to them are a result of feminism's significant achievements. These young women are more educated, mobile and technologically connected than their predecessors ever were—a debt owed to the feminist struggles of earlier generations toward equal pay for equal work, access to education and reproductive freedoms, which have allowed women to have substantially more economic independence and career-building opportunities than ever before. Further, my research uncovered a productive tension between the return to handmade in digital time as a reaction to the pervasiveness of electronic culture and the disembodied nature of digital work, which is negotiated by some women through the aesthetic and material making craft embodies. Paradoxically, this tension is amplified

through the way crafters have taken to the internet to organize, share, network and sell their handmade wares to a global market. In this way, contemporary DIY crafters affirmed that making is connecting and connecting is making (Gauntlett 2011). Crafty women have carved out important space in the blogosphere, which, as my interviewees expressed, has enabled them to use crafting as a springboard for cultivating kinships online, underscoring the importance of community, anointing the voices of women as part of feminist tradition, while wholly founding a new discursive practice, an “e-criture feminine.” My research further uncovered a celebratory rhetoric of freedom, flexibility and creativity and a DIY ethos of valuing the handmade over mass-produced goods, consistently reproduced by Etsy and its vast marketing and community-messaging machine, alongside popular publications that trumpet indie craft entrepreneurship.

When focusing the analytical lens on craft production, its economic contexts and labours, my research exposes a highly gendered, feminized sector of precarious cultural work—in terms of both material and emotional investment and also the impact of micro-entrepreneurship on life and family. My research found that these women are deeply invested in a creative identity and a sense of self-reliance as personally empowering, where they’ve adopted a post-feminist mindset and ambivalence to the feminist histories that have affected their current opportunities. Rather, they have naturalized the risks and precariousness of craft entrepreneurship through a largely uncritical absorption of dominant neoliberal discourses on the masculinized “enterprising self,” notions of self-sufficiency and prompts to “quit your day job” in a post-Fordist era. Further, the research highlights the tensions between creative independence and the rationality of making a

living, and the material and immaterial labours of modern crafters. These tensions are in part negotiated by some of my participants, which revealed degrees of awareness and subjectivity relative to who really benefits from their work and the broader entrenched structures of capital. They also negotiate multiple identities, particularly as the craft economy is divided among independent young women who have no children or are intentionally waiting to start a family and mompreneurs, whose unpaid domestic and child-rearing responsibilities add another layer to the so-called freedoms that entrepreneurship of this nature is touted as bringing. Finally, my research unraveled discourses of alternative economies by exposing how Etsy is contributing to the precarious state of some sellers both through its policies and by offloading considerable immaterial labour onto shop owners, while the corporation itself achieves exponential year-over-year revenue growth. Together, these findings provide substantial insight toward understanding the constraints and rewards of labour and livelihood for women engaged in DIY craft, reinforcing the importance feminist cultural research of these types of micro-level ethnographic studies of new sectors and the changing conditions of women's creative work. The following chapter will conclude the dissertation, underscoring the contributions of my research *au complet* and offering a series of reflections toward future directions of research.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion:

Threading Together of my Intellectual Handiwork

As I reach this concluding chapter, I cannot help but think of the research, reflections and outcomes of this dissertation as similar to the process of making a quilt. Crafting a quilt takes devotion of time, research into materials and approaches, and challenges both the creative and an analytical mind. Like the theories, arguments and analyses of doctoral research, it requires understanding of method and pattern, the skill to cut and piece together fabric to create ‘blocks’, which are thoughtfully composed and stitched together one-by-one to make a quilt top. Yet, a quilt is not complete at this stage. Underneath, is the batting—the ‘bulk’ of the quilt—which supports and connects the top to the backing. It is the interstitial layer that creates its structure, depth and substance. Finally all three layers are quilted together, where the needle pierces through and back, interlocking the thread and binding the whole thing together. Like a dissertation, it takes material, intellectual and emotional labour and the result is a culmination of a lengthy, yet rewarding process of consideration, curiosity and contribution of an original piece of cultural and knowledge production.

Drawing together the threads of this intellectual handiwork, in the pages that follow I reflect on the research, my personal investment, and the nature of my original contributions—what they offer and how and why they advance cultural studies and critical feminist scholarship. I consider the evidence and arguments presented, their

effectiveness and the processes undertaken to uncover the dynamics in motion in the cultural economy of DIY craft. It is also an opportunity to consider the limitations of this research and discuss its future directions.

Summary of Research

This dissertation has examined do-it-yourself networks of indie crafts as a significant cultural economy and site of women's creative labour, querying two main research questions:

1. *How to explain the significant turn to do-it-yourself, micro-economies of handcrafted goods and “feminized” creative labour in the present moment, a seemingly paradoxical cultural development in the age of digital media, networked communications and a rising sense of dematerialization in cultural production?*
2. *And, by framing this new wave of DIY craft as a “cultural economy,” how might we understand the constraints and rewards between the labour and lifestyle of crafters as embroiled with questions of gender, the development and impact of social, cultural and economic capitals, and the material and structural authority of late capitalism?*

It has taken care to situate the phenomenon in light of historical discourses on craft and position the current resurgence of DIY craft as a contemporary problematic—one that moves beyond existing research on craft as associated with women's domestic activity, or as a salon refusé subordinated to the fine arts, or affiliations with turn of the 20th century industrialization—focusing instead on women and craft as a field of cultural *work*. I argue that today's indie craft is representative of a complex and shifting economic and cultural landscape, particularly highlighting the changing nature of work, and focusing on women's cultural production and informal networks of entrepreneurship in the post-Web 2.0 era. Concentrating on DIY craft in North America from 2005 onwards, my study

investigated the convergence of new forms of flexible, production-based labour, a do-it-yourself ethic, changing media and technologies, and discursive politics at play in craft's habitus and amidst the practices, identities and aesthetic attunement of its cultural intermediaries.

As a cultural studies and feminist ethnography, I was interested in developing a critical analysis of the discourses, dynamics and tensions articulating amidst this cultural economy of craft. I interrogated the practices, identities, meaning construction, social relations and gendered hierarchies of power operating within modern craft. To this end, my interventions focused on three main areas: a reconceptualization and cultural analysis of DIY craft as a Bourdieuan-influenced field of gendered cultural production; a case study of Etsy as a corporatized model and significant marker of social class and distinction; and a feminist cultural analysis of crafty women's making, connecting and the precarity of their feminized labours.

Personal investment

I embarked on this doctoral research, as a scholar and professional, newly returned to the academic milieu, invested in the potential of researching the intersection of women and creative work. Having spent nearly a decade working in design, business and management for a series of media and tech start-ups, I had experienced first hand the shifting dynamics of creative work in the age of digital media, networked communications and ecommerce. Perhaps, most poignantly, as a relatively young woman and founding partner in the design and licensing firm Veer, I had experienced the

tantalizing mix of rapid career ascension, invigorating creative work, and having a voice at the senior management table, while negotiating considerable tensions and precarity around the demands and intensity of start-up culture. I became acutely aware of the entrenched gender politics, yet struggled to understand the multiple anxieties, contradictions and identities that I experienced within a seemingly progressive creative enterprise. Like my interviewees, I danced between the ‘creative self’ and the ‘enterprising self’ as intermediary in today’s cultural economy.

As a cultural researcher, I valued these experiences as formative to my “intellectual craftsmanship” (Mills 1967). They began as an intuitive sense that what I had experienced in my working life was valuable fertile ground for prospective research. This impulse would grow into the foundation for this dissertation and reach both backwards and forwards into my childhood affinity for craft and my adult connection to craft communities and practice. In retrospect, this instinct merged into my own scholarly craft and is vested throughout this dissertation. I heeded Mills’ call that:

...the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community [...] do not split their work from their lives. What this means is that you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship is the center of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you may work. To say that you can have experience means, for one thing, that your past plays into and affects your present, and that it defines your capacity for future experience. As a social scientist, you have to control this rather elaborate interplay, to capture what you experienced and sort it out; only in this way can you hope to use it to guide and test your reflections, and in the process shape yourself as an intellectual craftsman (1967: 195 in Sawchuk 2011).

Interweaving my experience in this way also enabled me to directly connect my investments to the theorizing I've marshaled throughout this project. In particular, the commitment to feminist ontology, epistemology and method—to interrogate the relationships of power and gender; to identify the inequities and feminized labours; to draw attention to crafty women's voices, communities and practices. It mattered that I reflexively situate myself and that generative knowledge can come from embodied subjectivity and multiple standpoints. Importantly, I mobilized feminist methods and theory in my listening, observing, field noting and capturing of snippets of conversations and digital data. I came to better articulate my feminist politics and values, which informed my analytical perspective and conceptual vocabulary. In particular, Haraway's (1991) feminist claims that knowledge is inherently partial, situated, and contradictory were resonant. Her argument that situated knowledges accommodate paradoxical and critical perspectives, allowed me to think through and manifest what is knowable about craft's habitus and the values, agency and preoccupations of crafty women at this juncture in time. It also afforded me avenues to connect my professional experience directly to this project—drawing parallels between Etsy and Veer, and contemplating them as a woman and a feminist cultural scholar.

Finally, I would be remiss at this stage not to reflect on my personal investment in this research as tied to the experience of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson 1998). Throughout this process, my research practice has been guided by writing as a “way of knowing” (924), a dynamic, creative and generative approach that is woven into the investigation. This feminist research method enabled discovery, organization, sifting

through data and clarifying of ideas by way of the writing itself, rather than acting as a transparent mode ‘writing up’ after the fact—a mode that standard social science discourses generally advocate. Instead, writing as method of inquiry was part of my scholarly craft and is stitched into this dissertation as knowledge production. It allowed for the development of my voice and acknowledgment of the relationship between language as value-laden and my subjective position. It gave meaning and nuance to the field research, analysis and theorization I’ve undertaken as knowingly partial, situational, and bound by the limits of myself as the researcher—allowing “us to know ‘something’ without claiming to know everything” (928). Lastly, this approach opened up my research to moments of storytelling, auto-biography and conversation that underscore the importance of feminist methods more broadly as operating at various levels throughout my study, including ethnographically, discursively and collaboratively in working with these crafty women.

Research Contributions and Considerations

Stitching together the numerous contributions of my investigation, I understand the field of contemporary DIY craft as a dynamic set of articulations, relays and tensions that together weave a complex web of cultural production, changing conditions of work and precarious feminized labour. In doing so, I’ve problematized DIY craft as a cultural economy, effectively outlining the contours of its production, consumption and circulation, not as discrete moments but as relational discourses, practices, and structuring institutions that reveal different dimensions of economic and cultural entanglement. Significantly, my study brings a feminist purview that foregrounds gender

as a critical analytic category, a dimension that has been largely neglected in ethnographies of cultural production and work, with the considerable exception of the work of Angela McRobbie.

In a substantive case study, I extensively investigated the handmade marketplace, Etsy, revealing its limits as corporatized model dressed up in the language of empowerment, community and a celebratory rhetoric of emancipation and enabling women craft entrepreneurs to quit their day jobs. In actuality these discourses proved extremely constraining and avoided any discussion of the very real labour of its overwhelmingly female workforce of producers. My research redresses this invisibility by accounting for the experiences, practices and voices of the makers I interviewed. Rather, I found that the company evangelizes an Etsy imaginary, one that strategically cultivates an organizational habitus, aspirational consumer logic and curated aesthetic that plumbs the relationship between Etsy's taste culture as marker of distinction and class. The integration and capable use of digital marketing and social media proved paramount to upholding Etsy's seductive veneer, courting the upwardly-mobile, urban producer-consumer, which ultimately fuels the company's profit motive and its interest in maintaining its structure and authority in the field of DIY craft. My critical analysis unraveled this position as untenable and fraught with contradiction, masking social inequities, power relations and gendered hierarchies and reinforcing the importance of focusing on the trajectories of my interviewees in chapter five. This discussion strengthened my understanding DIY craft as a highly-gendered space, building off the insights into Etsy's gendered management structures, discursive politics and, vitally, its lapses towards its feminized workforce,

acutely exemplified by the felt absence of crafters in the programming of the Hello Etsy! event as a microcosm of Etsy's broader politics.

These findings entrenched the importance of the individual experiences of crafters. My analysis articulated their stories, struggles and range of experiences, thereby locating and relocating the gendered dynamics of their making, connecting and labouring. It both revealed and complicated questions women's cultural production through an ethnographic investigation of a very particular demographic and the specificities of an "always on" work/lifestyle environment that defines working in craft production in the digital age. The young women I interviewed are more educated, mobile and technologically capable than ever before, representing a largely white, middle-class and North American population of makers and entrepreneurs ranging in age from 25 to 38 years old. Yet, although the opportunities afforded to them are a result of feminism's significant achievements, these women's under-recognition of feminism's contemporary relevance was evident, largely distancing themselves from feminist politics and viewing it as passé or uncool. Further, the transformative promises of creative work as providing the illusion of control and advancement through self-discipline, individualization and entrepreneurial career management were revealed as deeply problematic and unstable.

In further situating the contributions of my doctoral project as original scholarship, my research captured the contemporary moment of a cultural economy that is indelibly part of a current thrust of change in terms of how creative work is unfolding at this very

moment. This timeliness is punctuated by the specificities and convergences of the digital age—social media, ecommerce and network sociality—that I identified and probed for both their “prohibition and possibility” (McPherson 2009: 383) as integral to DIY craft and its operation as a field of cultural production within the larger digital economy.

Building off Bourdieu’s invaluable notions of habitus, cultural intermediaries and social and cultural capital, I proposed a novel reconceptualization of his models by vastly updating cultural field theory to account for distributed, informal networks that define the habitus of contemporary DIY craft and integrating a consideration of gender, which will have purchase for future studies of other networked, distributed cultural economies. Moving beyond Bourdieu’s models, my observations, integration and nuanced analysis made visible the currency of cultural capital within Etsy’s commercialized digital model, not as neutral but part of the inner workings and ‘star system’, which Etsy coercively co-opts towards its own ends.

Yet, perhaps the most salient contribution of this dissertation is the integration of feminist critical analysis. This is manifested in significant part by my preoccupation with the tensions and hidden economic and emotional impacts of the gendered dynamics of DIY craft in the digital age. Existing research has either focused on professional cultural work milieus, neglected to consider gender as a key analytical dimension, or does not integrate the convergence of network technologies and digital economies into the changing conditions of work. This study knits together all three dimensions, adding substantial empirical and theoretical contributions to the literature. It that acknowledges the contemporary importance of gendered, informally networked cultural production

that must constantly interface with other more entrenched institutions, while also exposing the vast personal and professional networks that female makers as individual entrepreneurs must incessantly nurture to earn esteemed social and cultural capital—both on- and offline. These dynamics require crafty women to play multiple roles in the circuit of culture, and most often for paltry wages and significant emotional output.

I argued that corporatized models like Etsy, whose entire production counts on the flexible labour of women micro-entrepreneurs, exploits a feminizing of the economy and of affective and immaterial labour as relayed by my interviewees and field research. This labour relies on emotional work, care and nurture that have long been acknowledged by feminists as part of the reproduction of domestic labour, but, as I've developed, *are now being co-opted by new economy models of distributed networks and flexible work* “as relations of exchange and commodification invade realms where the emotional and nurturing labour [of care] once prevailed” (Vaughn 1997 in Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003: 8). This new ‘women’s work’—outside conventional notions of professional work and yet not bracketed by the domestic sphere—is particular to the distributed, networked nature of the digital era and the tensions of negotiating the creative and enterprising selves of the crafty women I studied. These women are led to believe that success stems from unwavering self-discipline and a 24/7 ethic of unbounded workdays. The appropriation of immaterial, affective labour by digital economy models and DIY craft in particular is complicated in my research beyond Hardt and Negri’s theorizations, heeding McRobbie’s (2010) call for critical, reflexive feminist intervention and foregrounding of gender. By charting the first-hand experiences of setting up and

running a craft micro-enterprise: the trade-offs of taking on supplementary work to make ends meet; learning to manage inventory, taxes and bookkeeping; putting off having a family or, conversely, juggling the many familial responsibilities of being ‘the flexible one’; and the constant digital labour of tagging, posting to social media and updating one’s site yielded a host of anxieties for these women. As my study demonstrated, this precarity is in sharp contrast to the celebratory rhetoric and heroic (male) internet success stories of the well-funded ventures backed by industry veterans and influential power brokers on their boards who uniformly adhere to a business logic that will yield return on their investment. Rather, Emeline V.’s arresting comment: “nobody talks about what happens if your business doesn’t work out” (interview) or the possibility of being saddled with debt, emphasizes an outcome of this research: the systemic failure of DIY craft micro-entrepreneurs’ ability to move their operations to a larger one or to make it financially viable at the individual practitioner level *over the long term*.

In this way, the economics of the long tail (Anderson 2006) largely did not add up for the crafty women of my study despite the promises of “an era without the constraints of limited shelf space and other bottlenecks of distribution” (52). This is not to say there were no success stories, but rather that success and failure are systemically constructed and critical feminist analysis is essential to understanding their dynamics and has purchase for other studies of creative networked, micro-entrepreneurship. Angie J. reported on getting lucrative wholesale deals with large retailers like Anthropologie and Topshop, however she had to count these as “outside normal business” (interview) because they were isolated opportunities and still required her to work ‘sweatshop-like

hours' to fulfill those orders. Thus, the problem of the *sustainability* of DIY craft entrepreneurship became more pronounced as my research progressed, raising vital questions about the pitfalls of micro-entrepreneurship that is still subject to the profit requirements of the larger macroeconomics of business.

Notes towards future research directions

In all, these outcomes lead me to contemplate the limitations and directions for future research emerging from this study. The specificity of ethnographic research inevitably leads to a highly-contextualized, in-depth investigation that does not easily allow for generalizable findings. My study is particular to a moment and place. It details the experiences of indie crafters with specific investments, positions and priorities that are in constant motion. However, given the increasing prominence of informal cultural economies and flexible, portfolio-careers of a combination of freelance, contract or micro-entrepreneurship, its ability to mark a particular juncture in time documents and adds to a vital critical discourse and, as such, offers methodological, empirical and theoretical insights for other studies in this vein. I have already witnessed cross-threads with current research on women and the digital production of electronic music (Madden 2013), for example. My study was also limited in terms of the politics of access to Etsy management. In thinking about the continuance of this work toward a potential manuscript, I would pursue efforts anew toward gaining access to interview Etsy leadership, which the cultural legitimacy of a book contract might help persuade. Naturally, a more expansive sample of interviewees may have also led to additional

findings or reinforce current conclusions with additional evidence.

Conversely, these limitations also open up significant opportunity for future directions of research. I've analyzed a present of DIY craft that is in constant flux and the ongoing development of ecommerce, social media, mobile applications and other unforeseen technologies are going to require constant vigilance of research relative to women's cultural production, flexible labour and micro-entrepreneurship. For example, crowdsourcing funding models like Indiegogo and Kickstarter alongside developments in 3D printing or point-of-purchase applications like Square¹²⁷, which converts any tablet or mobile device into a digital cash register, will continue to transform DIY craft, maker culture and women's possibilities for creative work. The economic, social and cultural impacts of these ongoing developments will only expand as interest in digital, cultural economies continues to gain credence¹²⁸ among governments invested in national digital economic strategies as perceived solutions for more systemic economic problems and lack of informed policy, emphasizing the need for a critical perspective on DIY craft and, more broadly, women's labour and entrepreneurship. Further, the increasing shift toward flexible labour and its large population of female workers does not adhere to current types of economic development or small business programs, or existing art and craft council models; nor does it acknowledge the importance of feminist inquiry toward gender equity

¹²⁷ <https://squareup.com/ca>

¹²⁸ The contemporary interest and importance of DIY craft as a cultural economy is evident in the news cycle, emphasizing its topical nature as the shift toward flexible work as becoming an ever-more prominent aspect of developed economies. The Economist's recent piece on "Artisanal Capitalism" is just one such current example: <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21592656-etsy-starting-show-how-maker-movement-can-make-money-art-and-craft-business>

as well as social structures and policies that reflect women's specific needs. Etsy reports that only 26% of its sellers hold full-time, permanent employment in conventional economic sectors, while 48% are independent, part-time or temporary workers¹²⁹. Future research would specify policy implications in Canada and the United States, for instance, and could implicate collaborative research networks across national boundaries to compare and contrast policy-oriented research and advocacy. How might governments account for the burgeoning micro-entrepreneurship sector among its existing occupational categories and statistics? How can economic models quantify the impact of micro-capitalism, which at an individual level may currently be relatively small but, as more and more workers carve out livelihoods in this way, its increasing collective impact will be essential to informed economic metrics, programs and policies? What happens as the existing demographic of women aged 25 – 40 years old, who've 'grown up' on this type of flexible labour and portfolio-careers managed outside conventional employment, move into the second half of their working lives?

Additionally, as a growing sector, flexible forms of work do not adhere to existing forms of social policies and structures typically available to those holding full-time employment. Rather, they lack social protections like health insurance, unemployment benefits, paid maternity and paternity leaves, or retirement savings programs, which may reinforce traditional gendered divides in the household where there are two partners, extending the idea of the family wage and health benefits, which feminists have long critiqued as detrimental to women's independence and earning potential. This lack of social

¹²⁹ https://www.etsy.com/blog/news/files/2013/11/Etsy_Redefining-Entrepreneurship_November-2013.pdf

protections may be even more acute for the significant numbers of enterprising young women whose are independent, flexible, solo-entrepreneurs, who must take their economic and social well-being into their own hands. This largely means foregoing protections that require them to pay out of their own pocket, which most often means going without such securities and benefit programs. Future research would investigate these considerable risks and instabilities of feminized, precarious labour toward articulating public policy recommendations, activism and advocacy to build these capacities into government policy and accommodate this increasingly important sector of the economy. Moreover, the working conditions of these women micro-entrepreneurs are exploitative and income is significantly below median levels, suggesting potential interesting connections or contrasts to craft and micro-finance models in the developing world (Gajjala and Birzescu 2011) and the deplorable (and, recently, fatal) conditions of textile workers in South Asia as linked to transnational commerce and “globalization processes [that] include material and discursive hegemonies produced at the intersection of the economic, the cultural and the social, mediated in multiple ways through old and new mediascapes in the changing industrial landscape and modes of production” (Gajjala 2011: 4; see also Appadurai 1991). My involvement as an advisory board member of the Fembot Collective¹³⁰, an international collaboratory of scholars, artists and activists promoting research on gender, new media and technology, provides valuable networks towards research collaborations to examine such questions.

Finally, my research troubled the hegemonic structures of the cultural economy of craft to

¹³⁰ <http://www.fembotcollective.org>

make visible the invisible and largely unspoken gendered processes upon which the productive economic activities of the handmade economy depend. To this end, I am also interested in future research directions that would more fully investigate the issues of sustainability I've raised in my findings. How might DIY crafters move beyond the restrictive Etsy model (and corporatized models, more generally), which constrains women's ability to grow beyond the solo-practitioner level and maintains proprietary ownership over data and technology? What is then the potential for a novel approach to the networked sociality and the complex professional, political and personal relationships, which might draw, in part, from earlier feminist projects and means of organizing? What are other financial and structural models that might address the instabilities I've identified at the nexus female-led commercial cultural production in the post-Web 2.0 era? These questions also play into the 'creative self' and 'entrepreneurial self' conflicts I've noted, alongside the blurred lines that emerged in my research around questions of 'when is it still handmade' relative to creative identity, scalability and the labour capacity of individual women makers? When does it become a production line? When is it still 'creative'? And, how much 'hands-on' is required and whose hands must they be to still be called handmade? This series of questions leads me to contemplate research that opens up the problematic of sustainability to other sites and infrastructures that move beyond the individual Etsy seller or DIY craft micro-entrepreneur to a more blended, middle zone that would include a few employees, a rented space and a profitable production capacity to support female-led creative design development?

McRobbie's (2012, 2014 forthcoming¹³¹) most recent work on the Berlin fashion scene provides some openings in light of these questions, whereby she examines the localized context of a vibrant small-scale and independent fashion sector in Germany's capital city. She points to the city's particular cultural geography and economic and social programs for job creation through entrepreneurship as part of reunification efforts, which includes reduced rents for business start-ups (*Zwischennutzung*), typically located in former East Berlin areas under renewal since the fall of the wall (2012: 5). Unlike the large retailers and fashion houses of London, Paris or New York, Berlin's fashion scene has generated independent micro-enterprises, self-organized and demonstrating an array of cooperative and collaborative modes of co-working. Through her empirical research on three female-led fashion social enterprises in Berlin, McRobbie argues for the potential for "localized practice within a neo-artisanal frame", noting in particular that "by paying attention to the many multi mediated associations, and networked arrangements where elements from an earlier tradition of feminist projects, third sector and not-for-profit activities can be drawn on, the assemblages of fashion emerge as a pathway for local growth, meaningful non-standard jobs and the merging of craft with ethical and sustainable practice" (1). There is a distinctly DIY aspect to the type of mixed-use spaces and

¹³¹ I am also indebted to Professor McRobbie's recent work-in-progress, which she shared in two public lectures at Concordia University in November 2013. As part of the organizing committee for her visit, I was inspired and influenced by her insights delivered in the two papers titled 'Unpacking the Politics of the Creative Economy: Hipsters as Flaneurs in Neoliberal Times' and 'Berlin Fashion Matters: Young Women, Self Employment and Social Enterprise', respectively. As I was in the latter stages of writing this dissertation, I was able to immediately reflect on the affinities and contrasts of her research relative to my own findings in DIY craft as a similarly gendered field of cultural production.

production practices of Berlin fashion designers, where, for instance, a working ‘atelier’ where sewing machines and bolts of fabric and notions are in plain view backs a retail storefront of racks of clothing.

Although McRobbie’s research doesn’t address the effects of ecommerce and digital marketplace infrastructures that underpin the contemporary DIY craft economy, it provides interesting pathways to consider beyond solo-practitioner to female-led social enterprise, moving to a potentially more sustainable production capacity that employs a handful of complementary skill sets (for example, sewing, pattern-making, marketing or social media promotion). As I contemplate future directions for my research, I see the potential for research toward both policy initiatives that will require significant feminist intervention and activism to highlight DIY craft as a growing sector for women’s employment that must be supported through tax incentives and granting mechanisms. Additionally, I look to my own wealth of design, entrepreneurship and creative industries professional experience coupled with strong feminist commitments as a node in a much larger network of female-led organizations across sectors, which could offer potential partnerships and specialized skills sets. For example, further research might investigate the intersections of multi-disciplinary social enterprises co-work spaces or digital collaboratories—for women, by women—that would bring together material craft production skills; computer programming, web publishing and data analytics skills; and business management, grant-writing and sustainable capital strategies, such as profit-sharing. These potential pathways reinforce the DIY ethos of self-reliance and creativity, and draw from feminist traditions, while forging a new dynamic, contemporary mode of

self-organizing and co-working of conducive to the digital age and micro-enterprises. Such directions might hold potential appeal for many women who value flexibility and community of this type of work milieu, with shared teaching and learning, providing a true alternative to the exploitative conditions of precarious feminized labour of existing corporatized models and demands of neoliberal economies.

To conclude, these ideas for future directions of research mark the potential beginnings of a new intellectual quilt, still in the early conceptual stages innate to any new project. Yet, vitally, they build on the substantial contributions, lessons learned and expertise gained—stitch-by-stitch—of investigating the cultural economy of DIY craft as a gendered site necessitating feminist critique and intervention to expose the tensions, dynamics and contradictions that today's crafty women must negotiate. In quilting together the complex webs of contemporary craft, this dissertation has exposed this sector of precarious feminized labour, while acknowledging the various conditions and aspirations of women working in the informally networked digital economy of craft. It is to the women of my study, whose accounts of their making, connecting and labouring serve to bind this dissertation, and have, in large part, made this study personally rewarding and intellectually instructive as novel scholarship. Finally, I close with a renewed call for critical feminist inquiry that does not shy away from the importance of researching women's creative *work* in all its shades and configurations that will most certainly continue to evolve and change over the years to come.

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APPENDIX A

Research Ethics Approval and Sample Consent Form

Jan 24th, 2012

Jacqueline Wallace, Ph.D in Communication Studies Student
Department of Communication Studies
Concordia University

Re: Ethics Request for Ph.D Thesis Project "Women's Creative Labour: DIY Networks and the Indie Crafts Movement."

Dear Jacqueline:

I am writing to you to report that the following project,

"Women's Creative Labour: DIY Networks and the Indie Crafts Movement."

to be undertaken in the fulfillment of the requirements for your Ph.D in Communication Studies degree, has been reviewed by the Communication Studies departmental Research Ethics Committee and has been approved by this committee.

A copy of the Summary Protocol forms and this letter will be placed in our Research and Ethics Committee files.

On behalf of the Research Ethics Committee,

Sincerely,



Owen Chapman
Assistant Professor
Department of Communication Studies
Concordia University
CJ 4.401
Ext. 5063
o_chapma@alcor.concordia.ca



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN:

Women's Creative Labour: DIY Networks and the Indie Crafts Movement

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a program of research being conducted by Jacqueline Wallace, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies of Concordia University (email: wallacejacquie@gmail.com or phone: +1 514 443 0360). This research is supervised by Dr. Matt Soar, Associate Professor, Communication Studies (Dept. telephone: (514) 848-2424 ext. 2542 or email: matt.soar@concordia.ca).

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research. I understand that the research is investigating do-it-yourself (DIY) craft and design networks, creative labour and the role of gender in this cultural economy. I understand that I will be asked questions regarding my participation in DIY craft production, collaborations and sites of creative work. I understand that this research also includes a primary case study of *Etsy* (www.etsy.com), the digital global marketplace 'to buy and sell all things handmade'.

B. PROCEDURES

The research includes my participation in an interview or discussion group. I understand that an interview may take place in person, via Skype or telephone at a mutually agreeable real or virtual location. I understand that a discussion group will take place in person. I have been informed that the interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes, while a discussion group may run for approximately two hours.

I have been informed that the interview will be recorded with an audio recording device or on camera. I understand that it is possible that excerpts from the interview may (though will not necessarily) be used in the primary doctoral research and may also be used presentations, publications or other creative works, with attribution at the level of confidentiality I specify below. I understand that research notes and the recordings will be kept in a secure location for logging or transcribing, and kept for the duration of Wallace's doctoral program or five years, whichever is longer, or indefinitely depending on the my consent (to be indicated in Section D below). If both agree that some portion or all of the interview should be kept indefinitely for archival or other purposes, I have been informed that best efforts will be made to find an appropriate secure, long-term location.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I understand that some questions may elicit confidential information, which I am at liberty to decline answering. I take responsibility to indicate if any information that is shared is confidential. I understand I will receive no remuneration for my participation.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences (*please check*)

I understand that the data from this study may be published (*please check*)

Please check only ONE of the three following choices:

I understand that my participation in this study is NON-CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., my identity will be revealed in study results), OR

I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., my identity will NOT be revealed in study results), OR

I understand that my participation in this study is at the following level of disclosure (*please specify*):

Please check only ONE of the two following choices:

I consent to transcripts or audio or video records of my participation in this project being kept:

for the duration of Wallace’s doctoral program or five years, whichever is longer.

indefinitely

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the researcher, Jacqueline Wallace, by email: wallacejacquie@gmail.com or telephone: +1 514 443 0360; or her supervisor, Dr Matt Soar, Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, by email: matt.soar@concordia.ca or telephone: 514.848.2424 2542.

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or by email at ethics@alcor.concordia.ca

APPENDIX B

Summary Chart and List of Interviewees

Name	Interview Date	DIY Craft Enterprise/Etsy Shop	URL	Location
Emeline Villedary	March 7, 2012 Nov. 21, 2012	<i>Emeline&Annabelle</i> Atelier, Couture, Café	www.emelineandannabelle.com	Montreal, Canada
Marie-Pier Labelle	June 19, 2012	<i>Days of August</i>	www.etsy.com/shop/daysofaugust www.daysofaugust.com/	Adelaide, Australia
Anne Dardick	Sept. 19, 2012	<i>Dot & Lil</i>	www.etsy.com/shop/DotandLil	Montreal, Canada
Jenna Herbut	Sept. 26, 2012	<i>Make It</i> Productions	www.makeitproductions.com/ www.makeituniversity.com/	Vancouver Canada
Angie Johnson	Oct. 10, 2012	<i>Norwegian Wood</i>	www.etsy.com/shop/iheartnorwegianwood	Montreal, Canada
Sandra Alföldy	Oct. 17, 2012	Professor of Craft History, NSCAD	www.craftandpopularculture.com/	Halifax, Canada
Jacqueline Wallace	Oct. 17, 2012	Auto-ethnographic interview	www.jacquelinewallace.com	Montreal, Canada
Chen Reichert	April 17, 2013	<i>Late Greats</i>	www.etsy.com/shop/lategreats	New Haven, CT, USA