

A POSTMODERN FEMINIST TEXT ANALYSIS
OF THE PEDAGOGY OF POPULAR CRAFT

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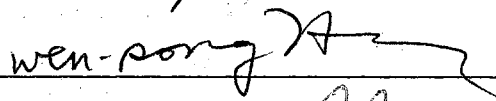
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
May, 1998

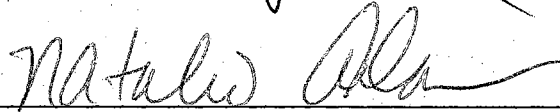
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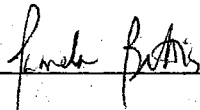
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are several people I wish to thank for providing feedback, guidance, and most importantly friendship, throughout my doctoral program. Of utmost importance to me is my husband, life-companion, and best friend, Craig. Even though he was also completing his dissertation at the same time as myself, he was forever patient and helpful, and a joy to be around (though I can't claim the same for myself!). Next, I wish to thank my family: Grandma and Mom, for their investment of love while I was growing up and continuing even today; Aunt Tillie and Uncle V. for always checking in on me; my in-laws Sharon, Tommy, Delbert and Susan for being supportive, and David and Bennie, who I consider to be like family, and Nadine and Alan, two friends I met while at Oklahoma State.

Dr. Sally Carter has been more than an academic advisor, she has been a good friend. Both she and Dr. Wen-Song Hwu have never discouraged me from pursuing the sort of research I wanted to pursue. I am also glad to have met rather late in the game, Dr. Natalie Adams and Dr. Pam Bettis. Overall, my doctoral program has been a wonderful experience, and one I will miss tremendously.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Process of Choosing Topic

Although my undergraduate degree includes painting and art history, my interest in crafting goes back to childhood. I enjoyed sewing and gluing as much as drawing and painting. However, it wasn't until my fourth year of college that I began to consider textile arts my chosen media of expression and a topic to write about. Becoming certified in art education makes one aware of how marginalized the teacher of art is within the studio. No one ever really sees you as an artist when you decide to teach. In some ways this experience of my work being dismissed as that of an "art teacher's" led me to appreciate how crafters maintain their traditions. My work became craft.

My master's thesis deliberately excluded the usual fine art subject matter and went directly to the bottom rung of the aesthetic ladder: popular crafts, the kind seen at church bazaars. In part this was a defiant move against what I considered the limited, elitist, narrow and stifling art traditions and practices I had studied as a student. But I was also interested in the entire concept of people creating identical objects of an anonymous nature. This flew in the face of what I had learned as an artist; to always be original...and "masculine."

Looking back on that thesis, it's almost embarrassing how simplistic some of the ideas were at that time. But it was a start and in an essentially non supportive environment. Art education majors weren't even required to write a thesis or have a master's exhibit. This was further evidence that what we had to say or show wasn't even worth listening to. However, the independence that comes with being ignored allowed me to develop my own ideas and writing style.

In the doctoral program I discovered educational philosophies that more closely matched my own notions and things really took off. Popular culture, postmodernism, and feminism were research ideas I had not encountered before, and I began to make some connections among education, popular culture and craft in a postmodern world. I realized that popular crafters, the majority being female, were marginalized, just as female art educators who engaged in crafts were not considered "real" artists. Unless you strapped on the phallus of male dominated art and traditional artist behavior and style, you couldn't make it as a female artist. Craft's anonymity was intriguing and refreshing. While fine art critics made it seem as though craft tradition was frozen, or even dead, crafters were very much alive and productive.

For me, craft became less about conformity and more about questioning the modernist concept of originality. By upholding originality as the standard, large quantities of vital works are ignored simply because they resemble each other. Popular craft has also been accused of being politically neutral in content, unlike the social and cultural commentary of fine art, when in fact it has many things to say about country, family, religion, women and community. Basically, crafting is as neutral as the public school textbook. When what I started to notice about popular craft did not mesh with my

fine art training, I felt I had found a place to begin my research.

Craft is Historical

One problem involves reconceptualizing women's craft as woman's work. Craft's linkage with women may not just be an essentialist notion. Archaeologist Elizabeth Barber in her book *Woman's Work: The First 20,000 Years* (1994) points out that division of labor based on sex has to do with what activities are compatible with child care. Crafting is, she claims, because of its features: portable, easy to drop and then resume, repetitive, and stable. It keeps the crafter in one spot, or at least not far from the home. Historically speaking, in order to keep women "productive" to society during child bearing years, craft work became women's work. The only other work that meets the same criteria as craft is food preparation. "These are what societies world-wide have come to see as the core of women's work, although other tasks may be added to the load, depending upon the circumstances of the particular society" (p. 30).

Craft has always been linked with women even though men have made names for themselves in the craft world, such as William Morris' Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century. Since the Industrial Revolution, women's involvement in craft has split in two directions. The first is the studio/professional fine arts crafter, and the second direction is the personal/everyday popular crafter, some of whom are also professionals in their field. It is this everyday direction that I wish to explore and its emergence after the Industrial Revolution.

Since craft is tied up with issues of gender, the changes that affect women will affect craft forms. Unfortunately, much has been lost from a historical standpoint due to

the perishable nature of cloth (Barber 1994). However, by looking at today's crafting, perhaps much can be gained about why women continue to craft. For example, feminist research of the 1970's began to look at how the routines of schooling maintained gender differences. One aspect of schooling is the male-oriented view of knowledge as logical, ordered and sequential. Today, any crafting periodical will include how-to instruction procedures for every project. The familiarity of the how-to creates a comfort zone for female popular crafters; possibly they view it as educational in nature, something they have encountered before.

In attempting to look at this relationship among women, craft and pedagogy it becomes apparent that traditional aesthetic criticism is not sufficient. Even when written under the guise of postmodernism, the context of women's craft work is ignored (Deniston 1997, Hixson 1997, Lippard 1995, Kingsley 1987). A typical stance inserts women into the art history timeline, then mourns the fact that there were few women artists. What usually follows is speculation on "what could have been" (similar to Woolfe's essay *Room of One's Own*) had women artists been allowed to exist. Fehr (1993) makes this exact point by claiming that we are all robbed of a large portion of great art because women weren't allowed to become artists (p. 86).

This stance becomes problematic when we introduce craft. Craft has existed as women's work for at least 20,000 years. Were those women not producing creative products, some of which were unique and inventive considering limited resources? The problem with Fehr's view is one of context. Just because women were making their homes the site of their works doesn't mean they weren't making aesthetic decisions. The system of art history needs to be re-viewed, as does the matter of who gets a place in this

history. Fehr does admit this system is wrong, but he still relies on it in retrospect to judge women as artists (and the lack of women recognized as such) when in fact women have always made things with their hands and continue to do so in the form of crafts.

Craft is Critical, Contradictory, Complex

Craft has been charged with being politically and visually innocuous. As Pagano (1994) suggests, women's art has been dismissed as sentimental because it does not hold up to the male standard of neutrality (p. 256). It is interesting to note that school textbooks have also met the same charges, until one digs deeper. Apple (1988) identified how textbooks are indeed political, just in a more subtle way. This subtlety is extremely effective and powerful. He points to hegemony and the way it is reproduced by society, not just imposed from above (p. 236). Likewise, popular craft functions through a hegemonic system, embodying "traditional values" and "common sense." One could label craft's political stance as one of nostalgia, most often encased in rural imagery.

The problem of nostalgia vs. the here-and-now requires an overview of the conservative reformation of the 1980's and the structure of the family (Coontz 1992). God, country, home and family are dominant motifs in popular craft and in the platform of the religious right. Crafting can be said to have experienced a political backlash of its own to its more ethnic forms like macramé and folk embroidery of the 1970's. As a result, Reagan simultaneously ushered in rampant conservatism and the "country" era of craft, much of what we see today at craft shows (motifs such as farms, geese, cows, etc.)

Nostalgia is not a matter of simple people having simple beliefs. Pinar (1995) views the suppression of history as a denial of collective identity. The symptoms of a

denied history include violence, racism and nostalgia. The incomplete history is the one school textbooks contain, free of significant contributions of women and people of color. By being denied those complex and contradictory aspects of history, the American identity is repressed and incomplete. So it invents and sustains a nostalgic self.

It may be possible that craft forms illustrate this denial more vividly than any fine art object, since modern art wants nothing to do with nostalgia, or the everyday person's world. An important contradiction in craft's nostalgia is that most women now work outside the home while their craft imagery remains rooted in a domesticated past. The multiple meanings in craft items indicate that working women craft an imagined identity/past.

Craft Magazines and Craft Items

Unless one counts the studio craft movement from the guilds to now, there has been no real effort to document craft, particularly popular craft from about 1980 to the present. Craft magazines offer one solution to this lack of documentation. They present images, in the form of trends and instructions on how to reproduce certain motifs in the making of a decorative object. Magazines are also the text women crafters follow. Whether they embrace or resist it is another matter to be discovered. But they do acknowledge and consume magazines as a source for crafting ideas (HIA 1994 Nationwide Consumer Study).

Within magazines, a picture of home as feminized space begins to emerge. Femininity expressed through the home is a pastel world of Victorian and country pastiche, glued together by nostalgia. This comes across in advertisements, articles and

letters from readers. Carrington and Bennett's (1996) exploration of women consuming magazine texts for play and enjoyment is particularly relevant here. The home becomes a series of surfaces with which to embellish via craft. This can include the actual home environment itself, but also extends to bodily embellishment of family members through wearables and jewelry.

Giroux (1992) defines pedagogy as occurring "wherever knowledge is produced, wherever culture is given the possibility of translating experience and constructing truths, even if such truths appear unrelentingly redundant" (p. 218). Craft magazines present a definite pedagogy through the how-to. The how-to can be linked to conservative texts such as the Tyler Rationale and Bloom's Taxonomy, where knowledge is conceived as a set of building blocks (Cherryholmes 1988). We can say that the how-to is the pedagogy of popular craft and its ties to schooling are strong.

Finally, magazines present images relating to the concepts of nostalgia and "country." These images create an ideology which the crafter perpetuates and disrupts while crafting. Nostalgia is often wrongfully equated with simplistic belief systems when in fact a lot goes into maintaining such beliefs. If crafting is not a neutral activity and if it has many messages within its written and visual texts, what are some of these messages about home, family, religion and education? Messages within craft magazines are usually presented in bold, colorful, glossy, high-tech formats. Sometimes this is in direct contradiction to the nostalgic "simpler time" message of crafting. Craft objects are often made of synthetic materials. It can be said that crafting is highly contradictory and problematic. Its analysis will require more than one approach.

Purpose of the Study

In this study I intend to explore more deeply the meaning of craft's more popular forms. Craft magazines will be a primary source for analysis. How magazines convey the complex universe of nostalgia is part of popular craft's history in the making.

Description of the Problem

In looking at craft, the problem is not how to push for making craft into art, but to focus on the question: what is this activity known as craft? Turning the study of craft into an art vs. craft crusade is a trite approach and shows much ignorance of the complexity of craft. Craft is distinct from art in many ways and should be respected for its uniqueness and connection to people (Metcalf 1980, Metcalf 1993). Too much has been written on the art/craft debate already. It's time to get beyond assertions of who's better/who's equal and look into what is special about craft's more popular forms.

A re-viewing of craft as more than common-sense art and recognizing it as a meaning-making endeavor, also calls for re-thinking our ideas of originality and how they are tied to modernism (Dissanayake 1988, Wolff 1981). A reliance on originality makes the artist into a metaphysical being, as if "he" were given some sort of talent. Postmodern analysis has pointed out instances of art being shaped by society, not the other way around (Trend 1992, Wolff 1981). Opening the dialogue of art to include group activities such as popular craft, allows a democratic space for debate and discussion to occur with more exciting possibilities. Plus the importance of women crafters being included in the aesthetic conversations can finally be acknowledged.

Craft has a lot to do with the notion of community. The community is both social

and isolationist at once as crafting is marked by periods of solitude and sharing. Expression of community goes against the ideal of individuality as taught in schools and in the dominant art education curriculum. We can view the alikeness of women's craft items as expressions of their community values. Perhaps it is more important to adhere with the community and create anonymous objects than to make individualistic art works. As Deniston (1997) suggests, "these excluded art forms are particularly transparent. This transparency allows unique insight into the various social meanings contained within art forms, practice and aesthetics" (p. 42).

Ultimately, what makes crafters intriguing is their ability to select what aesthetic forms they will resurrect from the past. It is, however, difficult to distinguish an origin for these images; much like trying to find where ideas formulate in textbooks (Cherryholmes 1988). Much of what composes popular craft is self-referential and circular. Thus, the problem of popular craft is not a simplistic one, but it must be explored nonetheless.

Focus of the Study

I intend to examine the texts of popular craft as contained in magazines and images of craft objects. Here I am not only looking for what these images say, but also a quasi-history of contemporary popular craft. Magazines are the most popular sources for ideas (HIA 1994). They contain how-to lessons and advertisements as project "jump starts" for crafters. The dominant popular crafting ideology of interest is nostalgia and how it is portrayed by the use of a country style. There are numerous other styles used in popular craft, but country remains the strongest, surviving many trend shifts in the past

20 years. The focus throughout my study will be about how women appropriate "country" in their lives.

Research Questions

In focusing on the analysis of crafting magazines as more than just "text", I have arrived at the following questions:

*What do crafting magazines have to offer in the way they portray women, the home, and women's work, in this case crafting?

*What do crafting magazines have to say about the "craft community" and its values? How is this tied to the concept of nostalgia? More specifically, is this adherence to community expressed through look-alike craft items?

*What is the pedagogy of the how-to and what does it have in common with the existing public school system/structure?

Significance of the Study

Importance of the Study/Contributions to Existing Knowledge

There is an unimaginable gap in craft's history. Women's domestic craft is the most marginalized of art activities (Deniston 1997). Therefore it is not adequately addressed by modernist aesthetic research or even traditional feminist analysis which would view popular craft as an oppressive entity (Hixson 1997). Crafting, due to its contradictory nature of past methods melding with present materials, may be looked at from a postmodern feminist stance. Though problematic, this stance takes into account a wide range of perspectives and allows for more theoretical possibilities (Fraser and

Nicholson 1990). On the one hand craft is a celebration of feminine resourcefulness and community but it is also not an innocent activity. The concept of nostalgia contains a strongly patriarchal worldview that can't simply be written away (no matter how much I and others might enjoy crafting).

A major problem is that little has been written about craft that doesn't: a) try to crusade for craft being made into art, b) dismiss craft as a politically neutral activity thereby reducing its aesthetic impact, c) portray craft from a modernist stance or museumize it (looking only at the object and not the crafting process), or d) ignore popular craft entirely.

These approaches appear to ignore how society has changed from more modern assumptions of originality/individuality to a postmodern worldview of community/collective aesthetics. There is also little understanding of the social, economic, and aesthetic importance of women who have perpetuated the traditions of crafting (Deniston 1997). Women have done this in their own way, different from the commonly held romantic myth of the American pioneer wife whose only aesthetic activity was to be resourceful.

This study will focus on contemporary women's handwork from crocheted bed dolls to painting on saw blades, as viewed through craft texts. Such items are missing from art history and aesthetic analysis. Since these activities remain unacknowledged, crafting as a whole, including professional female crafters, is not clearly understood.

Evidence for Theoretical Significance of Study

Postmodern feminist research has not only focused on women, it has been a

different sort of focus. Because what some consider as "women's work" (mothering, cooking, cleaning, crafting) is now viewed through a fresher lens, the modernist way of looking at craft as unoriginal and not expressive needs to be reconsidered. By subjecting craft to patriarchal forms of art criticism, the idea that crafters are part of a community is lost, along with alternative concepts of originality. It could be that certain groups of women place more importance on a shared community than on self-expression alone. As a result, craft objects may look like each other and even come from the same kit, making craft more complex and contradictory.

Part of a re-conceptualization of craft from a postmodern feminist view involves looking at its political dimension. Women crafters experience marginality, or living outside the center of culture. Martel and Peterat (1994) demonstrate how marginality is a way of being for women in our society. However, the complexity of existing in the margins points to a possibility for positive change. The concept of "marginal crafter" can be opened to a freer space where women can group together as they have done in the past, to create. I would even maintain that there is a sense of liberation to be gained for one's self when no one considers your work important or cares what your work looks like in the first place. You can make the things you like to make, things that are meaningful to you and the groups you inhabit.

Postmodernism "makes the everyday an object of serious study" (Giroux 1992, p. 55). This suggests that popular craft may be a significant aesthetic activity. Unfortunately, popular culture writings have not addressed craft issues; in many ways they remain overly dedicated to literature and film imagery. How people decorate their daily lives is an issue requiring attention to more subtle meanings than what first meets

the eye.

Significant changes are occurring within art education. While still dominated by the view of art as self-expression, multicultural concerns have surfaced, forcing a second look at those cultures' works (Katter 1995). Most are not museumized. These objects are used in the home; thus context becomes a key issue rather than originality. We need to re-view the pattern and its usage. Perhaps people consciously choose when and where to utilize patterning devices making popular craft a site of struggle and fantasy, rather than one of domination and submission.

Theoretical Contributions of the Study

I wish to expand postmodern theory and research to include the crafts being made today. Media, literature, education, identity...nearly everything has been looked at from a postmodern perspective except popular craft and how it pertains to education and the home. Trend (1992) has written about art education and community issues from a postmodern view, but he does not discuss craft (though he doesn't deride it either). Likewise, while postmodern popular culture discourses may focus on formed elements of media culture, they focus little on people themselves (Giroux 1992).

Feminist researchers have written about women and the arts (Lippard 1995, Hicks 1992). The women artists discussed are typically not representative of the everyday life most other women experience. These are artists such as Frieda Kahlo, Kaethe Kollwitz, Mary Cassatt et. al. One wonders why these figures are lauded over and over again as "ground breakers" and "masters" in such an unproblematic fashion while the framework in which they are discussed is often patriarchal to begin with. Feminist art criticism

needs to be linked with the postmodern in order to provide a space for questioning our systems of aesthetic labeling.

I am interested in re-viewing women crafters, an invisible, marginalized group, from a postmodern feminist position. Hopefully this will allow for a political examination of craft, its popular cultural workings, struggles over meaning and the notion of both positive and negative aspects of crafting ideology such as nostalgia. As Hicks (1992) maintains, engaging in feminist discourse inevitably makes the writer become involved in a form of self-analysis. I plan to include my own particular biases toward craft, the way I have experienced it myself as both a female and an intellectual.

Definitions

I am prefacing the following definitions by first explaining how each concept is viewed by a traditional or modernist stance. This is critical in order to understand the problems inherent in looking at popular craft. I will follow each traditional definition with examples of how the concept can be expanded to include postmodern feminist ideas. In chapter two, more detailed overviews of postmodernism, feminist research and popular culture will be discussed.

**CRAFT-* Handmade objects for practical use whose makers are bound by traditional manual skills. Some common examples are quilts, woodwork, ironwork, dolls, baskets, ceramics, etc. Craft is a distinct category from art, the separation based on the intellectual or inspired status of artists. The crafter's role is to make useful things and they are to be admired for their skills. However, the crafter is not concerned with expressing broad themes such as social injustice in their work. Craft has no intrinsic

meaning, as art does. Anyone with enough expertise can create a craft object by following a pattern, whereas only one person can make an original painting. Many third world cultures utilize craft rather than art but this is because their country is behind socially and technologically. An overall image is one of a single craftsman or small group making a select line of objects entirely by hand using historical methods and a limited range of tools.

When craft is reconceptualized, its trait of "practical use" becomes a positive rather than negative one. Craft has its own unique aspects such as use of decoration, cultural reference and context, and expression of community values (Metcalf 1993, Dissanayake 1988, Kingsley 1987, Slivka 1987, Metcalf 1980). "Third world" countries are not the only cultures that make crafts. As studio crafters have demonstrated, men/women and all racial groups enjoy crafting. The focus on quality and skills becomes a source of pride, not merely an avoidance of social issues. The meaning in craft lies in its context and manufacture (and the same is true for fine art). Wolff (1981) would argue that all artistic activities are collective, not isolationist. Yet many studio crafters reject the term "crafter" and call themselves artists, further blurring the lines between art and craft.

**POPULAR CRAFT-* There is no consensus on a term for this activity. Even though the general public considers popular craft part of craft, studio crafters do not. "Amateurs" "hobby art" and "hobbyists" are terms indicating low quality, mass produced, mechanized and uninspired craft objects and their makers. The studio crafter and artist desperately seek to separate themselves from popular craft by pointing to their own high standards and high paychecks, evidence of what important collectors and connoisseurs prefer.

Popular craft items show little imagination and origin of thought and therefore merit parenthetical mention in art history texts, if at all (and usually this is done in the context of distinguishing "bad" from "good" art).

Popular craft is a term I will use in order to name what I see to be a blending of popular culture with crafting. Certain qualities set it apart from what we usually think of as craft. This form of crafting is easily and quickly made; emphasis is on ease and speed of assembly in contrast to slow manufacture. Speed is viewed as a positive attribute, the faster the better. Ease of assembly means that anyone can have success with crafting, no matter their skill level. The same is not true for more intricate craft forms like wood carving, for example.

Materials used to make popular crafts are overwhelmingly synthetic, although natural materials can be part of this form. Studio crafters may use synthetics, but in the overall piece the material takes a back seat. It's the other way around with popular craft. If it's made with orange acrylic yarn, you can TELL.

I believe popular craft's history to be quite recent, at least since the Industrial Revolution made sewing materials widely available through assembly line manufacturing. As a result, it is quite inexpensive to make most popular craft items. This has become more evident due to large outlets that buy and sell volumes of materials used in these crafts to the American public.

Traditional, pre-modern craft rests on the notion of utility and function. Popular craft items do not have to function to be accepted. Often they are extremely decorative and embellished beyond utility. Functionality takes a back seat to form in many cases, as with ruffled lace toilet paper covers. These items are used for home decoration accents

and come in color matched "lines" or "sets." So popular craft can also be viewed as a form of collecting.

Whereas fine art and studio craft items have been museumized to emphasize their monetary and cultural value, popular craft objects lose their significance when removed from the context of their place in society. There are intricate periods of shopping, ideas, group sharing, manufacture, revision, display, selling, gift giving, and collecting that cannot be gleaned from isolating one object for study. The entire process of popular craft makes it an intriguing and complex form of creative activity which dissolves the boundaries between object and context.

**CRAFTEXT*- a convenient term I will use that employs Cherryholmes' (1988) and Apple's (1988) poststructuralist notion of writings and images as text. By making craft magazines and craft items "text", they can be read, interpreted, and discussed. Crafttext will also be treated as a unique entity (denoted by the word craft) with its own peculiarities not addressed by the usual understanding of the term text.

To the modernist, crafttext is a series of rote, non-political exercises and is used to dominate or dupe oppressed groups. When re-conceptualized, crafttext becomes a site of contestation and meaning. These meanings can shift over time, bringing into question notions such as tradition and stability. Much of what makes crafttext is its illusion of sameness, as if the world has frozen in time.

**CRAFTVIEW*- an invented term I will use to denote a value or ideology most crafters hold to and perpetuate through making craft items. On one hand, a craftview is expressed through magazine's text or is written directly on the craft materials (such as fabric printed with the Pledge of Allegiance). But craftviews are also called into use by

the crafters themselves. This is part validation and part origination within the crafter, as they explore existing mores of craftviews.

Examples of common craftviews include the family, heterosexual couples, American patriotism, and Protestant Christianity. Both postmodern and modernist assumptions toward these values are dubious and usually one-sided. As Giroux (1992) maintains, popular culture does not fare well on either the right or left ends of the political spectrum. The same can be said for craftviews. It is difficult to locate a single theory willing to include craftviews as concepts worthy of study. One has to patch together elements of many different ideas.

Craftviews present countless problems for the postmodern scholar. For one thing, some of these views are in direct contradiction to what I personally believe as a crafter and educator. Another difficult area involves getting past the deceptive simplicity of craftviews. It can be tempting to dismiss them as uneducated beliefs when they are in fact enormously complex in their maintenance and production. Whatever appears to be "practical" and "common sense" is usually open to inquiry and suspicion on my part.

As a crafter, I can also see many valid points to craftviews. Although derided in recent research, the family can be a source of creativity and solace (Luke 1996). Solace-seeking behavior is not necessarily a negative response as it can lead to community change and involvement (McRobbie 1996, Giroux 1992, Dissanayake 1988). The family is a reality for many women crafters and is worth examining (Coontz 1992, Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). Religion and spirituality are other sources of celebration along with community and solidarity, areas often ignored in curriculum discourse.

Research Questions

References to Support Questions

I have attempted to construct my research questions based upon what has been written in the curriculum field. Certain aspects of the Reconceptualist field allow for open-endedness and do not seek to be a totalizing discourse. Rather, these research questions should lead to more questioning so the dialogue may continue, not end.

My first question *What do crafting magazines have to offer in the way they portray women, the home, and women's work (in this case crafting)?* is concerned with how text is distributed and taken up. Cherryholmes (1988) views text as including what is not written as well as what is (p. 61). This makes a postmodern feminist text analysis suitable for crafting magazines since much of what makes crafttext is not officially written, but visual. And subtle imagery can be the most hegemonic.

I center my research on women because of their normal exclusion throughout the school curriculum. (Martel and Peterat 1994) Consequently, women are excluded from art dialogue (Deniston 1997, Hixson 1997, Hicks 1992). This exclusion occurs in the way certain forms of knowledge are valued; typically hands-off, isolated, linear thinking that contradicts the way craft works (more sharing and circular in its approach). In schools, women's minds become divided from their bodies as intuition gives way to imposed rationality (Lather 1991).

Kellman (1996) views women's handwork as a "narrative of daily life" and a "domestically rooted art...reflecting adult expertise, family, and community life" (p. 34). She also points out the amount of labor involved in craft work, linking this labor to

women. It is inevitable, then, that popular craft should be allied with the way most women live and the domestic space they inhabit. This setting should not be devalued. My first question also assumes that gender is a product of social construction rather than a biological concept and that crafting magazines play a part in this construction.

What do crafting magazines have to say about the craft community and its values? How is this tied to the concept of nostalgia? More specifically, is adherence to community values expressed through look-alike craft items? Katter (1995) explores the ideas of connectedness and sense of community as they relate to craft. He examines three different levels of community: the immediate or everyday, the transitional, and the global and stresses the importance of craft in discussing community at all three levels. Coontz (1992) looks at the family as an institution that sustains nostalgia. Trend (1992) is an art educator who views community as a positive possibility, though problematic. In feminist pedagogy, community can also be seen as a form of attachment and survival for marginalized groups (Martel and Peterat 1994).

Nostalgia is a more difficult concept to discuss without taking a patronizing or "all is innocent" stance. Popular culture provides some alternatives for facing the problem of nostalgia. Giroux (1992) considers popular culture "a critical pedagogy of representation" (p. 218). Representations (such as rural images) are produced "within cultural limits and theoretical borders, and as such are necessarily implicated in particular economies of truth, value, and power" (p. 219).

While it is important to view representations as a struggle over meanings, Giroux cautions against limiting popular culture to an ideology critique. As Lather (1991) succinctly puts it, there is a "hubris at play in our creation of theory which fails to touch

the audience for whom it is intended" (p. xviii). What is needed is a popular culture that looks at how people sustain ideologies through emotion and reason. In the case of crafts, one possible way of sustaining nostalgia and a sense of community over individuality and isolation is through creating "agreed-upon" craft forms.

What is the pedagogy of the how-to and what does it have in common with the existing school system? The how-to is the core of craft pedagogy since today's craft skills are rarely handed down from one generation to the next. Cherryholmes (1988) outlines structural characteristics of traditional curriculum texts such as Bloom and Tyler. These characteristics are shared by the how-to, particularly the maintenance of a neutral appearance. The school curriculum sustained by conservative interests enforces a sort of cultural homogeneity. It can also be said that craft magazines influence a sameness that emerges in finished craft forms.

I sense the school/craft connection to be a strong one for two reasons. First, schooling in its tradition of repression and order has created a reluctant but persistent belief that following directions will lead to success. This is where the how-to becomes a comfortable way to engage in crafting. Secondly, schooling has denied women's contributions to pedagogy and intuitive ways of knowing and replaced them with ordered, directional thinking to the point of naturalization.

Assumptions

Certain concepts form the background of my study. Rather than labeling them "hypotheses" they are more appropriately termed assumptions or possibilities. These are the preconceived notions I have concerning popular craft, based partly on what I have

observed as an active crafter and an intellectual. There is no guarantee these assumptions will change or stay the same, but a successful re-view of craft should at least broaden them.

*Craft magazines express certain views of what it means to be a woman and what is considered a woman's domain. This is done via visual boundaries, repeated over and over in the way of motifs.

*Popular craft is a postmodern form of aesthetic activity due to its qualities of pastiche, contradictions, refusal of originality, and democratic level of participation. One gains more by seeing popular craft as a group process than one can by looking at a single craft object.

*Craft magazines contain a how-to project/format that is familiar to most readers. This is due to their exposure to a traditional public school system that advocates order and rationality over other ways of knowing.

*However, crafters do not merely "follow along" as they make crafts. They actively create their view of community and express such values through these craft objects. The notion of crafts as used for gift giving reinforces and celebrates community.

Rationale for Assumptions

Some Reconceptualists might question my assumption that popular craft is a postmodern aesthetic activity. In many ways, popular craft appears modernist. Its motifs point to worldviews like religion and patriotism. Since popular craft is composed of seemingly "quiet" female workers, it appears to endorse patriarchal values. It also advances simple answers to complex questions through the use of sayings such as "love is

home and family."

But relegating popular craft to modernism ignores its complex side. One only has to look at the history of modern art to see how it has not met the needs of most people. As Trend (1992) maintains, "the simple truth is that most avant-garde expression does indeed ignore the concerns of working people, older people, people of color, people with little education" (p. 86). Many of these people utilize popular craft as their primary source of aesthetic activity.

Labeling craft as modernist also eliminates the possibility that the definition of community has changed to being defined by patterns of mass consumption (p. 101). How these groups use and exchange craft texts can create a different way of viewing popular craft. The addition of the popular media complicates the crafter/society dialogue endorsed by modernism. Chaney (1996) locates a key tension between "the diversity I see as emancipatory in contemporary culture and the pressure towards an effective homogeneity" (p. 196). This tension is played out in popular craft.

Craft's strongest adherence to postmodernism is in its rejection of originality and its anonymity. The anonymity of popular craft items can then be seen as a way to remove focus from the individual artist and place it on the activity of crafting itself. Certainly there are pattern designers known by name, but the real crafting gets underway only when the "group", no matter how separated by level of acquaintance or physical distance, begins to repeat the pattern. It should be noted here that most crafters do not feel any sense of guilt in using patterns. Pattern is positive, not negative.

But popular craft would not be postmodern if it didn't have contradictions from within. Such contradictions include:

*The "old days" motifs done in polyester blends and plastics.

*Pattern use as community celebration and pattern use as comfort

zone/compliance.

*Popular craft as a communal experience and popular craft as a capitalist activity.

*Women crafters as marginalized and women crafters experiencing freedom in these margins.

*Popular craft as an encouraging, inclusive, aesthetic activity and popular craft as exclusive in terms of racial and gendered representations.

Limitations, Challenges, Concerns

Recently, there has been significant controversy over how (and if) postmodernism should be taken up by feminist discourse. As discussed in chapter two, aspects of postmodernism such as the fragmented self, rejection of Enlightenment goals (including equality and justice), and suspicion of totalizing categories like gender have alarmed feminist writers (Lather 1991, Bordo 1990). In many ways it is important to note that feminist research needs to continue utilizing varied concepts of gender and equality as strategies to conceptualize and ultimately change the position of women within society. Nicholson and Fraser (1990) endorse a merging of feminism with postmodernism where "postmodern feminists need not abandon the large theoretical tools needed to address large political problems. There is nothing self-contradictory in the idea of a postmodern theory" (p. 34). I maintain that the complexity of popular craft demands both feminist research and a postmodern sensibility.

Because much of the study of popular craft relies on interpretive rather than

factual elements, a major concern will be presenting what I observe in an open-ended fashion. This will mean not only expressing my views about craft, but also what others have to say, even if I disagree. This will not lead to an "enemy set up" where opposing viewpoints are torn apart just so my views remain unchallenged. To the contrary, there is validity in many forms of opposition. Even if there appears to be none, there must be an attempt to understand why people have held on to certain beliefs.

In re-viewing the hidden text of crafting magazines, I will need to realize that I have prejudices toward certain craftviews and against others. For example, even though I can understand and easily respect the concepts of Christianity, home and family, the "man as head of the household" remains a sore spot with me. I also have to admit that there is a strong undercurrent of anti-intellectualism in popular craft, expressed in its "one day at a time" philosophies. But I also know that there are ways to at least understand why people endorse such views. One reason might be that education has been an unpleasant, self-negating experience for most and a rejection of schooling results in many varied forms (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989).

Another challenge is the lack of a theoretical foundation specific to popular craft. Aside from Deniston's (1997) ethnographies of older women and their artwork, no one has, to my knowledge, studied popular craft or has done more than mentioned it in passing (or tucked it under "Material Culture Studies"). In some ways this is exciting because there are more possibilities for speaking as a crafter and with crafters rather than for them. The field is essentially an open one.

As one interested in popular culture, the problem of avoiding "intellectual tourism" becomes paramount (Giroux 1992, p. 243). Popular craft research should not

become a campy celebration of kitsch written in semi-condescending overtones. Hixson (1997) differentiates between "kitsch" (what many women utilize as decoration) and "camp" (the self-aware male appropriation of kitsch that renders it abstract). Too much has been written already that pretends to validate popular forms, but then makes it seem as if the writer has recovered from the popular and can now speak objectively (i.e. campy). In my case, I can say that I genuinely like and admire the world of popular craft. Even better is if its existence ruffles some fine-art feathers along the way.

Organization of the Study

Chapter Two will include a review of the literature on postmodernism, feminist research and popular culture. These theories will be presented in terms of popular crafting and critical pedagogy.

Chapter Three will describe the research process as used in a variety of text analyses and how this will make sense of popular crafting magazines.

Chapter Four will explore in greater detail the notion of crafttext and what it says about women, the home, and women's work.

Chapter Five will identify the craft community, its craftviews and the concept of nostalgia as expressed through craft objects.

Chapter Six will look at the implications of the how-to as pedagogy and the links between popular craft and traditional schooling.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Through the review of the literature I wish to expand the concepts of the theories that inform my research. Postmodernism, feminist research and popular culture will be explored from the framework of craft as pedagogy. Within each general concept area, I will outline in a more detailed manner how key aspects of each relate to popular craft. In the chapters that follow, these ideas will be applied to popular craft in a more detailed fashion as I explore issues of gender, nostalgia, and schooling.

Postmodernism and popular craft intersect in the areas of text analysis of textbooks and the how-to. Feminist research can shed light on popular craft through a review of concepts like community and validation of women's handwork. Popular culture provides ways of conceptualizing craft through an analysis of consumerism, craftviews and the ways people negotiate meaning while crafting. Through this review of existing literature, it is hoped that a more flexible overall definition of popular craft will be understood.

Postmodernism

Overview

To assume we exist in a postmodern time is to believe that there has been a

radical break with a historical period known as modernism. Doll (1993) characterizes modernism as a time of stability, unchanging worldviews such as progress, science as truth, and univocal texts. Cherryholmes (1988) differentiates between modern and postmodern thought: "Modern, analytic, and structural thought seek rationality, linearity, progress, and control by discovering, developing, inventing metanarratives, metadiscourses, and metacritiques that define rationality, linearity, progress, and control. Postmodern, postanalytic, and poststructural thought are skeptical and incredulous about the possibility of such metanarratives" (p. 11).

The postmodern period can be summarized as one with multiple identities, an influx of technology, an overall feeling of disconnectedness, fragmentation, information overload, blurring of boundaries, pastiche, and a general questioning of nearly everything thought to be set in stone (Doll 1993, Lather 1991, Morely 1990). The overwhelming feeling one receives from postmodern theory is cynicism, although there are other viewpoints that blend postmodernism with other theoretical positions. The correct term is probably "postmodernisms", indicating disagreements within the field: "More properly pluralized in order to encompass the varied positions terms "postmodern", postmodernisms are responses across the disciplines to the contemporary crisis of representation..." (Lather 1991, p. 21).

Postmodernism as Nihilism

The early postmodernists emphasized the de-centered subject and questioned "man" as the originator of selfhood. Nihilistic postmodernism denies any existence of foundation, origin, or totalizing concepts like "identity." These writings stem from an

existential skepticism of metanarratives which seek only to disguise how power operates.

Deconstruction is the process and philosophy of radical postmodernism whereby the theorist systematically questions and rejects modernist notions. However, this deconstruction should never lead to a re-construction of alternatives (Doll 1993, Giroux 1992). To do so would advocate a truth or consensus narrative and recreate a modernist scenario of unbalanced power. But, as Morely (1990) suggests, even though postmodern scholars deny the above, they ironically seem to endorse a "truth" of the postmodern condition, as if it were agreed upon.

It is important to note that nihilistic postmodernism does not view societal change as a positive force. Rather, it frames social organization of any kind in terms of isolation, disconnectedness, and loss. The postmodern cannot become a tool for political action because consensus and community are seen as non-existent and suspect. For feminists like Lather (1991), the abandonment of these important projects makes her wary of engaging fully in postmodern discourse. As she points out, postmodernism has its own set of inconsistencies, such as a penchant for aesthetics over ethics, universalizing the experiences of marginalized groups, and limiting its discourse to the academy.

Postmodernism as Critique

Cherryholmes (1988) provides an excellent example of how postmodernism can be applied to curriculum issues. Utilizing the aspects of postmodernism that question existing order (deconstruction and critique), Cherryholmes demonstrates postmodernism as active theory rather than nihilistic or frozen. In this way, curriculum is reconceptualized as a text with multiple, contested meanings.

He begins by looking at curriculum as a modernist text. Using the traditional metanarratives of Bloom, Tyler and Schwab, he lists structural characteristics of each. He then continues by using theoretical methods of poststructural analysis to "read" the structuralist curriculum texts. The questioning that follows serves to illustrate that there is no fixed meaning within text. In fact, any original assertion of meaning can be difficult if not impossible to locate, as in the case of textbooks. The "common sense" stance of traditional curriculum is questioned, and one is forced to notice the political motivations behind it.

Postmodernism is not a unified discourse. Morely (1996) discusses four possible ways of conceptualizing the postmodern. He examines these in terms of how the postmodern has been taken up by various scholars, usually depending on their political motivations. The first way is as a representation of a period of time, postdating modernity. A second way is to think of postmodernism as a form of "cultural sensibility characteristic of this period." Thirdly, one can think of it as an aesthetic style, like postmodern art, that visually attempts to capture the mood of the period. Finally, postmodernism has been viewed as a mode of thought used for analysis of itself and society (p. 50). Morely engages in a critique of postmodernism as single entity by looking at its multifaceted uses within the academy.

Postmodernism as critique allows for analysis of pedagogical issues like politics, power and representation. This broadens the category of postmodern theory to include concepts closer to one's experience as an educator. Rather than deconstruction as a stopping point, the postmodern critic utilizes it in his/her process of re-viewing text. The possibility of using postmodernism for social action is not necessarily ruled out, though it

is not specifically addressed.

Postmodernism as Potential for Change

Doll (1993) and Fraser & Nicholson (1990) acknowledge the negative attributes of postmodernism, but in a break from the early theorists, see it as having potential for liberation. They address different social concerns that postmodernism can encompass and still retain its inherent skepticism. For Doll, curriculum has the potential to transform society.

The transformative curriculum Doll advocates is one of "mutual exploration" (p.3), students "suspending belief in the teacher-as-authority"(p. 4), and as a result, all forms of evaluation and assessment will become irrelevant. For Doll, the existence of postmodernism is exciting and challenging at the same time. Curriculum has the potential to become playful and complex without the hostility and closed-mindedness of traditional forms of pedagogy.

Fraser and Nicholson (1990) believe that postmodernism and feminism work best when taken together. The reality of oppression for women (and men) within our existing gender system makes postmodern feminism an important task to undertake. "A postmodern reflection on feminist theory reveals disabling vestiges of essentialism while a feminist reflection on postmodernism reveals androcentrism and political naiveté" (p.20).

Fraser and Nicholson describe postmodern feminism as "useful" in that it recognizes the diversity of women's experiences. Women share similarities yet remain isolated from each other, depending on the context of the situation. Postmodern

feminism admits that while there is no single agreed upon existence known as "gender", there are certain realities that seem to remain rigidly in place for some groups (for example, try telling the working class that categories of "rich" and "poor" don't exist).

Popular culture, like other discourses, must avoid being portrayed in strictly limited terms. For Giroux (1992), the popular is dual: on the one hand it becomes a referent for an individual and on the other hand it is a site of struggle over accommodation and meanings (p. 188). Popular culture can also be seen as a form of resistance and change as much as maintenance of the status quo. Most importantly, it is a process, not just a product.

Postmodernism as a potential for change places notions of community and group cooperation back into the pedagogical discussion. Not only does it try to accomplish this, it makes democracy a necessity in the discussion. However, we should always remain skeptical of the hidden power structures within postmodernism. Is it truly a liberatory discourse, or is it yet another class privileged, white male discourse (Lather 1991)?

Relationships to Popular Craft

Textbooks and the How-To. Cherryholmes' poststructural analysis of textbooks relates to popular craft in many ways. The school textbook and the crafting magazine's how-to share remarkable similarities:

- 1) An appearance of stability that utilizes charts, graphs, tables of contents, lists, and steps in numerical order (p. 55).
- 2) The texts seem "interchangeable" and "anonymous" due to the controls behind their production (p. 59).

3) Both avoid controversial content and pedagogical style (p. 59).

4) People have expectations and desires when selecting textbooks (crafting magazines) (p. 59).

5) Texts can be thought of as univocal, linear, and developmental in appearance when they have many meanings (p. 61).

6) Any attempt to trace an idea back to its origins will "continually lead to prior ideas or contradict themselves" (p. 64).

7) Both advance valued meanings (p. 50).

According to Cherryholmes, textual meanings cannot be exhausted by a single reading (p. 64). Part of interpretation and analysis involves going from the text to oneself, back and forth. Textbooks and crafting magazines can pose questions, either stated or unstated, that call for either poststructural or structural responses (p. 65). So a crafting magazine can be seen as a linear entity, or it can be reconceptualized as a means by which crafters contest and acquire ideas. Most importantly, text analysis acknowledges the reader as part of the shared meaning making rather than the reader-as-sponge.

Copy Replaces Original. Interestingly enough, the terms "postmodernism" and "modernism" were first freely used in the fine art vernacular to describe architectural styles and movements in painting (Doll 1993, Huyssen 1990). Modern art sought to remove any cultural references. This culminated in the solid black field paintings and conceptual art, where thought alone was enough to classify a work as art. The geometric shapes that defined modern art of the fifties and sixties were important because of what they excluded rather than included. On the other hand, personal expression also became

paramount, but the meaning came from the artist's or critic's statement. This made most modern art quite alienating to all but a few (Trend 1992).

Postmodern art rejects several long-standing modernist notions that are still quite rooted in the fine art system. First, ethnic and cultural representation belongs in art, since artists are a part of society (Deniston 1997, Lippard 1995). Categories of high and low art forms are blurred as postmodern artists borrow kitsch imagery in their pieces (Hixson 1997). Artworks are shown to have multiple meanings, not just what the artist intended at that time (Wolff 1981). Finally, self-expression for its own sake is both irrelevant and narcissistic (Dissanayake 1988).

There is no longer an original from which to compare copies (Cherryholmes 1988). This creates a loss of foundation and a loss of the concept of "original artist." Popular craft both welcomes the notion of copies by endorsing the how-to and at the same time it compensates for a loss of cultural identity by creating a deep-seated nostalgia.

Reconceptualizing popular craft in terms of postmodernism allows for a different view of the copy. It also introduces a more positive notion of postmodernism as a realm of possibility. Through crafts, people can seek solace and identity. Of course, this becomes problematic in the way postmodernism intersects with some of modernism's ideals of community and solidarity. Feminist research outlines ways of integrating political concepts with postmodern theories to invent a more inclusive discourse.

Feminist Research

Feminisms- an Overview

Even though the 1970's produced a new understanding of gender in the curriculum, gender has always been a central concern and organizing principle in education (Walkerdine 1989). Lather (1991) describes feminist research as: "simply putting the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry" (p. 71).

Contemporary feminist research has its roots in the feminist revolution of the sixties and seventies. These writings were in many ways a reaction to the institutionalized silencing of the female voice, particularly within school systems.

Like postmodernism, contemporary feminist research has different perspectives and points of view. In the late '70's, working within an oppressive culture and defining "womanhood" were common themes and causes. Research from this time period looked for a singular definition of gender and related "female" experiences such as mothering, teaching, and nurturing (Bordo 1990). Feminists assumed women were a cohesive, closely knit group.

As feminist research grew in strength, some divisions occurred among research camps. (Bear in mind that for the sake of simplicity I am not addressing the complexity of such divisions). The essentialist position advocated the existence of an inherent womanliness based on the female body and ways of knowing. This position would argue that craft is biologically linked to women, unlike Barber's (1994) view of craft as culturally linked with women. Those opposed to gender essentialism argued that gender was a socially created entity with the family structure as the primary reinforcing agent

(Coontz 1992, Walkerdine 1989). The latter viewpoint led to a reconceptualization of feminist research and a questioning of the universality of gender. Low-income women and women of color rightly protested their being grouped under a concept of gender developed by white middle-class feminists.

Bordo (1990) notes that there have been some negative consequences of such a radical shift in feminist ideology. The panic over being labeled "essentialist" (equivilant to non-academic) has left many feminist researchers unsure of how to treat the problem of gender. Bordo maintains that it is not possible to include every voice in one's research. There is no "correct" theory that will ensure inclusion of every experience. Those who proclaim to do so may not be aware that the very practice of research is exclusionary since only a small portion of the population has access to academic discourse (p. 40).

For example, I did not select popular craft because it is a "white" activity or because it is "safe." A majority of popular crafters are low-income, white women (HIA 1994). This is a "common sense" observation: look around any craft show or church bazaar. What first intrigued me about craft was the overwhelmingly repetitive "country" look, not the whiteness of the crafters. The fact that people of color are not displayed does not mean race isn't an implicit issue in craft. It is simply not a central concern in popular crafts. The silence surrounding race and craft objects speaks in many ways much louder than my research ever could. This in no way prohibits other avenues of research for those willing to pursue such subjects.

In conclusion, postmodern feminism offers a unique way of re-conceptualizing popular craft. There are feminists opposed to adopting postmodernism and those who embrace it fully. A more reasonable solution is to consider the healthy skepticism of

feminists like Ellsworth (1994) and Lather (1991). What might appear to be empowering should always be questioned.

Feminist Art Criticism

Hicks (1992) provides an excellent example of feminist research as it is applied to the field of visual analysis. For Hicks, the visual realm is a vital source for the reproduction and construction of gender inequality. Her first argument is that art objects do not possess their meanings entirely in themselves. They exist in a social context. If the context is a powerful one, such as a museum, then art objects can take on authoritative interpretations (p. 23).

Even though feminist art criticism has many forms and differing views, there are common goals that shape how it is practiced. The first goal is "to provide an analysis of the sociocultural and historical contexts within which a work is created and subsequently viewed" (p. 24). This can include obtaining biographic information, looking at a culture's value systems, and how a work of art is produced and sold.

The second goal involves working for social change. Critical analysis of visual imagery should have an insightful quality that looks at options as well as inequalities. It is hoped that alternative interpretations of art objects will tie into a vision of the world as a democratic place. This involves a self-analysis that makes viewers and crafters look at how they form their aesthetic interpretations that both maintain and oppose the status quo.

The third goal is to make a place for subjective and personal meanings in the viewing of art objects. This means that one's life experience plays a large role in how we

interpret the aesthetic world. Art provides a unique way to learn how cultures other than our own view the visual realm. What the three goals serve to do is to create a form of oppositional criticism wherein one is encouraged to question authoritative interpretations.

Lippard (1995) is another feminist art critic who examines women's artwork in terms of the issues it addresses. She struggles with a definition of "hobby art": "If the first major pop artists had been women, the movement might never have gotten out of the kitchen. Then it would have struck those same critics who welcomed and eulogized Pop Art as just women making more genre art. But since it was primarily men who were painting and sculpting the ironing boards, dish washers, appliances, food and soap ads or soup cans, the choice of imagery was considered a breakthrough" (p. 62).

Lippard is addressing a salient point. Whenever the word "women" is attached to creative activity, the power of the activity disintegrates into "genre." No matter how open we are to new possibilities, our concepts of popular craft remain automatically rooted in notions of inferiority.

Relationships to Popular Craft

Valuing Women's Work. Thanks to the feminist research movement, women's domestic handwork such as quilts, weaving, and lace has received critical attention (Deniston 1997, Kellman 1996, Lippard 1990). While still not addressing more popularized craft forms in depth, scholarship that values the handwork of women is one step towards a reconceptualization of the aesthetic in daily life.

Kellman (1996) relates how she was always interested in the work of women,

particularly her family's crochet. She likens decisions made in craft work to the same ones made in art: attention to line, color, workmanship, and materials (p. 34). Since women's handwork marks special seasons and celebrations, it also provides an important opportunity for community narratives.

One quality of women's handwork is its accessibility. Beautiful and whimsical examples can be found just about anywhere. I have discovered affordable and outstanding specimens at yard sales, thrift stores, auctions, and from relatives willing to unload just about everything. While the notion of plenitude would devalue most works of art, a reconsideration of women's creative activities makes abundance a positive trait because many people can participate in its appreciation and dialogue.

"Relying on their own creative sense during their free time and often in the company of other women, women have added pattern, texture, and color to their lives, making lovely that which could just as well be plain" (p. 38). In today's world, women's leisure is even more difficult to come by. Boundaries are blurred between leisure and periods of working. As Chaney (1996) notes, there has been a decentering of leisure from distinct communal activity to a more privatized participation. At the same time, one's occupation no longer marks one's social identity as much as one's leisure time does. Today's crafting is highly fragmented. Even still, women continue to participate in domestic handwork.

Marginality and Community. Feminist research has not only explored women as existing in marginalized space, but also their community within the margins. Martel and Peterat (1994) acknowledge that women's experiences in schools have led to their marginalized state, or "structural exclusion" (p. 152). By only valuing a certain style of

curriculum, women are automatically placed outside the center of education. In crafting, many of these women share stories of being excluded from the system of art and commerce (Lippard 1996, Kingsley 1987).

However, marginality can become an advantage for women in that it serves as an avenue for group cohesion and community. Walkerdine (1994) challenges a commonly held notion in education research that femininity is automatically equal to poor performance or low self-esteem. She recommends that we focus instead on how femininity is read and constructed. Community becomes a means for establishing attachments and opening dialogue where women begin to see each other as active participants, not just as someone else's definition of womanhood.

"Women in schools create their own celebrations on the margin of the formal curriculum. Exclusion forces them to find their own corner" (Martel and Peterat 1994, p.155). While women crafters aren't generally a part of the art world, they have created their own quilt guilds and on-line craft groups. I would argue that if not for having to find their own space to work and re-invent meaning, women's aesthetic activity would not be as vital and supportive as it is now.

By viewing marginality as a way of life for women popular crafting itself becomes a marginalized activity. While its visual overtones are status quo, the entire practice of craft is not valued or acknowledged as a political or aesthetic activity. Popular craft cannot be dismissed as mainstream and unworthy of study by feminist researchers. Craft's complexity lies in the tension between its appearance of holding power via its use of "acceptable" imagery and its actual low artistic status.

Feminist research is relevant when faced with the task of understanding popular

craft. Where traditionally there existed no acknowledgment, women's handwork is now beginning to be seen as a source of narrative. As opposed to the modernist patriarchal view of women as low-status copiers, a concept of women as members of a community has placed value on the spaces that women share. Our understanding of marginality is expanded when it is seen as a possibility for transformation and solace among women.

Popular Culture

Theoretical Overview

It has only been since the past decade that popular culture began to be taken seriously by the critical pedagogy movement. Like many other contemporary fields, popular culture has the capacity to blend with any subject area. Its flexibility makes it an ideal way to frame popular craft. Postmodern feminist critique alone is insufficient because it tends to ignore or reduce the complexity of the domain of the popular.

While popular culture is a large field with several writers covering a multitude of topics, authors like Giroux (1992) address its pedagogical aspects. Popular culture has had, in my opinion, the misfortune of a) being bogged down by frustrated "literary critics" who b) treat it as a modernist enterprise where writing about the popular will elevate its status in academia.

Both radical and conservative groups do not favor popular culture. According to Giroux, the Left sees it as an "integrative force" used to control large groups of people. The people, of course, do not comprehend what is controlling them and they cannot fight back. Popular culture has no redeeming qualities as it stands for conformity and

passivity. The less cynical among the Left tends to romanticize popular culture as populist culture and therefore authentic. This is the view that popular culture is just something that people like and that no other explanation is necessary. One gets the impression that if one goes poking around asking scholarly questions, one ruins the fun for everyone else.

Conservative groups see culture in terms of mass culture and true culture. Ruling culture usually embodies what is considered classic. In order to become educated, popular forms must be replaced with required reading lists and the like. Popular culture is a perceived threat to civilization. Many authors endorse this view, producing vast amounts of moralizing articles that place television, for example, as the aggressive force that invades the minds of innocent people. In the field of art education, authors like Swanger (1993) express concern about students being caught up in popular imagery, when they should be creative instead.

What is inadequate about both Leftist and conservative views is that neither one sees popular culture as a contradictory site, where people consume and contest meanings. Popular culture is not simply "good" or "bad" but a process of social action (Giroux 1992). Traditional views of popular culture do not consider how power is constructed within popular forms and that people simultaneously accept and resist them. It is necessary to reconceptualize popular culture as a "critical pedagogy of representation" (p. 218).

Relationships to Popular Craft

Nostalgia. Giroux's analysis of Disney in Disturbing Pleasures (1994) demonstrates how innocence has a political side. He begins by quoting Edward Said:

"An alarming defensiveness has crept into America's official image of itself, especially in its representations of the national past" (p. 25). Cultural workers are required to attend to these sites where people are dedicated to a collective forgetting. In the case of popular craft, its continual oversight as a political entity has been nothing but patronizing.

When politics are disguised as innocence, more is at stake than simple deception (p. 29). Nostalgia involves power in that it influences how people understand the past and attempt to re-invent it. "Under the rubric of fun, entertainment, and escape, massive public spheres are being produced which appear too 'innocent' to be worthy of political analyses" (p. 28). This has been one of the reasons fine art has refused to take on the problem of popular craft.

According to Giroux, innocence provides people with a sense of belonging to the creation of history. But along with this comes a desire for security in a relatively hostile world that supersedes complexity and questioning. Much like Disney's mobilization of popular memory that "parades under the longing for childlike innocence, wholesome adventure, and frontier courage," popular craft creates repeated imagery that imagines rural existence as a better way of life (p. 31).

On the one hand nostalgia does acknowledge something hard won. Farming is seen by most people as one of the original American occupations. But on the other hand, the undesirable side of its difficulties is ignored, leaving only pleasant images of happy cows and ducks. "Narrating the past becomes a vehicle for rationalizing the authoritarian, normalizing tendencies of the dominant culture that carry through to the present" (p. 32). Bringing up difficult issues does nothing but create trouble, so keep things the way they are. Such is the message of popular craft.

Coontz (1992) locates nostalgia in the idealization of the family as "the sole repository for standards of decency, duty, and altruism" (p. 97). Families are portrayed as standing alone against society when in fact it is the nuclear, not the extended family that espouses such individualistic values. When people engage in nostalgic thoughts regarding the family, their wish for the "better days" is actually framed in contemporary terms. Coontz describes how our concept of family is actually more modernist than historical. Values like individuality, private property, and public policy based on private affection (i.e. marriage/morality) have more links to modernism than the "good old days."

Previously, the extended family had distinct social roles and responsibilities. Individual fulfillment was not as important as collective obligation (p. 98). The home was not the center of recreation or entertainment as it is now. Morality was a public issue, rather than one's own opinion. As the nuclear family became the ideal, privatization occurred on many levels. Economically, owning property became the right thing to do. Minding one's own business, being honest, hard working, and taking care of one's own were ways to remain "free from vice" (p. 107). For women, personal fulfillment in marriage and the home may have meant more companionship with their husbands, but "it divested motherhood of any larger social and political meaning" (p.154).

What is important about Coontz's work is that she demonstrates how what we construct as nostalgia consists of both myth and cultural insight. She also describes in depth how consumerism plays into this process of constructing nostalgia (see chapter five below).

Conclusion

Since the Reconceptualist movement emerged two decades ago, theories that were once inaccessible to educators have become well known in the field.

Postmodernism, feminist research, and popular culture constantly cross each other's boundaries and illuminate what each has to say concerning pedagogy. It is this blending of the three areas of research that enriches and expands the dialogue of popular craft.

In the chapters that follow, I will explore further how popular craft intersects with postmodernism, feminism, and popular culture. The "method" of text analysis is varied and plural, especially when re-viewing the magazine, rather than the book, as text. The transient, more partial appearance of the magazine requires more than a surface reading.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

I have chosen text analysis as the method and process of my investigation into popular craft. Cherryholmes (1988) and Hicks (1992) use a variety of approaches that relate to text analysis. Both incorporate a postmodern perspective; Hicks' process is also informed by feminist art criticism. In this section I will first outline what type of text I wish to examine. I will then approach the processes of text analysis from a postmodern feminist stance, utilizing the work of Carrington and Bennett (1996), Luke (1996), and McRobbie (1996), and discuss how these will be applied in my own research. They also understand magazines in terms of being popular culture artifacts, rather than texts with "fixed" meanings. This is important in understanding the context of popular craft.

Crafttexts

Popular crafting magazines are an abundant source of text. Nearly every type of craft has its own magazine. These magazines are remarkably similar to each other in format, but within its pages lie a confusing array of colors and images. There is also a specific separation of gender within craft. Men's craft magazines are devoted entirely to construction-oriented wood and metal projects while women's craft magazines encompass all facets of decorating the home space and the body. The magazines I will be analyzing are *Aleene's*, *Crafts*, *Crafts 'n Things*, *Country Woman*, and *Crafting*

Traditions. These are directed primarily at a female audience. I selected these particular magazines due to their general use of "country" motifs and broad range of craft projects, as opposed to magazines that specialize in one technique such as *Plastic Canvas Monthly* or *Crochet*.

By using crafting magazines as text, I will first describe their structural appearance in chapter four. They are primarily visual. The reading comes later when one wishes to make the project according to pre-set directions. The how-to project format is dominant in both male and female craft magazines. It also becomes apparent that the step-by-step project as lesson is similar to how schools ultimately view "quality" learning.

A second form of crafttext that will inevitably be discussed is the craft object itself. In some cases it can be seen as synonymous with the how-to because it becomes impossible to separate the process from the product. The display of finished craft items at seasonal shows is also an intriguing source of text. Selling and buying crafts bring capitalism into the popular craft dialogue. Crafting is admittedly about consumption and production as leisure and enjoyment.

Text Analysis/Cherryholmes

In his book *Power and Criticism* (1988) Cherryholmes describes in great detail his process of analyzing conservative curricular texts: Tyler's Rationale, Bloom's Taxonomy, and Schwab's Practical Four. His analysis is an activity he considers to be a rethinking of educational discourses-practices (p. 1). First, he reviews what the current curricular practices consider important (linearity, structure, accountability) and then he

sets out to identify the traits of such practices.

After addressing issues of poststructuralism and how they relate to texts, speech acts, discourse, and practice, Cherryholmes outlines the basic premises of each of the three conservative texts mentioned above. I have mentioned earlier that several of these qualities are shared by popular craft.

In chapter three, Cherryholmes interprets his observations about conservative curriculum in a poststructural analysis. This is where the inherent contradictions and circularity of text emerges. He locates the voice of authority in conservative texts in its appearance of anonymity and political neutrality (p. 39).

The final stage of his analysis is in chapter four "Meaning, Meanings, Textbooks, and Teaching." In this chapter he argues that meanings are not located in words, but in ongoing discourses (p. 50). He also maintains that textbooks value certain meanings over others, even though they appear to be neutral. The textbook influences how teaching is to be done: as efficiently as possible.

I find Cherryholmes' process most useful when faced with the task of examining craft magazines and craft pedagogy, the how-to. Not only does it serve to identify the structural elements in such texts, it goes one step further to view teaching as a way of mediating the dominant text. Craft's pedagogy lies in its advancement of the how-to.

Visual Text Analysis/Hicks

Along with Cherryholmes, Hicks (1992) goes through a process of analysis in her article "The Construction of Meaning: Feminist Criticism." Her subject is more visual in nature but she treats art as a text with multiple and shifting interpretations. She sees five

tasks of feminist criticism in relation to visual images (p. 26). These tasks are a series of processes that will be underlying my analysis of crafttext because they address the visual image as a powerful textual source of how women are perceived.

The first task involves the contextual nature of meaning and how it is constructed in the viewer. Here, what one sees can be understood to be symbolic. Images reflect certain beliefs about women. What sort of meanings have we placed on the symbols of popular craft? This will influence how we see these objects.

The second task is to compare different images to see if they share similarities or have divergent views of women. Popular craft accepts certain beliefs about women and rejects others. Again, as with context, we are limited by our cultural understanding of these symbols. So it is important to view many different sets of images to get a broader picture of what is happening.

The third task is to bring what we see "out of the world of visual representation and into a more real world situation" (p. 26). Hicks recommends doing this in a narrative style, to further blur the boundaries between the museum and daily use. Popular craft already has a sense of the real world, but it is also a highly idealized activity. Both sides need to be explored simultaneously in this task.

The fourth task is to examine how many contexts inform a visual work in terms of production and viewing consumption. Craft functions in several contexts. There is gift giving, selling, making, collecting, and decorating. It is critical to validate the many different ways craft exists in our consumer culture.

The fifth and final task is to "take action" on the critical analyses that result. What are some alternative ways to view women in craft? Can craft become

reconceptualized as an arena of challenge and change for all crafters? Most importantly, from the standpoint of future research, will crafters be allowed to speak for themselves regarding these changes?

In terms of popular craft, Hicks' "tasks" serve as an important reminder that aesthetic activity doesn't occur in a vacuum. There is political intent behind even the most "benign" of art objects. Both production and consumption inform popular craft.

Magazine Culture

Carrington and Bennett (1996) provide a dynamic example of text analysis from a postmodern feminist viewpoint. They maintain that there has been overgeneralized readings of women's magazines, especially when the conclusion is drawn that popular culture is "the enemy." "Through their consumption girls and women are said to be seduced into a culture of mass consumption and duped by the ideology of romance into a future of domesticity" (p.148). They argue that girls and women are not passive receivers of popular culture. Rather, the culture of magazines is a highly contested terrain.

One possibility is that women consume magazines for play and enjoyment. In the case of Carrington and Bennett's study, girls consume their magazines for sources about their own sexuality and for more open and frank advice on personal matters. This creates a freer textual space. The same argument could be used for craft texts. Women look at them for information and advice pertaining to their own creativity. These magazines offer encouragement in a more democratic sphere, where anyone can participate and succeed at making things. Compared to the fine art world, which is based on exclusion and rank, the world of the magazine promises something for everyone.

Within such a contested space, women can formulate their own concepts of authority. "Little attention has been paid to the way in which the relative status and power of women has paradoxically been enhanced by consumer society's providing women with new areas of authority and expertise" (p. 151). Part of this is due to the nature of magazine advertisements. While homogeneous in appearance, the messages of ads are contradictory. For example, Carrington and Bennett relate that personal hygiene ads make positive statements about body image and menstruation. This conflicts with the other images of dieting and thin models in teen magazines. As women read these texts, they experience an authority that comes with choosing their own meanings.

However, magazines do promote a polarization of genders. Strong is contrasted with weak, masculine with feminine. Carrington and Bennett seek to problematize magazine culture by building a questioning of magazine text into their study. They contrast what they find in the magazines with what existing feminist theory says about women and popular culture. In several instances, the conflict between theory and popular text reflects elitist notions of what women should and shouldn't enjoy.

The value of Carrington and Bennett's project lies in their determination to not accept what they see at first glance, be it teen magazines or feminist research. They explore the intriguing notion that "the relationship between the reader and the text is a pedagogical one" (p. 161). Texts act as an authority figure, yet readers constantly challenge this authority using a variety of complex strategies.

Luke (1996) investigates parenting magazines as an instructional site. "These sites, texts, and social relations are the public forum in which specialized, disciplinary knowledges are transformed into public pedagogies and common sense knowledges of

everyday life" (p.168). The right ways to parent are transmitted via photographs, articles, question and answer columns, and of course, feature articles. Product ads reinforce proper parenting through capitalistic ideals. The ownership of goods demonstrates that one is a parent who provides rather than withholds.

Luke takes her research of child care magazines further by looking at the connection between capitalism and text: "The possibility for discourse to be transformed into merchandise is a fundamental requirement within contemporary capitalist logic" (p.162). This puts popular craft in an exciting theoretical light. Part of what mystifies/upsets others about its existence is that it is pure consumerism-as-meaning. People aren't supposed to see commercialism as capable of generating significant meaning because it isn't "genuine." I maintain that it isn't that popular craft imagery is "false," it's that "the real" is no longer real. Popular craft is a constant reminder of what people are afraid to admit- the tenuous existence of truth or fact on an aesthetic level.

McRobbie (1996) describes women's magazines as "possibly the most concentrated and uninterrupted media-scape for the construction of normative femininity" (p. 172). As she lightly comments, feminist writers are now admitting they enjoy magazines and romance novels. The legitimacy of "women's pleasures" (cooking, fashion, domesticity, etc.) provides different sorts of sites for analysis. These sites do not automatically entail a dependence on men. In many cases women seek to separate themselves from males in order to fully enjoy their own spaces and activities.

The concept of "womanly" is problematic. There is no agreed-upon definition of femininity and to advance one is to risk sounding quasi-essentialist. McRobbie presents the magazine's normative definition of womanhood in order to utilize it for elements of

contrast and consensus. While I agree that one should take care to avoid totalizing discourse, one can't ignore that there exists out in the world a general "sense" of feminine things/domains. Thankfully, McRobbie doesn't shy away from categories. Instead, she simultaneously utilizes and questions them.

Magazine culture is highly competitive. In order to be a successful magazine, the readership must see themselves in the text, but in a non-threatening manner. The challenge becomes one of reflecting the audience in a few basic themes. McRobbie notes that this is no easy task, being that editors are fully aware of the diversity and complexity of their audience. Condensing such variety into homogeneous ads and broad feature articles is quite monumental. It also points to an interesting paradox. We have a divergent readership that can potentially reject a magazine that doesn't adequately simplify them.

I plan to draw on the work of Carrington and Bennett, Luke, and McRobbie as ways to incorporate popular culture in postmodern feminist text analysis. The domain of the popular is particularly complex when it comes to women. In Chapter Four I begin an analysis of crafttext in terms of women and the domestic sphere. The problematics of women's work and whether craft is actually included in that category are also discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR:

HER DECORATIVE DOMAIN WOMEN, THE HOME, AND WOMEN'S WORK

An Aesthetic Double-Whammy

It can be disorienting for most academics and fine artists to experience popular crafts and crafting magazines. The use of repetitive motifs, reliance on sentimentality, and self-conscious decoration goes against the autonomous, rational thinker that higher education calls for. Part of this discomfort with popular craft can be attributed to our ambivalence with the working class and what they represent, since most crafters belong to lower income groups (HIA 1994).

Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) address the often overlooked issue of class as it relates to our educational conceptions of people as failures or successes. They argue that academia, no matter how well-meaning, feels an ambivalence (bordering on disgust) towards the working class. This is true even for educated people who grew up in lower-income families. "There is a set of fantasies invested in and surrounding the working class, all of which place them in an impossible position...we object strongly to others who from behind microphone and notebook do claim to know them, but whose knowledge understands working class people as a constant disappointment" (p. 12). This is particularly true for working class women, who receive criticism from both feminist

and conservative groups. Lower income women are viewed as a "let down" to progressive ideals. They seem to refuse to change or rebel against the system. Often they are portrayed as rigid and authoritarian in their child rearing practices (p. 13).

If, as Walkerdine and Lucey maintain, women's labor is crucial to our understanding of class structures, then could we not view popular craft and crafttext as a source of this understanding? For the sake of analysis, I consider popular craft as one facet of "woman's work." Pagano (1994) states "Women are the objects out of which art is made. And art that women have made has often represented just that state" (p. 257). The art that women create has automatically been dismissed as sentimental because it does not hold up to the male standard of neutrality. When we begin to delve into crafttext, we see an unfolding of all of these issues, though the decorative domain appears unproblematic and cozy.

Women

Photographic Representation

Though not frequently, crafttext does utilize photographs featuring women. This was the first thing I looked for during my analysis. I was primarily interested in how women appeared in photographs, not what they were doing in them. This included looking for type of dress, facial expressions, age, setting, and what is traditionally considered "feminine" (like use of pastel colors, make-up, etc.).

The first thing I noticed was that women of all ages and sizes were used in photos. There were no "runway models" or advertising using women as sex objects that predominate fashion magazines. Also, men were rarely if ever pictured. There were a

few photos that had male/female couples, but other than those examples, men were absent. I took this to mean that I was dealing with a woman's domain, men were not necessary, and that as a woman, I could be any age, size or shape and participate in crafting. Race is another matter. There were no photos featuring women of any race other than Caucasian. This confirms the HIA 1994 consumer survey findings that most crafters are white females

Of the "ordinary" women pictured, most were shown smiling, wearing make-up under soft lighting. Pastels like pink, lavender and blue were featured on attire, though women wore jeans as well as skirts. Flowers in printed fabric, as a decorative motif or prop were common. Women were shown with children, ages ranging from infant to teenager. The most common use of these photographs were to either display the featured project (such as a decorated T-shirt) or to advertise craft supplies. In these advertisements, most of the women were shown holding craft supplies rather than using them.

One of the more interesting advertisements used a close-up of just hands. Even in this case, nail polish was used to distinguish the female's hand from the male's. One ad for adhesives displayed a woman's hand holding a glue gun near a heart shaped pin. Above her hand read "From Delicate..." Underneath, a man's hand held an even bigger glue-gun near a wooden plaque. Above his hand read "...To Heavy Duty." This gender separation went even further by the use of a delicate, curvy font for "delicate" and a bold, block letter font for "heavy duty" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 81).

Although there were mostly instances of such gender differentiation, *Country Woman* featured women as farmers, working with tools as well as posing in their

kitchens. A *Crafts* magazine ad showed an older woman wearing jeans and work shirt holding a tiller. The complexity and contradictions of gender are not limited to academic feminist discourse, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

Verbal Representation

After viewing photographs, I then focused on how women were represented in crafttext language. This included project descriptions (the short headings above how-to's), letters to the editor, adjectives ("cute", "pretty"), pronouns (she, her), and any title that might place a woman in the context of traditional gender roles like wife, mother, grandmother, aunt, daughter, and so forth. This verbal representation of women further reinforces the visual images so as to "naturalize" the domestic domain. For example, the kitchen is described as "her" kitchen. Whenever women are mentioned, they are typically "attached" to some area of the house. However, crafttext is not simply a matter of "women in the home." The home also becomes a space of contradictions as women question their role in postmodern society.

Crafting magazines feature regular columns that are titled with a woman's first name. "Tiffany's Notebook" and "Dear Aleene" are two examples from *Aleene's* magazine that create a sense of familiarity and group membership often utilized by crafttext. A lot of craft related businesses also use feminine first names. One magazine insert card reads "Come to Vanna's house" to view "afghan patterns" and "share tips and hints" (*Aleene's* August 1997). "Craftleen" becomes a nickname for Kathleen, who writes a column for *Crafting Traditions*. In it, she shares "We're making preparations for a happy addition. That's right, we're expecting a baby!...both of our mothers, eager to be

first time grandmas, have been contributing homemades, too." She adds "Any advice from "seasoned mothers" is greatly accepted here!" (April 1998, p. 2).

This centrality of children in women's lives is reflected verbally as well as visually. One kid's corner column suggests: "Just ask mom for the materials" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 45). A caption to a colorful yarn ad featuring young children reads "Wouldn't life be dull without them?" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, pp. 44-45). Using moss in floral arrangements "symbolizes maternal love" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 46). One mother writes "Both Joey who's four and 18 month old Andrea love the soft animal toys I create for them. (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 31). Finally, the cover of *Crafts 'n Things* (April 1998) announces "You can make a Barbie patio set with your favorite little girl!"

Craft projects often utilize the feminine in the form of anticipatory project descriptions aimed at women. Often, these statements are brief, just long enough to capture the reader's attention. These descriptions read like the table of contents, giving only enough information to render the how-to project "feminine" in intent:

*"Granny's Basket- make a great wearable for Grandma!" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 5).

*"All Dolled Up!" (*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 54).

*"Easy to Make Gal Pal Fashion Pins!" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 1).

*"Sew a Country Miss for your Doll Collection!" (p. 12).

Some of these descriptions are encased in nostalgia, such as "Working up designs like this remind me of the happy times Grandma and I spent with hooks in hand and yarn in our laps" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 30), and "Each time Margaret prepares

this full flavored dish, she's reminded fondly of her mother" (p. 22). Not only do these descriptions place women in the domestic domain, they present women in relation to other females. Women "share" ideas and crafting techniques with female family members. This becomes evident in statements like "Both mom and I like lace and ribbons so I included those too" (p. 37).

Crafttext expands the context of sharing by including the entire readership as family. Women are encouraged to write to the magazine with the promise of a warm reception. *Country Woman* magazine extends an invitation: "Do you, like Margaret and other women whose projects we're presenting this issue have a crafty creation to share? Please do!" (August 1997, p. 20). Two women write in to the editor, sending photos of their crafts they made from a how-to featured a month before. The reply reads "Thank you ladies, for sharing your modified versions of the Fall Leaf Place Mat" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 9). Crafttext takes an active role in the construction of sharing. Yet sharing is a very subtle concept, and it becomes hard to determine what is generated by the readership and what crafttext is trying to manufacture. I was amazed at how a simple statement like "Household help is as near as Nettie! Write her with any homemaking questions you might have or surefire solutions you've found" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 24), unconsciously "drew" me into this quasi-manufactured circle of women.

One device that maintained this "draw" was the persistent presence of an "assumed audience." In these kinds of texts, no adjectives or pronouns identified the intended audience as male or female. After encountering gender differentiation on all levels, I found this sudden neutrality very strange. At the same time, I knew that the text

was for me to read and therefore identify with. One example of this "assumed audience" comes from a contest description: "Perhaps you'd prefer to crochet a clever afghan, stamp a beautiful design on a sweatshirt, create quilled bunny trims, fashion a bevy of button covers, fix up spring time fridgies, piece together a cottontail quilt, work up a wooden magazine rack, knit a quick tea cozy or stitch up a stunning sampler" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 64).

In order to make sense of and identify with the "assumed audience" one has to know quite a bit about being female in mainstream American culture. To picture a man doing one of the above mentioned craft projects (with the exception of the magazine rack) is to create a surreal mental image bordering on the improbable. This points to the rootedness of gender roles in both crafting and non crafting situations. Academics argue that the "oppressed" are not really aware of their own condition yet the "oppressed" seem to have no problem knowing they are the "assumed audience."

On the one hand, women are described in relation to men:

*"As a ministers' wife, I'm constantly on the lookout for new ideas for mother/daughter banquets" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 65).

*"My husband gave me a hand by cutting the figure from other wood that I had around. He does that often...I'm afraid to use the saw!" (p. 63).

*"Memory books appeal to the manly men and boys in your family...you'll also get the new "manly papers" too!" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p.61).

Yet on the other hand, women were doing things outside the dictates of traditional gender roles:

*"Alice is a designer by trade, but spends her free time doing everything from

baking Victorian cookies to kickboxing" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 44).

*"When I work on fences I wear a leather carpenter's belt that has a front pouch.

I use it to hold new staples and the old ones I remove. It also has a strap for my hammer" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 24).

*"If you have pitch on your hands from chopping wood or stacking wood, rub

them with petroleum jelly to make it disappear" (*Country Woman* October 1997, p. 24).

Two possibilities emerge from the above excerpts. Either these women are unusual, or women have always done this kind of work, yet there has been little talk about it. I will explore these possibilities further in the section "Women's Work."

Representation in Craft Forms

Femininity becomes a motif when it culminates in a craft object. This part of my analysis focused on the ways women were conceptualized as finished craft items. I was looking for how crafttext interpreted women on the aesthetic level. How-to's that in any way indicated mainstream feminine motifs were noted. Needless to say, there were quite a few projects that featured crafts as female.

The largest category of feminine motifs was angels. Female cherubs decorated boxes and folk art angel dolls were meant to accent country decor. There were projects for a "Southwestern Angel Doll" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 32) and even "Q-Tip Angels" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 70). Some angel projects were quite inventive, combining the practical with the fanciful, like "Salt Shaker Angels." "Dressed in simple country trims, these heavenly gals sprinkle on the charm wherever they go" (*Crafts*

March 1998, p. 68). An advertisement offered a free pattern for "Miss Holly, the Air Freshener Angel" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 91). In all of these examples, angels were seen as female, usually with long curled hair, "cute" or "beautiful" in appearance, wearing lace trimmed dresses, and smiling.

There were ads for vacuum cleaner cover patterns that used the feminine motif of the skirt which covered the vacuum. One of these ads featured a bunny with an apron pocket that held several baby bunnies. A second ad offered three patterns; Granny Mae, Matilda, and Sweet Suzanne, all hillbilly characters wearing calico bonnets. The last ad featured "Millie the Maid." What is stunning about these representations is that the female form of the doll literally and figuratively merges with the vacuum, a physical symbol of housework.

Women are portrayed as decorative, sometimes to the point of excess: "Steppin' into Fall Centerpiece! This bright autumn leaf has her walkin' shoes on and is ready to strut her stuff for your table. All aglitter with a festive fabric bow and painted gold veins, she gives new meaning to the brilliant colors of fall" (*Crafts* October 1997). The project photo features a bright orange wooden leaf with smiley face atop a pair of shoes. A cluster of plastic nuts and leaves decorates this ensemble. "Dressed up Egg Gals" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 38) and "Pretty Pig Candle Holders" (p. 7) are other examples of excess and eclectic decoration associated with femininity.

One project gave a suggestion of how to transform "Swinging in Spring Bunny" into a female: "By modifying the face to resemble a girls', changing the paws to hands and feet, and adding curly hair instead of ears, you can create a country lass to last you all year long" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 24). Other projects came appropriately

dressed, such as a chicken little doll wearing a tutu, "Harvest Helen" doll in autumn attire (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 57), and "Birdie Bag Holder", her apron body for keeping plastic grocery bags (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 22).

I read these crafts as the way women are gendered to be mothers, housewives, perfect angels and excessive beings. But I also see these craft projects as ways women can interpret all aspects of their gender without necessarily having to explain their own unique personalities. In other words, women are playing around with and making fun of the more ridiculous notions of mainstream femininity. It is much like make-up having the potential to be oppressive or a viable means of artistic play and fantasy. Because women have been objectified in all areas of their lives, the notion of gender as a collectible artifact isn't so strange. Women gather items around them that are motifs of their experience, like "Millie the Maid" vacuum covers and cherub figurines. While it is not certain how each woman feels about these "collectibles", they are building such collections through the manufacture of crafts.

The Home

Visual and Verbal Representation

The domestic domain is heavily represented in crafttext. Whether just a hint of home emerged in a placemat or an entire living room scene, it was obvious that one's dwelling was a topic of interest. Before looking at how the home was linked with popular craft and women, I examined crafttext for images and statements about the home. Anything related to furnishings, shelf displays, kitchen items, table settings, and sayings like "home sweet home" were noted. What I was after was an initial level of

representation, even if it only formed the backdrop to a larger concept of home.

Coziness was a common theme. An ad in *Aleene's* presented an inviting scenario related to the home: "There's no place like home, especially when its brimming with cozy afghans beckoning you to sit and relax...toasty treasures that are perfect for fireside cuddling" (February 1998, p. 27). The afghan in the photo was displayed draped over a comfy chair next to a table bearing a cup of tea, book, and reading glasses. *Country Woman* shows a house covered in snow with glowing windows (February 1998, p.68). A home can become cozy to the point of inspiring retreat from the world "...where it is warmer to stay inside rather than venture out" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 11).

Homes were "happy" places. This was reinforced by craft projects decorated with smiling figures, such as a table setting covered with happy pumpkins (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 41) and a kitchen shelf containing contented folk art cat dolls (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 29). The happiness message came through loud and clear on a red calico house pin that read "Happy Home" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 34). Even a Halloween theme creates this pleasing environment: "What you'll find on these six pages will turn your home into a happily haunted house come October 31st" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 28).

The word "home" appeared in many forms. One ad offered an instructional video titled "At Home With Flowers" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 92). "Down Home Delights" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 1), "country home cooking" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 25), "homegrown charm" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 40), and "down-home recipes" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 1) were other examples of linguistic play. "Homespun" and "homemade" were also common descriptions.

After looking at photo after photo, I began to sense a heightened artificiality to craft's portrayal of home. Most of the pictures had a stage set quality, with the exception of people's actual houses in *Country Woman* magazine. Any craft project featured in a domestic setting easily matched the color scheme of its surrounding decor. One preferred decorating style was Classical, with subdued greys, burgundies and navies. Of course, "country" made an overwhelming showing, such as in a pair of colonial cross stitch dolls displayed next to copper molds and kettles (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 35). Another collection of craft items was perfectly integrated with its pink and mint green setting. The caption promised "springtime beauty year round" (*Crafts 'n Things*, April 1998, pp. 30-31).

There were distinct regions of the home, the kitchen being the most public, followed by the living room. A large portion of domestic "stagings" were impossible to pinpoint in terms of location within the household. There were shelves of bric-a-brac, a table with a vase of flowers, and the like. I sensed here that the home had different creative purposes, one being function and the other for display. We tend to think of the home as absolutely practical and mundane when in actuality there are areas of excess and opulence in many dwellings. The home is a site of decorative possibility, as evidenced by the project displays seen in craft magazines. Whether gilded figurines and wreaths embedded with silk roses and pearls or a raffia centerpiece set on burlap, opulence was not a forbidden element of decor.

Lippard (1995) addresses this opulence as it relates to women. "The over-decoration of the home and the fondness for bric-a-brac often attributed to female fussiness or plain "bad taste" can just as well be attributed to creative restlessness. Since

most homemade hobby objects are geared toward home improvement, they inspire less fear in their makers of being selfish or self-indulgent" (p. 133). However, despite the guise of thriftiness of do-it-yourself home decoration, popular craft is a thriving industry. Perhaps women do not "rationalize" their crafting at all. The "takeover" of the home via decoration, even down to the smallest corner shelf, is an active and proud display of consumerism and capitalism at its finest.

The home becomes symbolic of purchasing power, as well as coziness. This is beautifully illustrated by miniaturization, where the crafter can buy or make their own "little houses." These tiny home figurines are totally contained environments. "Birdhouses in Bloom", a set of porcelain dwellings that resemble Victorian mansions more than aviaries, boasts "from the diamond-paned windows to the decorative roof, you will be enchanted with every intimate detail" (*Crafts*, October 1997, p. 71). An ad for the "Micro Mini Dollhouse Club" invites "begin your membership with this charming Victorian Bay dollhouse kit" (p. 93). A faux stained glass paint ad showing a Tudor cottage promises that "our house will beautify your home" (*Crafts 'n Things*, April 1998, p. 11).

Today, it might be financially impossible to ever own a home, but that doesn't stop the dream. Rather than basking in sparseness (as some members of the culturally elite do), lower income crafters decide to decorate to the point of spectacle, in order to display what purchasing power they do have. With crafting, it becomes more evident that the home is a site of self-conscious ornamentation, not just a safe retreat from the world.

The Relationship of the Home to Popular Craft

Thompson (1994) writes about the absence of Home Economics in education. She describes it as the "other woman's movement...not even there...an invisible part of the curriculum. Its practitioners are routinely denied the opportunity to speak in their own voice" (p. 184). After studying the practice of Home Economics, her impression of its curriculum as stagnant and irrelevant changed to her viewing it as an intelligent, active field. She realized that "society does not recognize most so called women's work as 'real activity' because it is usually associated with others' development rather than self-enhancement or self-employment" (p. 185).

Home maintenance can be categorized as part of what Thompson calls the "Hestian" or private sphere. This contrasts with the "Hermean" or public sphere, mostly populated by men. "Hestia's flame symbolized family, connection, continuity, and the interdependence of the public and private spheres" (p. 186). The Hermean sphere has been responsible for the division between home and public place. As a result, the Hestian sphere was relegated to invisibility. "Males were given the leisure to pursue the more 'intellectual' work" (p. 186). Since women were busy maintaining the domestic sphere, they did not have such leisure.

Though semi-essentialist in tone, Thompson's metaphorical explanation of the division between private and public partly accounts for the home being viewed as insignificant and non-intellectual. Likewise, crafts that are for the home are mere "frill" and not important in the grand aesthetic scheme of things. The relationship of the home to popular craft is expressed in the proliferation of how-to projects that are for domestic

use. Yet practicality can hardly describe many of these crafts. Excessive decoration, whether physically (like a frame encrusted with buttons) or conceptually (such as "country" styles) is a part of popular craft and home decor. Decoration will be discussed further under the section "Woman's Work."

Crafttext provides countless projects for the home. Under the category of table decor, a crafter has the option of making the following:

*"Perky Place Mat: "Any cup of coffee will feel right at home set down on this pretty placemat" (*Country Woman* February 1998, p. 22).

*"Ribbons and Roses Napkin and Placemat Set" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p.47).

*"Faux Flowers Centerpiece" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, pp. 24-25).

*"Turn clay pots into turkeys for your table. Make an adorable holiday centerpiece" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 30).

*"Terra Cotta Napkin Rings; Corncob Candle Holders" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 24).

*"Fruits of Your Labor Napkin Holders" (*Aleene's* February 1998, p. 20).

There were several choices among the bed linen/accessories category:

*"Painted Pillowcases" (*Aleene's* February 1998, p. 54).

*"Bedside Keeper" (made of tops of old blue jeans; pockets for holding remote control, crossword puzzle book, etc.) (p. 34).

*"Sweet dreams come naturally in a bed warmed by this beautiful coverlet" (*Country Woman* February 1998, p. 16).

*"Luxurious Ribbon Pillows" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 70).

An amazing number of home decor items were wreaths. Some wreaths were

meant for interior walls while door wreaths marked the boundary between the home and the outside world. A wreath could be decorated with any material, such as plastic canvas poinsettias (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 52), dried flowers (*Crafts 'n Things* April 1998, pp. 12-13), clay pots painted to resemble pumpkins (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p.15), or seashells (*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 18). The only feature that every wreath shared was that they were round. Otherwise, for the sake of variety, if it could be glued, sewed, stapled, fused, woven or welded, anything could go on a wreath.

Some of the more interesting popular craft items were multi-purpose in design. These projects went above and beyond both form and function, bearing a unique fusion of opulence with the ordinary. The "Spring Air Freshener Birdhouse" was a flower pot, sculpture, and household deodorant in one. "With the garden fresh fabric and bright sunflower decorating the birdhouse, you can almost smell spring in the air" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 36). For the kitchen, the "Birdie Bag Holder" provides a dainty dispenser for plastic grocery sacks--the crow's apron dress (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 22).

Judging from the sheer number of projects for the home, popular craft has a far-reaching connection with the domestic domain. It is a pleasing connection, pointing to endless decorative possibilities. But what does this have to do with women and how they view the home? How do they see themselves "within the home?" Perhaps the Hestian sphere can be expanded via popular craft.

The Relationship of the Home to Women

Home is no longer a "set" locale for women (Probyn 1990). Most women are employed outside the home, yet they continue to call up domestic imagery in the form of

decorative crafts. The house has persisted as an important symbol of prosperity, independence, family, and happiness. It also represents key tensions between duty and freedom, comfort and smothering. Crafttext portrays the home as a woman's domain, used for entertaining guests, cooking, crafting, and relaxing. If there were any negative thoughts about the home in craft magazines, they were barely detectable.

One function shared by both home and women was entertaining guests. Often this was connected to cooking and serving food. One *Crafting Traditions* reader contributes "I love to bake, especially for friends. These cookies are a particular favorite I make for gatherings in the fall" (October 1997, p. 22). Later, in the same issue, another reader promises that her recipe "will work for family meals and friendly gatherings in almost any season" (p. 24). Still a few pages over, a heading declares "This cake is sure to conjure up a host of smiles for your event" (p. 39).

Other home related items were designed specifically for guest viewing. A "Family Showcase Project" in *Aleene's* had an entire wall devoted to a museum-like arrangement of photographs and memorabilia. A caption underneath read "Family and friends are never far away with this gorgeous gallery display" (August 1997, p. 43). Another project suggests "greet your guests with cheery clay pot pumpkins" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 4). One crafter's handy hint following a plastic canvas project subtly implied that guests would inevitably see one's home: "If these colors don't match your child or grandchild's room, pick plastic canvas in more suitable shades" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 11). "Suitability" becomes important when one's home will be seen by others. So the home is not entirely a private space.

Country Woman magazine held ongoing decorating contests and they

photographed the winners in their re-decorated homes. Winning rooms had both a definite color scheme and decorating motif, such as the patriotic kitchen described by its owner: "Looking up, the patriotic color scheme in the kitchen curtains I designed fits in with the blue and white checked wallpaper to the cooking and dining spaces...It's perfect for serving guests buffet style!" (August 1997, p. 4). Another winning kitchen had more of a colonial harvest theme. "It's prime time for preserving- so family and friends know exactly where to find me...right here in the kitchen...I wanted to make sure my favorite room was well rooted in the past" (October 1997, pp. 4-6). Janet boasts about her living room: "Now we feel a sense of belonging and pride here, surrounded by things that are all a part of who we are. Is it any wonder this room has become the heart of our country home?" (p. 42).

Other women were determined to re-decorate for the sole purpose of carving out some privacy. "For years, Lynette was on pins and needles waiting for her dream craft room to become a reality." She says about the room: "It was high on my wish list forever. I drew up the plans, then I added the final touches; painting wall papering, and decorating. I'm thrilled with the results!" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 46). In the same issue, the second prize winner explained "when I purchased a new sewing machine recently, I knew that I'd need a place all my own to work on projects. A little-used closet caught my eye. This is the first room I have ever had that's only for sewing and crafts. I love the privacy!" However, privacy can be a relative term, as she adds: "and, since it's just off the family room and right around the corner from the kitchen, I also know my family can easily find me if they need me" (p. 48).

The demands of family upon one's space and crafting time became clear during a

recent conversation with one of my co-workers. We were joking about how much sewing we could get done when our husbands weren't around. My co-worker then stated emphatically "whenever I sit down to sew, I consider it my time, no interruptions." From the rest of our conversation I gleaned that her husband and son would come into her "sewing room" (half of a small guest bedroom) just to sit and talk. Or, they'd walk around, touching her sewing equipment and projects. The following week she reported that her son "knocked down my iron and now I have to use my old one." Maybe a woman's place isn't in the home after all.

Woman's Work

All controversy about it aside, it is hard to accurately define "woman's work." Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) believe this is because it is usually compared with a) manual labor performed by males, or b) non-domestic career women. "With notable exceptions, women as both workers and housewives are represented as a conservative force, unable to recognize their oppression as women or exploitation as workers" (p. 71).

Certainly there are assumptions about the "labors" of housework; that it is harder than any other career path, or more fulfilling. Coontz (1992) studied the practice of housework between the 1900's and the 1940's. She found that during this time, fewer children were born, and the need for full-time housework declined. Not only were more goods available to help with housework, many of the items once produced in the home could be purchased ready-made. However, the sentimentalization of motherhood remained (p. 164). What she calls "make-work" took the place of obsolete chores. The extra time left by technology had to be filled in to keep up appearances of being busy.

Women who recognized the deliberate quality of ironing sheets or napkin folding quickly grew disenchanted with household labor. Some went on to join the growing feminist movement of the '60's and '70's (p. 165). In many ways, popular craft has retained a "make-work" quality, though not the obligatory sort of the 1950's.

Photographic Representation of "Women's Work"

During this phase of the analysis, I considered "women's work" to be, simply, work done by women. At first, I expected to find the typical examples, like sewing, cooking, and child care. These were evident, but soon a broader picture of feminine labor emerged. Not only were women docile crafters, they also herded cattle and tended the family greenhouse business. It was tempting to exclude this more varied portrait of women's work in favor of a simpler scenario of "oppression." However, the diversity of female labor in crafttext could not be ignored.

Some "traditional" representations of women's work were: playing with children, crafting, cooking, serving dinner, quilting, and weaving. Again, the women doing these activities were not one set age or size. The visual stereotypes of lower income groups (raggedy furniture, old clothes, dirty kids) were absent. Instead, women were carrying out the above activities in clean, colorful settings that were heavily embellished with crafts.

I was then fascinated by what I saw in other photographs. There were women doing carpentry, loading hay, and picking grapes in hot weather. These weren't idealized photos, either. The facial expressions revealed that there was heavy labor involved in these tasks. I also thought back to my husband telling me about his grandma building her

first house from scratch. She did the same work as her spouse, including plumbing, wiring and roofing. Women's work, especially among lower income women, has always included the manual labor that is typically associated with men. Yet it is not seen as "their" work, just part of what needs to be done at the time.

Perceptions of "Women's Work"

Crafttext advances many opinions about women's labor, focusing mostly on craft as it compares with other work. Popular craft is shown as a pleasurable and worthwhile activity: "There is something very satisfying about beginning a project, watching it progress, and completing it. It's exciting to have a finished creation to show for your efforts" (*Aleene's* February 1998, p. 31). One crafter states "the last four years have been particularly active for me. I've tried all sorts of techniques and really gone "wild" with my crafting" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 40). *Crafts 'n Things* invites women to send in their ideas: "Many of our designs come from crafters, just like you, who enjoy making things for their families or friends or as a way to relax and unwind" (April 1998, p. 5). An enthusiastic crafter exclaims: "I'm pretty sure I was born with a paint brush in my hands!" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 41).

Crafting was presented as a therapeutic antidote to everything from work related stress to bodily ailments: "So what's a woman to do? We can medicate, meditate, exercise, try physical therapy, go to a support group, punch a pillow, or use alternative therapy to reduce stress and pain...Me? I think of crafting. I believe it's one of the best stress reducers available." In the same article, other crafters give examples of their positive encounters with craft: "Cross stitch is a real help when you have pain and stress

to cope with." "When we craft, we focus on the task at hand, on the canvas, the cloth, the beads. We discard our everyday thoughts and worries, there simply is no room for them in our minds. We live in the moment" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 114).

Some women related how their family and friends participated in craft projects. This was usually presented as a positive way to promote "family togetherness" and sharing in an otherwise hurried world. "Our daughter and I are both teachers and that gives us lots of reasons to make school type designs" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 8), writes one crafter. Another woman declares "crafting for a crowd is nothing new...I've been teaching youngsters at church how to make projects for years" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p.21). Sometimes husbands would join in the fun after seeing their wives working on crafts. There were several statements regarding the idea that men observed from a distance before participating as either the audience: "Quilts I've crafted over the years fill every room...my husband and sons don't mind a bit" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 59), or helpers: "My husband gave me a hand by cutting the figure from other wood that I have around" (p. 63). Others became crafters: "My husband, Terry, didn't get involved until he bought a saw for himself a few years ago. Now he's an active crafter like the rest of us!" (p. 13).

What I also observed was a sharp distinction between chores and crafting. Women were emphatic about maintaining this separation. Craft time was their time, even if it meant putting other housework aside for the moment. The subdivision of women's work into "fun work" and "necessary work" is reflected in what readers have to say via crafttext. One woman writes to the editor: "I was surprised when I received several bottles of Aleene's paints and glues for Mother's Day. Please don't let my family

know; I like it more than the dishwasher I'd been asking for" (*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 7). Another woman cheerfully described the craft/work distinction: "Since I stopped working, I've constantly been on the go. That's just fine though, because I love being busy. I do find time to craft, thanks to speedy craft projects" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 16).

For some women, crafting is top priority. The following quotes from *Crafting Traditions* illustrate this importance:

*"I was thinking about spring when the idea to create a whimsical bird came to me. So I dropped what I was doing and got busy" (April 1998, p.5).

*"Crafting is my life. I can't think of a better way to spend my time" (p. 52).

*"The kids always need new sweaters or vests. When they do, I'm more than happy to pick up my knitting needles to fix up something like this pullover. Knitting for our children is my favorite pastime" (p. 30).

The amount of time put into their crafts was often the subject of spousal commentary. Men seemed ambivalent about time spent on crafting as opposed to other types of work. "Will you put that knitting down and just relax Annie?" my husband, Louie, sometimes scolds as he sees me concentrate on getting a pattern right. I've tried to explain that knitting is relaxing for me. My grandma taught me how to do it, and it's the one handcraft I've kept up" (*Country Woman*, February 1998, p. 2). "My husband calls me "Quiltenstein" because I'll stay up until the wee hours working on a patchwork project" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 32). Women would manipulate time so it could be in their favor. One crafter came up with her own version of the golden rule: "How good a meal tastes doesn't always equal how long it takes to prepare" (*Country*

Woman October 1997, p. 37). *Country Woman's* food editor explained how she often leaves the cooking to her husband during the summer because she has other things to do (August 1997, p. 36). Another crafter relates how she "sneaks in designs after everyone has gone to bed" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 28).

Because it takes a lot of equipment and materials, crafting can easily absorb a household. Finished projects cover every bare surface, not to mention the supplies stored on tables, in closets, and anywhere that there's an empty spot. This may be partly an assertion of one's presence and partly a resistance against what a house is supposed to be for (i.e. chores). This resistance on the part of women crafters was always couched in humorous language: "'Usually I do my crafts throughout the entire house,' she relates. Lately though, her active toddler and a playful new puppy have managed to change that arrangement. 'These days, I have to confine my crafting to our bedroom. My husband is enthusiastic about my projects but even I have to admit the bedroom is getting crowded!'" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 16).

In the same issue, another crafter jokes: "My house is not my own these days. It's a craft house. I used to confine my designs to a table in the den. Now supplies and crafts have spilled over into almost every other room" (p. 61). A handout at my quilt guild gave sixteen reasons for buying fabric. Quilters are familiar with having to rationalize the need for building one's stash. It's not enough to simply explain that one likes fabric. Instead, quilters enjoy developing humorous justifications like the following:

*"It keeps without refrigeration, you don't have to cook it to enjoy it, you never have to feed it, change it, wipe its nose or walk it!"

*"Like dust, it's good for protecting previously empty spaces in the house, like the

ironing board, the laundry hamper, the dining room table..."

*"Stress with dealing with the Fabric Control Officer (my husband) made me do it."

*"Buy it now before your husband retires and goes with you on all your shopping expeditions" (unknown source).

Though humorous, much resistance can be gleaned from the above statements.

These women do not wholeheartedly embrace nor do they reject household work. They do dislike it and would rather craft on their own time, in their own space. Often, this is not possible, so they make their crafting highly visible by spreading supplies around the house and joking about it. The presence of crafts cannot be denied, especially when used collectively as a decorative source.

Decoration as Transformation and "Making Special"

Dissanayake (1988) discusses the role of the arts in all cultures. She lists three characteristics of creative activity: 1) the arts are ubiquitous, 2) they are integral to many activities of daily life, and 3) they are a source of pleasure. "Humans are something more than animals because they do not take their world for granted on its own blind terms, but interpret it, fashion their experience of it in multitudinous and multifarious ways" (p. 11). In terms of Western fine art, no other society has made art for its own sake, to be judged on aesthetic criteria alone. Museumized art exists for nothing except itself (p. 40).

Even though creative activity is a universal phenomena, not every culture appreciates the same things. Some societies value originality while others prefer realism and tradition (p. 49). In the case of popular craft, originality has an entirely different

definition, probably meaning "the first copy" or "I made this." Holding up popular craft to the standards of fine art will find it severely lacking. Dissanayake suggests that we "examine what the arts do for people, rather than what they appear to be in their various manifestations" (p. 60). She argues that the arts have "survival value" (p. 62), implying that life would be anemic without some kind of aesthetic activity.

Dissanayake's concept of "making special" is one of her greatest theoretical contributions towards an understanding of art. For her, making special "implies intent or deliberateness. When shaping or giving artistic expression to an idea or object that is artistic, one gives (or acknowledges) a specialness that without one's activity or regard would not exist" (p. 92). When "making special," the everyday is transformed into a different realm, a highly embellished one. "Positing a human need or tendency to make things special allows us to explain why many people are able to live quite contentedly without "good" art" (p. 97). Making special ensures that what is being embellished will continue as an important personal and group activity, such as popular craft.

Embellishment meets two important human needs: for simultaneous order and disorder.

In terms of popular craft and crafting magazines, decoration is a large part of making special. It's also about transformation, taking something old or plain and turning it into something spectacular. Examples of transformation abounded, whether in project descriptions or advertisements:

*"Old sweaters take on a new look in home decor" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 13).

*"Recycle a liter bottle into a bright bee buddy" (p. 45).

*"Instant pressed flowers add a touch of elegance to an ordinary box" (p. 50).

*"Turn plain clear glass dishes into romantic Victorian glassware" (p. 56).

*"The box itself is transformed into a treasure" (p. 59).

*"Some of these furniture pieces I got at the thrift store and spruced them up"

(*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 7).

*"From conventional to dimensional" (shows a before shot of a plain living room,

then the same room re-decorated) (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997,

pp. 82-83).

*"Just fit the topper over any handle bag to transform the bag into a creative

gift package" (p. 105).

Transformation could occur with just a few materials, as evidenced by the

following claims:

*"With just paper, glue, and a few trims, kids of all ages can transform simple

lollipops into smiling leprechauns" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 22).

*"Paper mache', paint, and quilt batting are transformed into a right jolly old

elf" (p. 28).

*"Just four easy stitches transform a plain tablecloth and napkins into wonderful

heirlooms" (p. 42).

*"A snippet of this and a pinch of that transforms plain salt and pepper shakers

into wonderful little angels in just minutes" (p. 68).

Recycling was a popular means to achieve transformation. Several craft projects were built around the use of old, ordinary objects, such as the "Bee Buddy" project described above. The fact that human intervention could result in something even better was enticing:

*"An old pair of jeans becomes the perfect caddy with this no-sew project!"

(*Aleene's* February 1998, p. 34).

*"If your pillow cases lack pizzazz, you'll want to try your hand at this terrific

project. You can transform the ordinary into the adorable" (p. 54).

*"Take your old belts, emboss them with glue and make them a wonderful

accessory all over again" (p. 59).

*"Transform an ordinary photo album into a timeless treasure destined to bring

memories back to life in fun and decorative style" (p. 62).

*"Even the shapes I attached were cut from leftover wood scraps. After a few

coats of paint, everything looked nice and festive" (*Crafting Traditions*

April 1998, p. 18).

It became obvious that "making special" was one of popular craft's biggest functions, operating on two levels. One was the "specialness" that the crafter added as she manufactured the item. The other level was craft items used to decorate an interior space. Even though crafttext endorsed a patterned way of making special, crafters still considered their aesthetic activity as "creative" and "personal":

*"That's the beauty of painting on glass. What you can imagine, you can actually

create" (*Aleene's* February 1998, p. 51).

*"Rather than coating the lamb in coconut, you could add extra frosting and swirl

it as you spread it in order to create a textured curly coat" (*Crafting*

Traditions April 1998, p. 22).

*"I made an original Santa Claus can with a large coffee can and textured snow

paint to add dimension to hair, eyebrows, mustache, and beard"

(*Crafts 'n Things* April 1998, p. 8).

*"I create all kinds of whimsical figures from every angle. Then I let my imagination go wild!" (*Country Woman* October 1997, p. 14).

*"As I model their wrinkles, noses, and cheekbones, I feel that I'm getting to know each doll's character. So they are hard to part with" (p. 47).

Part of popular craft's triumph of form over function involves its dramatic impact via "loud" use of materials. The glitters, paints, sequins, bows, laces, and yarns of today are quite different from older craft forms which sported more subdued materials. Being noticed and part of something exciting was seen as a positive experience. One project ad claimed "now you'll be able to spot your luggage in a flash as it comes around the carousel...you'll be boldly going where no crafter has gone before" (*Aleene's* February 1998, p. 58). A crafter writes in: "Everyone who drives by my house takes a second look" (*Crafts 'n Things* April 1998, p. 8). Another statement promises "you'll have folks standing at attention when you deck yourself out in this colorful stars and stripes vest!" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 18).

Some crafters described their projects with a particularly bold flair for the dramatic. It wasn't enough to merely decorate, all-out embellishment was the rule, such as this jacket project: "Mr. Blackbird perches above a flower-filled pocket while more flowers spill over the shoulder. When the gluing is done, the painting fun begins! Accent the appliqués with dimensional fabric paints and a medley of buttons. Then, for a final touch, add a berry studded vine down the front" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 30). On the following page, one ad declares in large letters "DECORATE YOUR LIFE!" (p.31). An excited reader describes her latest project: "When you decorate the walls, let your

imagination soar! After gluing straw flowers, green ferns, and orange plumes on the sides, I put a garden in the middle. The pathway is cut from a sheet of sandpaper and is edged with small seashells" (*Country Woman* October 1997, p. 45). Finally, a crafter describes her creative process: "I thought I could use the corn cobs to brighten a couple candle holders I'd already crafted but never really liked. To do so, I removed the candle cups from the holders' bases, then affixed the cobs between those pieces. I added raffia and silk flowers for good measure. Now I'm happy with my candle holders" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 25).

After reading every example of decoration as making special and transformation that I could find, I began to feel sorry for those who lived with bare, minimal walls. Even though the fine art world dictates that only certain aesthetic activities are worthwhile, or that we, as artists, need to "teach" them these correct activities, crafters were investing significant energy into their embellishments. These activities were lively, pointing to a vibrancy that comes with art being a part of daily life. If popular craft was occurring on the margins, then the margins were colorful places indeed.

Conclusion/Contradictions

Regarding women, the home, and women's work, my analysis yielded more than I had anticipated. First, I came to understand that popular craft is representative of women's traditional gender roles. However, I found that these roles were also open to commentary via the making and collecting of gendered craft items. This contradicts the common misconception of working class women as "politically naive" (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). Crafters are quite aware of the markers of mainstream femininity and they

even heighten and exaggerate its characteristics while crafting.

Another contradiction emerged during my analysis of the home. While the domestic domain has many private and mundane qualities, it is also a site of capitalistic activity, sometimes to the point of conspicuous display. Women do not view the home as entirely theirs, either. Many crafters have had to strategically manipulate their families in order to find their own crafting space. Privacy takes on a whole new meaning, especially when women are using their homes for "appropriate display" (via matching colors) before mom comes to visit.

Finally, I realized that "women's work" was not a stable, neat category of labor. Most crafters made it clear that chores were one thing, crafts another. The use of humor as resistance, like anecdotes about "taking over" the house with craft supplies, was especially interesting. Crafting was part of the domestic domain, but it seemed too much "fun" to be considered labor. Yet it isn't just play, either. Chapter Five will explore the political dimensions of nostalgia and craftviews such as ease, speed, artificiality, open participation, and gift giving.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CRAFTVIEWS

The Craft Community and its Values

Popular craft is as much about capitalism as it is about making things. Certainly, personal enjoyment and relaxation are part of the craft experience, but the myth of "monetary innocence" often associated with art does not apply. Rather than arguing that consumerism oppresses the working class, I want to examine how popular craft has become a adaptive strategy enacted by people in reaction to their being left out of the fine art system, as well as both middle and upper classes. Crafting becomes a coping mechanism rather than a cause of an oppressive culture.

Coontz (1992) analyzes American consumerism from the 1900's to the present. Her overview is particularly relevant because she links capitalism and industrialism with the family. The rationalization of buying things, as if it were a moral act, is behind a lot of popular craft, especially under the heading of "nostalgia." Attitudes towards the purchasing of goods changed around the turn of the century. Ethics of hard work and restraint began to wear thin as people became aware of how affordable machine made products were. In other words, if everyone deferred gratification, who would buy stuff? How would the economy grow?

Between 1870 and 1900, the volume of advertising multiplied more than ten-fold. Catalogue sales and bigger, more elaborate window displays fed into the national urge to buy (p. 170). Coontz notes that "even the word 'consumption' lost its earlier connotations of destroying, wasting or using up, and came instead to refer in a positive way to the satisfying of human needs and desires" (p. 170). Most of this advertising was aimed towards women, since they purchased three-fourths of all personal goods. Unfortunately, one side affect of this involvement tended to make feminist concerns and causes trivial.

By the 1940's advertising increased further by 400% (p. 171). Hedonism became moralized by the catch phrase "you deserve it." Such materialism was contained in the '50's by becoming linked with the family and individuality. In the '60's, there was no longer a questioning of the morality of hedonism because, after all, "business was business" not a "revolution" (p. 173).

Since the 1960's, consumerism has taken many interesting, albeit contradictory turns. For example, one device involves the use of "liberation" language to sell girdles or Nike shoes (p. 174). Coontz points out that the same forces that are producing "anti-family" ads of the present were the ones who promoted family life in the '50's. The theme of the ad is a mere vehicle to sell and is easily interchangeable. "The modern media has not become anti-family, it has simply become more sophisticated in targeting distinct audience segments" (p. 175).

Yet one cannot simply write off marketing as an evil, sweeping force. "There are sources of shared meaning and social activism in some of the expanded expectations fanned by consumerism. Audiences, furthermore, are not passive, and they may extract different meanings from ads and cultural products than are intended by their producers"

(p. 175). There seems to be such shared meanings within popular craft.

Finally, Coontz argues that part of our discomfort with the media arises from a denial that something other than human agency creates the self. This results in a form of deception: "The more people deny the social basis of their identity, the more easily seduced they are by consumerism's promise that one can become anything one wishes. And the more we see our identity as a personal achievement that can be constructed or made over with the aid of commodities...the more we value but the less we are able to define the one good that becomes scarce in a consumer society: sincerity" (p. 177).

In my analysis of crafttext, I found five values held by the craft community. First was "open participation", a democratic craftview where anyone could join the group. A second craftview was "speed", or craft projects judged on how fast they could be completed. Thirdly, "ease" was important so as not to discourage crafters. "Artificiality" or making one material represent another was highly valued. Lastly, the crafting community saw "gift giving" as a culmination of their creative efforts.

Open Participation

Against a backdrop of consumerism, the popular craft community advances its ideas, one of them being open participation and how one this re-defines originality. Our traditional understanding of what is original is made problematic with the presence of popular craft. If there are large numbers of participants that have relatively equal group status, then can the crafts they produce be original? What if the craft items begin to resemble each other, as in the "country" look? The answer popular craft gives is to do away with what is supposed to be "original" and make community participation top

priority. This is in many ways an adaptive strategy, as outlined by one crafter: "New and improved techniques seem to be increasing the quilting population, making them more efficient and happier, while still allowing for individuality" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 34).

Originality has not always been a standard of art (consider ancient Greek and Roman works). Wolff (1981) calls our society's adherence to artistic originality "a retrospective judgment" placed on the art object, more than a current assessment of uniqueness (p. 24). Crafters are interested in "the now", at least in terms of group membership. As one designer says "there really is something for everyone. Everybody's always looking for more ways to bring more people into the party" (*Aleene's* February 1998, p. 51). In order to entice future crafters, widening the circle is a must: "if they have a good experience, they're more likely to make a commitment to another project" (p. 33).

Open participation is one such strategy. By making anyone feel that they can accomplish a project or try a new technique, a fear of failure diminishes. *Crafts 'n Things* invited: "you may have shied away from submitting an idea because you're not a professional designer. But we think a dynamic craft magazine like ours has room for both pro's and non-professionals" (March 1998, p. 5). One reader exclaimed "I never miss your show. You make everyone feel like we're part of your family!" (*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 7). An ad for clay molds assured readers: "Not a sculptor? No problem!" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 94).

As a craftview, open participation is quite formulaic. All an ad or designer has to do is say "you don't have to be an expert of some sort in order to accomplish this." The invitation has been made:

*"You don't have to be a florist to make this simple arrangement" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 57).

*"Now you don't have to be an advanced decorative painter to achieve beautiful rich blended results" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 2).

*"And they're so easy to crochet that even a beginner can be a crafty green thumb" (*Country Woman* February 1998, p. 19).

*"If you can thread a needle, you can do silk ribbon embroidery" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 105).

Part of a collective approach to creative activity involves ways of making crafting easier so that no one will get discouraged or frustrated too quickly. An open invitation to participate is one thing, but actively seeing to it that crafters will be content is another strategy altogether. Including detailed instructions, time-saving gadgets, and "goof proof" methods are ways to soothe any crafter's fears. One ad promised: "You can't make a mistake! Every stitch is perfect because it's automatic" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 67). Another ad in the same issue emphasized: "No experience necessary! Non-artists rejoice! Now anyone can paint on virtually any surface. Each pattern comes with step-by-step instructions and simple techniques that take the guesswork out of painting" (p. 108).

The contradiction between originality and patterning is made even more complex when crafters take up "uniqueness" and "rule breaking" and turn their definitions around: "When it comes to quilting, you can use any colors, any combinations, you can break any rules. There are no fabric police" (*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 31). This doesn't seem like the oppressive effect of patterning we've come to expect from popular craft. How can

crafters use the term "original" and "creative" while knowing they follow patterns? Again, the answer must lie in how popular craft has adapted originality to meet the needs of the craft community. These people enjoy following patterns while at the same time feeling they are doing something beyond the ordinary. Crafters do not have difficulty resolving the issues of pattern vs. original. Perhaps one should ask fine artists why they have a problem with popular craft's adaptive strategies in this direction.

Open participation is a decidedly postmodern concept and far more reasonable than the alternatives of exclusion and aesthetic rigidity that many fine artists endorse. Crafttext never casts negative judgments on any crafter's creative efforts. People are encouraged to keep crafting, trying new ideas and techniques. A democratic view of art gives crafters a feeling of unlimited potential: "The basic principle is so simple that it seems too simple to be art. Yet, one look at the samples done by creative people, and there is no doubt of its artistic possibilities" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 85).

Speed

Whereas traditional craft's virtue lies in its intricacy and methodical slowness (thereby giving the crafter time for contemplation), faster equals better as far as popular craft is concerned. Often linked with ease, speed allows the crafter to complete as many different projects as she can. Yet speed doesn't abandon the possibility of full enjoyment, either. It is also an adaptive strategy, placing greater importance on the experience of making as many crafts as possible while still retaining the allure of old fashioned crafting: "Craft is natural for the fast paced world, yet allows for personalization of projects for home decor, gift giving or communication" (*Crafts 'n Things* March

1988, p.85).

Pleasing others while saving time is one motivation for utilizing speed: "The magnets are ideal for craft fairs. They take no time to make and folks around here love them" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 8). One crafter explained "the figures turned out to be both speedy and inexpensive. That really pleased my fellow crafters" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 26). Another informed: "The design proved speedy and fun. I had such a good time with the first one, I made 23 more" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 52).

Many projects and product ads quantified speed in terms of weeks, days, hours, and minutes or used numerical figures to drive home "quickness." For the crafter, seeing time expressed so specifically added an extra degree of certainty:

*"Perhaps it comes down to immediate gratification; while regular quilts may take months or even years to make, a jacket is relatively quick and easy. You can complete one in 8-10 hours" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 31).

*"Create beautiful embroidery instantly and automatically! Just push the button and guide the tool along the pattern. Makes up to 500 stitches in one minute" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 67).

*"It took me just two hours for me to 'grow' my pumpkins" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 32).

*"Quick drying, waterbase 'instant' glues and sealers make it possible to complete a project in hours instead of days or even weeks" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 12).

*"You can finish a big afghan in less than 45 hours" (p. 45).

*"Requires only a few hours work and a few days drying time" (*Crafts March* 1998, p. 48).

*"I finished the first project in about an hour" (*Crafting Traditions April 1998*, p. 7).

Other projects used more abstract metaphors to define speed. One crafter's design was "quick as a wink to make with purchased mittens and doilies" (*Crafts 'n Things April 1998*, p. 71). Another said: "In a snap, you can create a bouncin' baby craft" (*Crafting Traditions April 1998*, p. 43). A yarn lover explained "once I got the idea, crocheting the afghan was a breeze" (p. 13). *Aleene's* magazine promised: "Before you can say 'snowstorm', you can finish this stylish sweatshirt" (December 1997, p. 59). The virtue of stamping was that "in one colossal swoop, a word print stamp can cover an entire card with a cheerful message and the card is complete and ready to go" (*Crafts 'n Things October 1997*, p. 105).

Many of the projects featured time saving tips. As if crafting wasn't already fast enough, these tips upped the ante on speed:

*"To save time, stencil the motif on a purchased pillow" (*Crafts 'n Things March 1998*, p. 31).

*"Instead of painting faces, use rub-on faces" (*Crafts 'n Things October 1997*, p. 14).

*"Use purchased dried orange slices to save time" (p. 38).

*"Instead of sewing the felt pieces together, you can fuse them with fusible tape or thin strips of fusible web." (*Crafting Traditions October 1997*, p.43).

*"You can just as easily use purchased versions for appliquéing in order to speed

up this design" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 17).

As a craftview, speed serves several important purposes. It is more than appeasement of impatient people. Speed allows for a diversity of experiences, especially when one's time is divided between work and home. Speed is postmodern adaptation by maintaining the barest nostalgic elements of crafting while "churning it out." Speed builds a sense of expertise and accomplishment without a lot of risk or investment. One could study art for four years only to be told one is "mediocre" or one could pick up the latest craft magazine, find a project, and become an instant expert.

Ease

Difficulty has long been a hallmark of master craftspersons. Everyone admires full-scale models of cathedrals made of toothpicks or four yard long bobbin lace wedding veils. Sheer tediousness brings out the "wow" reaction in just about any person. And for some crafters, creating a few long-term skillful pieces is their thing. But for popular crafter, it's not the way to go. In order to allow for open participation and speed, ease has to be a factor in all crafting experiences.

Granted, some popular crafters would put themselves in the "intermediate" or "advanced" level of expertise. Many magazines have a variety of skill levels to appeal to every crafter so boredom doesn't set in. The idea is to be challenged, but only enough to pique one's interest and encourage the crafting community to try something new. As one crafter said: "Even if you've never tried such a craft before, you'll find the lamb shaped cake isn't a bit difficult" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 22).

Technology has contributed to the ease factor, crafts keep getting faster all the

time. The following projects are a result of product developments within the past fifty years, or sooner:

*"Elegant wall hangings are easy to create with Aleene's Instant Decoupage"

(*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 14).

*"It's easy to personalize this sweatshirt with removable shrink-it flowers"

(p. 20).

*"Using the crimper is really a breeze- very little hand pressure is required"

(p. 55).

*"Deluxe E-Z Bowmaker" (p. 62).

*"Poly-Fill inserts, fiberfill and batting are easy to use" (*Crafts 'n Things* March

1998, p. 80).

*"You'll love how easy it is to create your labor of love projects with Velcro

brand fasteners!" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 85).

*"As sophisticated as tromp l'oeil but as easy as paint by numbers, new Accent

Magic Mural Tracers can be used to decorate just about any surface"

(p. 105).

Other projects promised success with a minimum of materials and/or effort involved. One craft was simply described as "easy to paint and glue" (*Crafts 'n Things* April 1998, p. 67), another as "an easy project to saw and paint" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 24). This craft removed all uncertainty: "Packet includes pattern, painting techniques, and the design is pre-printed on watercolor paper. All you have to do is just paint!" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 108). Earlier in the same issue, a product review column gave a hearty endorsement: "Use rubber stamps to create the design- then just

paint inside the lines! What could be easier?" (p. 36). And, "with wood quilting, everything can be planned and laid out so there is no fear of ruining a piece of furniture. It's goof proof!" (p. 14).

Ease points to that element of risk that exists in almost any facet of creative expression. People are extremely reluctant, particularly after adulthood sets in, to display their artistic prowess. Self-preservation takes the form of fail proof craft experiences. A wooden bunny is described as "easy to cut, if you make a mistake, it will add to his charm" (*Crafts 'n Things* April 1998, p. 23). Quilting templates advertised: "allow you to easily expand your patchwork potential without geometry" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 31). "User Friendly" is spelled out in bold letters over a picture of rubber stamps (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 77). Most importantly, as far as popular crafts are concerned, "it isn't as hard as it looks" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 62).

Ease if often linked with fun and good times:

*"Finger painting the eggs was both easy and enjoyable" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 27).

*"Fun and easy. Just paint and enjoy" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 13).

Ease also offered options:

*"If you love quilts but aren't a sewing fan, then this technique is for you! Just cut, iron, and quilt!" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 59).

*"According to Terry, it might be easier for some crafters to fuse the leaf pieces together with fusible web first, then stitch the leaves as directed here" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 28).

*"You don't have to know how to sew to make these bunnies. Just follow the

no-sew method!" (*Crafts 'n Things* April 1998, p. 16).

While one can argue that ease wrongly presumes a lack of skill on the part of the crafter or that it "babies" people in a patronizing way, it's hard to deny the positive benefits. The craft community values ease because it allows everyone to have a chance to try. Ease can be an ingenious solution when faced with overwhelming possibilities.

Artificiality

Crafters derived great pleasure from the use of "deception" in their works.

Making one material resemble another was a worthwhile accomplishment, especially if it could be done at a fraction of the original cost. Artificiality stretched the boundaries of what materials could do, often with stunning results. Visual deception is nothing new. There's evidence of fakery from the era of Chippendale furniture, for example. It's just that popular crafters actively search for the experience of artificiality applied in new and better ways.

The triumph of the artificial came through again and again. Crafters preferred the "double take" effect of their deceptive efforts over using "real" materials: "People are surprised when they realize that my wall quilts don't contain a stitch of fabric or thread. I decorate my home with stencils instead" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 44). One crafter listed the benefits of her plastic canvas adaptation: "It's two-sided for extra dimension and almost looks real, although the poinsettias will surely last longer than any I know of" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 52). A dried flower designer stated: "Friends and family will wonder if it's real or not. It's a terrific table decoration that will remain forever fall" (*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 55). An ad exclaimed: "Wow! Something

new! Imagine being able to create leather projects that have that rich hand tooled or embossed look using rubber stamps!" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 85).

Artificiality could be utilized to speed up the aging process of any item..

Achieving a patina was no problem when using paint and some elbow grease. An ad for fabric dye featured a finished cabinet that was meant to look "old." The instructions laid out precisely how to create the appearance of an antique using the dye and is a perfect example of artificiality in practice: "Rit dyes can add a rustic, old world feel to unfinished wood. This technique varies the color for an "aged" look...once the cabinet is dry, continue to age it by lightly sanding the entire cabinet, including the stenciled area. Again, vary the pressure to create an uneven look...continue to sand areas that would be naturally worn like corners, door pulls, legs and edges until you've created your own 'antique' original" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 71).

"Antique" was a common project theme. Faux cross stitch pillow cases could be easily accomplished by using "a unique cotton print fabric duplicating the heartwarming look of heirloom cross stitch embroidery" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 32). Later in the same issue, another project promised: "The mellow, timeworn look on these pots is easy to achieve using spray colors" (p. 46). A "Faux Finish Favorites" column in *Crafts 'n Things* described a paint and smoke technique used to recreate Colonial lamp holders (October 1997, p. 36). Another paint ad claimed that their products achieved the "look of expensive, color-washed antiques and collectibles" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 82).

Artificiality blurs the boundaries between real and fake, manufactured and natural a' la postmodern style. The "natural" look was a popular choice in crafttexts. However, there was a lot of footwork involved in presenting a craft as natural. Sometimes this was

done by using purchased materials: "add a straw hat and raffia to complete his natural good looks" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 16). An ad for a book on candle making displayed several "natural" models using synthetic fruits, nuts and perfume oils (p. 87).

Sometimes the illusion of texture was desired:

*"Crackled Foil Finishes" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 22).

*"No sew picture frames that feature an elegant embossed look" (p. 59).

*"Add dimensional accents to most surfaces for rich, architectural type detailing" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 2).

*"Ragging is an easy way to create the illusion of texture on any surface" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 32).

*"Faux Stone Finish" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 72).

Creating a "look" of material "A" by using materials "B" or "C" was at the heart of artificiality. Sometimes the craft object was meant to resemble something else, like using fabric to "create chocolate cake slices" (*Aleene's* December 1997, pp. 40-41) or birthday cakes made out of folded "receiving blankets, towels, diapers, pacifiers and pins" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 113). Crocheted flowers was another example of this resemblance (*Country Woman* February 1998, p. 19). In the other projects, creating a "look" usually involved some sort of value elevation, such as: "Layers of satin ribbons give these colorful pillows a decidedly rich look" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 70).

Still other "looks" included:

*"Create the look of quilts with Aleene's 3-D Accents" (*Aleene's* December 1997, P. 29).

*"You can create the incredible look of etching" (*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 57).

*"Almost Leather creates projects which look like leather, but aren't" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 86).

*"Gallery Glass lets you enjoy the sparkling look of stained glass throughout your home" (*Crafts 'n Things* April 1998, p. 11).

*"Now you can create festive tableware with the hand painted look" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 29).

And, perhaps the most interesting statement regarding "looks": "Mix and match these coordinated products to create your own unique Alma Lynne looks" (p. 13).

Faux, tromp l'oeil, fake, "___", the artificial welcomes it all. Popular craft has no interest in the verification of an antique dealer. In fact, crafters are proud of artificiality. It causes crafters to question the boundaries between what our society calls "real" and what it deems "fake." By manipulating materials once intended for a specific purpose, crafters are controlling their practice. Artificiality provides an outlet for chance and choice.

Gift Giving

What do crafters do with all of their creations? There is only so much physical space in the home. With changing decor and speed and ease of manufacture, projects accumulate quickly. Gift giving is a logical community choice. It also has an interesting social history. Coontz (1992) gives a brief overview of gift giving and how it has contributed to the formation of family groups.

"Social customs recognized both the inevitability of dependence and the necessity of dispersing it across society, beyond separate couples or even extended family

networks. Gift giving was one such custom; it established a relationship that was alternately one-sided and therefore more permanent than an "even" relationship, in which accounts are always settled so that one can leave at any time" (p. 46). Our values today insist that we "even up" so that we don't owe anyone anything, thus retaining independence. We feel uncomfortable if we receive a less valuable gift in exchange for our more valuable one, and vice versa.

Popular craft keeps the gifts coming and going. Rates of exchange are quite rapid. For every holiday there are motifs that make suitable gifts, not to mention birthdays, weddings, and baby showers. "Organizing social relations through reciprocity involves a delicate balance. It is unacceptable to give a gift with the sole motive of getting something in return, yet it is unthinkable to accept a gift without understanding that it sets up conditions for future behavior; it is an equally antisocial act to refuse a gift and the obligation that gift entails" (p. 47). This endless cycle of presents feeds into craftviews about community via the gift:

*"I create special treat bags that I fill with candy for our three grandkids, god-children, and nieces and nephews, not to mention friends' youngsters and my co-workers' kids. Everyone looks forward to my 'routine'"
(*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 63).

*"I have five sisters, two brothers, 17 sisters-in-law and ten mothers-in-law, plus a husband and three young sons, to make Christmas gifts for each year" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 53).

Part of the fun of gift giving involves finding something the recipient will actually use and enjoy. For crafters, relying on common themes was a tried and true idea source:

"For mom or Grandma, a cleverly cross-stitched sign will let her know her kitchen efforts are appreciated. Meanwhile, the fish inspired design will surely lure smiles from dad or Grandpa" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 68). One crafter added: "I tuck home made cookies and candies into the containers I've crafted for friends and family" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 47). An ad suggested "Welcome a new baby with a cuddly blanket. Paint a photo album as a special gift for a blushing bride. Wish a friend happy birthday with an adorable home made card" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 34).

Crafters often vocalized how their designs were well-received:

*"Just imagine the expression on their faces when they receive this handmade and heartfelt design" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 59).

*"Her friends are the lucky recipients of most of her craft designs" (*Aleene's* August 1997, p. 33).

*"In addition to crafting gifts for the new arrivals, I also created these package ties. Everyone who's received them just loved them" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 42).

*"Inspired by the 'Denim Plastic Bag Holders,' I recycled old jeans and made Christmas gifts for my family. They are all smiles as they proudly display their own decorated bag holders" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 6).

*"Grown ups will love 'em too, so paint plenty to share" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 50).

Handmade gifts are special, simply because of human intervention during the process of making. Even if done quickly, the idea that a gift involved crafting meant a lot to both crafters and recipients. *Country Woman* magazine assured readers: "We'll

help you out with gift giving, too. Turn to our colorful craft section for ways to fashion your own presents, always the *best* kind" (October 1997, p. 67). One designer's project is described as "a wonderful expression of affection you can recreate for someone special in your life" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 57). Another project description stated: "Decorate with bits of crafty leftovers and they're ready to deliver tiny blessings to your family and friends" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 68). One reader expressed: "I really appreciate teachers and what they do. So I like to show my gratitude for their hard work by creating gifts" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 12).

In conclusion, gift giving is a large part of popular craft. It is the culmination of the crafting experience that also involves a sharing of ideas. When readers contributed project suggestions, they were also "giving" something to other crafters. The sense of obligation that Coontz (1992) describes may be a part of gift giving as a craftview, but the negative aspects are not present. Making and giving gifts are not "chores," but something to look forward to. Crafting becomes more meaningful and communal through the exchange of handmade gifts.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia is the most recognizable and least understood craftview. The complexity of re-creating a non-existent past out of fragmented images of "the good old days" cannot be comprehended until one tries to examine the political side of popular craft. Nostalgia is part remembrance, part collective forgetting, involves group regulation and flights of fancy. There is nothing quite like the nostalgia of popular craft.

What is it about collective reminiscing that troubles academia? Are people who

engage in nostalgic practice necessarily sub-intellectual? Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) have observed that "the working class is a threat to the modern middle class, who adheres to science, rather than magic, the supernatural, or religion...the masses constantly presented ways of being which threatened the safe assurance of reason. Increasingly, they came to be pathologized" (p. 41). Ellsworth (1994) rightly points out that to insist that all people solve problems by rational dialogue or viewing all sides before making a decision, is unrealistic and oppressive. Many subordinate groups do not approach conflict in an academically sanctioned manner. Yet their ways of expressing themselves are still valid. I wouldn't be surprised if crafters, like other working class women once tried those methods to no avail. The abstract language of academia alienates a lot of people.

What are the stereotypes of people (like crafters) who adhere to a nostalgic worldview? As discussed above, people who validate collective reminiscing must be intellectually ignorant. Nostalgia is, of course, a delusion, because it contains aspects of religious belief. Since our advanced culture is "beyond religion," people who still give credence to it must be even more ignorant than once thought. Nostalgia keeps people in their place, sort of an "ultimate" hegemony. There is also nothing of political importance behind nostalgia, as evidenced by the kinds of people who practice it. Above all, it is utterly and completely simplistic. My question then, is why hasn't this "evil" been addressed and eliminated for good? Or, why has academia been reluctant to face nostalgia head on, get into its workings, and maybe learn something?

In popular craft, nostalgia is comprised of religious belief, familial allegiance as the solution to societal problems, patriotism, and fond reminiscing about an assumed

shared past. Religion, especially Christianity, makes a frequent appearance in crafttext, though often in the form of subtle imagery. An ad for a Hummel Nativity read: "Never before has the Christmas story been told with such warmth and charm. On display in your home, the Berta Hummel Nativity will add rich new meaning to your family's Christmas celebration" (*Crafts* October 1997, p. 95). One pillow had a stitched saying: "May angels bless you night and day" (p. 118), while another featured a cross design (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 28). Still another ad in *Aleene's* declared: "express your creativity and faith with Precious Moments iron-on's" (December 1997, p. 71). A sign promised to "tug at the heartstrings of every gardener" carried the slogan "the shortest way to heaven is through a garden" (*Crafts* March 1998, p. 40).

Dissanayake (1988) validates religion as a way of life for many groups. It is through spirituality that people both express themselves while respecting the importance of others. "The abstruse pronouncements of the most avant-garde intellectuals hardly affect the ordinary person who continues to believe in a consistent reality. Such authoritative truths as God's will, the ideal of universal brotherhood, convictions of racial or religious or national superiority, the millennium, self-realization, these magnetize, mobilize, and give meaning to the lives of millions of people who do not doubt the efficacy of such pathways..." (p. 184).

However, one should also heed Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) warning to not fall into the trap of simply valorizing the working class while ignoring their more self-oppressive practices. Organized religion (as opposed to spirituality) has many regulatory impositions, mostly in the form of leveling group judgments on members' behavior. One can also place too much emphasis on "fate" to the extent of refusing to plan for the

future. Stagnancy sets in as the group only welcomes those like themselves. In popular craft, the downside of religion lies in its rejection of "what lies ahead." The "now" is far more important to popular crafters because it is one of the few things in their lives they can control.

The family, like religion, is a driving force behind nostalgia. Families are where people learn about love, life expectations, good and bad habits, and cultural norms. Crafttext views the family as the only form of solidarity that will make America great again: "It's been said that women are the glue that holds families, communities and even countries together" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 63). To be strong, families must stick together, no matter what they become involved with: "Imagine the New Year's celebration with the family, crafting a one of a kind family calendar using blank paper and favorite rubber stamp images" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 88).

Strong families are invincible: "Many of these women found themselves with a living to earn and a family to raise on their own. It took courage, strength and resolve to step up, children clinging to their skirts, and cut a swath through whatever life had to offer" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 63). Crafters see the home as the center of the family, the necessary ingredient for happiness. One crafter described how she designed her living room with family in mind: "The first piece of art I put on the west wall led me to what I should have known all along would be the theme of this room. It's a wall hanging I cross stitched from a kit that has the saying 'home is where the heart is'" (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 42).

When it's all said and done, the family is where crafters find solace and inspiration. Crafttext does not express the negative things that can stem from the family.

By only showing the positive side of family life, crafting magazines feed into nostalgic belief: "You'll know it was all worthwhile when it's time to leave...there are hugs, kisses, and tears. Folks will say 'we have to do this more often' and honk as they drive away, waving...and your heart will be full of memories to last a lifetime" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 41). Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) remember how their own families "did not need to talk about it, would rather not talk about it" (p. 14). Bringing up problems for discussion only causes trouble. Surface happiness is more than being positive, it is a strategy of survival.

Patriotism is a decorating motif, as seen in one crafter's kitchen (*Country Woman* August 1997, pp. 4-6). Every surface had some kind of red, white and blue color scheme and the flag design appeared as heart shapes, curtains and seat covers. "Americana" is one facet of "country" (to be discussed below). But patriotism is also highly political and more than a simple allegiance to one's nation. Like the family, patriotism is about forgetting, more than remembering. It is less disturbing to focus on the decorative features of a country's history than to call up its inconsistencies. For many working class people, America has been deeply disappointing. However, instead of dealing with the hypocrisy, a national past is rendered "Americana."

The "good old days" is so closely tied with patriotism that it helps to discuss them together. Crafttext argues that not only does America have a shared past, but it was a good past and better than what we have today. Parents "offered moral guidance to their families. They knew right from wrong, and they knew how to teach that difference to their children" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 63). While crafters might hold back expressing how they feel about problems today, there's no limit to what they will say or

create regarding the "good old days." A "Nostalgic Country Washboard" was available in two sizes (*Crafts 'n Things* October 1997, p. 72). Or one could make "a Touch of Tradition Quilt Project" (*Aleene's* December 1997, p. 29). A wooden sign kit reminds us to "Enjoy Life One Sip at a Time" (p. 57).

Rural living is a large part of the "good old days." One crafter reminisced: "Living on a farm, we couldn't just run to the store for a bit of ribbon or a piece of lace. My Grandma taught me how to make do, something I still practice to this day" (*Crafting Traditions* October 1997, p. 28). A photographer discussed how "come autumn, we photograph harvest celebrations across the country, and we also capture glimpses of our rural past by concentrating on the gas and steam engines at old iron exhibitions" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 14). Whenever one crafter worked on her stitchery, "pictures of long-skirted ladies come to mind, and serve to inspire me even further" (*Crafting Traditions* April 1998, p. 17). Still another crafter declared: "Life in the country has influenced my handwork. Down home projects are the kind I love" (p. 61).

What's interesting about the crafters featured in *Country Woman* and *Crafting Traditions* is that they are actually part of a fully operational farms and ranches. So it's not just ignorance of farm life that creates the "good old days." Female farmers and ranchers are experiencing firsthand the hardships of their vocation, yet they prefer to practice only positive imagery of this labor. Suppressing one's limitations seems to be a source of pride: "No matter how long and hard the day and how exhausting the effort to make ends meet, they always had time for a hug and a kiss or a pat of reassurance that better days lay ahead" (*Country Woman* August 1997, p. 63).

Reminiscing takes the form of documentation in the recent memory album craze.

Surfacing as a trend last year, memory albums are an extension of the scrapbook idea, only the pages are identified by theme rather than done randomly. One ad for supplies declared: "You'll have a blast preserving your past!" (*Crafts 'n Things* March 1998, p. 46). By inscribing photos and trinkets in the album, crafters are actively constructing their own "good old days": "Do you have a collection of photographs and small mementos of a loved one who is no longer with you? It can be good therapy to gather those things together and display them in a way that you will always have a constant reminder of the wonderful memories associated with them" (*Crafts 'n Things* April 1998, p. 14).

In conclusion, nostalgia is a complex intertwining of religion, family, patriotism and memory. Part of its persistence in today's world lies in the fact that it is hard to isolate any one of these qualities for analysis. After studying crafttexts, I'm not so certain that it is necessarily bad for crafters to engage in nostalgic practice (it's actually not up to me to decide whether it *is* "good" or "bad"). It's understandable that when life has been proven to be disappointing to retreat into a world of nostalgic imagery. But we shouldn't assume that the nostalgia of crafttext is predictable. Memory albums allow for creative involvement in re-writing nostalgic discourse. In the next section, I will discuss how nostalgia fuses with craft to form "country." Do "country" crafts look alike for a reason?

"Country"

Lather (1991) writes: "Whatever 'the real' is, it is discursive. Rather than dismissing 'the real,' postmodernism foregrounds how discourses shape our experiences of 'the real' in its proposal that the way we speak and write reflects the structures of

power in our society" (p. 25). Similarly, the way "country" is inscribed in craft discourse reveals societal power structures, especially its "look alike" quality. For crafters, "country" is authentic and reflects the "good old days." But its appearance of stability is also surface, and surfaces are changeable (Chaney 1996). "Country" embodies the saying "the more things change the more they stay the same."

Visual Characteristics

"Country" has a redundant presence because it appears everywhere. Yet, one cannot assume that non-crafters know what it looks like. The physical markers of "country" include its motifs, materials, colors, and facial/body features. These characteristics fit together to form an illusion (however fragmentary) of stability and harmony that gives "country" its power:

Country Motifs: cats, holiday themes, "folk art", angels, birdhouses, little girls, fishing, hearts, stars, moons, checks, wagons, bunnies (Easter), wishing wells, Noah's Ark, geese, cowboys, quilts, lady bugs, apples, baskets, wreaths, sunflowers, pumpkins (Halloween), witches (Halloween), turkeys (Thanksgiving), Santas (Christmas), snowmen (Christmas), Colonial styles, scarecrows, gingerbread men (Christmas), fall leaves, rag dolls, heart in hand, crows, chickens, puppies, fruit, bears, old people, rocking horses, ducks, cows, pigs, gardening, barns, Christianity, patriotic, houses, canning jars, Sunbonnet Sues, Overall Bills, watermelons, landscape art, straw hats, male/female couples, reindeer (Christmas), Christmas trees, sayings and phrases.

Country Materials: calicos, doilies, crochet, wheat, unhemmed fabrics, straw, weathered wood, raffia, ribbon, jute, silk flowers, terra cotta pots, drawn-on stitching,

gingham, cross stitch, buttons, pinked edges, acrylic yarn, muslin, wood shapes, acrylic paints, yo-yo's, cinnamon sticks, ruffles, crinkled paper, bent wire, glossy paint, denim, bandannas, blanket stitches, plaids, dried flowers, Spanish moss, "dot font" lettering, lace, visible wood grain, felt, gourds, spools, burlap, Styrofoam, fusible web, polyester stuffing, glitter (small amounts).

Country Colors: primary red/yellow/blue, red/white/blue, mid-range pastels (gray-blue, rose, celery), off-white, red/black, harvest colors (mustard, orange, rust, olive), pink/blue, violet/white/green, forest/burgundy, holiday theme colors (red/green for Christmas, pastels for Easter), browns/reds, green/white, blue/white, pink/green.

Country Facial/Body Features: large face with small eyes/nose/mouth, straw hair, smiles, large eyes with white highlights, round faces, dot eyes/no mouth, "wiggle" smile, simple shapes, pink circle cheeks, freckles, yarn hair, "hillbilly" teeth, jute for arms/legs, stenciled features, skinny body/big feet, eyelashes for girls, "google" eyes, "spoon shaped" smile, frontal views (side views are rare), uneven "folk" shapes, jointed limbs.

Philosophical Characteristics

Chaney (1996) argues that aesthetic values come through in the way that people use and make objects. People reflect on the things they make. It is an analytic process, not a passive or denigrating one. Wolff (1981) states: "The nature of the audience and the way in which it 'reads' cultural products cannot be taken for granted, and certainly cannot be assumed to be unchanging" (p. 93). "Country" is a shifting phenomena, although it appears to have a fixed meaning, a timelessness. Part of "country's" rootedness lies in its repetition of imagery to the point of redundancy. There is no

guarantee that this is always successful (trends come and go), but it is definitely crafttext's primary strategy.

Why "country?" There are other styles in popular craft (Victorian, Classical) but "country" is by far the most widespread. As Chaney (1996) maintains, the theme of design has gone from functionality to more of a style. Objects become more like advertisements than commodities (p. 149). So part of "country" is a result of heavy advertising campaigns along with the development of newer and faster products.

"Country's" success lies in it being both the catalyst and culmination of group desire. Tensions come from wanting to control the materials one has and being controlled by specific themes. Advertising has played off this tension by promising crafters that they will have the ability to manipulate a product to fit their lifestyles. "Country" increases its own desirability by containing powerful elements of nostalgia (religion, patriotism, family and memory). Crafting as a group activity re-creates these shared meanings in physical form. Thus, objects closely resemble each other with no discernible origin of idea or design; a "Baurillard effect."

"Because appearances are designed for a multiplicity of contexts or purposes they will become increasingly fragmentary and ephemeral. An emphasis upon surfaces presupposes that meanings are not stable and are therefore dependent on the arbitrariness of perception and use" (Chaney 1989, p. 112). "Country" is fragmentary and it reads visually much like the visual characteristics listed above. Yet somehow all of these diverse motifs and elements meet to form "country."

In conclusion, the craft community has many shared values, or craftviews. Originality is not as critical as shared group experience. Crafters come together

encouraged by speed, ease, open participation, artificiality and gift-giving. Behind these values is a strong sense of nostalgia that is paradoxically located in "the now." "Country" utilizes repetition and anonymity as part of its appeal to group cohesion. What appears as "look alike" crafts is actually an expression of community as priority.

CHAPTER SIX:

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE HOW-TO IN POPULAR CRAFT

Foundations of the How-To

Educators are familiar with this bit of common sense: "no one likes being told what to do." But as in all things of a taken for granted nature, is this really the case? In this chapter, I examine the pedagogical format of popular craft: the how-to or step-by-step instructions.

If people don't like being told what to do, then how do we account for the step-by-step instructions on the pages of popular craft magazines? Whatever craft form one plans to undertake, there is a comparable how-to ready and waiting, seemingly unchanging. Even when craft magazines review how-to books, they use conservative pedagogical terms. For example, in the book review section of *Crafts*, the headings in bold print read "Back to Basics" and "Today's Lesson Plan": "Five lesson plans feature eight stitches, each with an accompanying project. Each lesson builds upon the stitches previously learned. Step-by-step illustrations are given to help you accurately complete the stitches and color embroidery diagrams help you know at a glance which ribbon or braid color to use" (April 1997, p. 14).

Traditional schooling has had a profound influence on people's dependence upon

printed directions and pre-arranged activities. The parallels between crafting instructions and the texts of schooling are remarkable. First, I will examine the foundation of crafters' comfort level with the how-to. This consists of the modernist educational system and the importance of ritual as site of organized meaning.

Second, crafters are in the postmodern era and craft has shifted gears in some pretty contradictory ways. Its persistence as an activity is the biggest contradiction of all. Therefore, one must go beyond simplistic readings of the how-to as just oppressive text and demonstrate that craft's pedagogy of anonymous instruction and rejection of the original in favor of community fits in nicely with postmodern, poststructural, and feminist philosophies.

Schooling and Ritual

Cherryholmes (1988) quotes: "If people are free to choose what to do, why is it they choose activities coincident with rules and normative commitments of established practice? Why do their choices not produce something closer to anarchy? One reason is ideological: people accept, internalize, and act according to shared ideas they believe are true and valid" (p. 5). Crafters appear to endorse the how-to because no other pedagogical format is displayed in crafttext. There must be something of value in step-by-step instructions, or something comfortingly familiar.

Most Americans today have been educated in the public school system, more specifically in a modern system that had long responded to increased immigration by stressing cultural sameness in its curriculum. Franklin (1988) notes that in the early 20th century, the existing middle class, believing themselves to be threatened by the arrival of

large groups from Eastern and Southern Europe, pushed for a curriculum of cultural homogeneity. This curriculum would also become an instrument of social control (p. 81). It sought to preserve corporate capitalism and productivity (p. 83). As Doll (1993) maintains, "more time could be saved and more goods produced if workers, including teachers, would do as told. This was the key to efficiency and standardization (p. 48).

Franklin argues that even though the '30's and '40's brought about changes in conceptions of social control from "coercion" to "voluntarism," the purpose of such curriculum did not change: "Voluntarism...is deceptive. It masks what is essentially a coercive process dedicated to cultural uniformity behind the language of democracy" (p. 82).

Doll observes how the assembly line became the model of efficiency and control during the '20's and beyond. Schools adopted this model to regulate every segment of the students' day and how that day was to be spent (p. 43). Segmentation of time continues to be a popular curricular component. One classic example is the endurance of the lesson plan with its "focus questions." People's relationships with social control are complicated. Even when one resists it (by boredom or rebellion) one doesn't really care to escape it. Social control is the setting for the educational how-to: "Recurrent themes characterize educational discourses-practices. The substructures of many that are dominant emphasize order, accountability, structure, systematization, rationalization, expertise, specialization, linear development, and control. Broadly put, these substructures reflect influences from analytic philosophy, modernism, and structuralism" (Cherryholmes 1998, p. 9).

Both education and the how-to embody aspects of ritual. Dissanayake (1988)

explains: "Individuals with different expectations, abilities, and levels of understanding achieve a unity by participating in the ritual. The ritual is larger than its individual participants" (p. 83). It is important for rituals to be as non-ambiguous as possible. To ensure clarity, repetition, stereotyping and rigidity are necessary elements of ritual. "All details must be performed in a certain sequence and in a prescribed, often iterative, way" (p. 85). The how-to always begins with a list of materials needed before proceeding to step one. A crafter cannot jump two to three steps ahead or else the symmetry of the project will be lost.

According to Dissanayake, rituals serve several personal and group needs. They promote smooth social functioning by utilizing common beliefs and values to bring people together. Rituals explain the world and provide a sense of meaning beyond what is declared "reality." They integrate collective emotions with proper public behavior. Painful life experiences can be formally "acted out" via rituals (p. 87). Thus, one can see how ritual has many positive aspects. The how-to format, while appearing to be an endorsement of proscribed behavior, is not absolutely directive, however. It also alludes to fantasy, or what can possibly be created.

By engaging in the how-to ritual, crafters are inventing highly personal understandings of their situations. Yes, step-by-step instructions are rigid and have more in common with public education than interpretive discourse. But it is just the format of the how-to that is familiar to crafters. Making things involves spectacle: "Ritual, like play, is concerned with metaphor in that it is saturated with symbolism, the creation of another world in which once ordinary things acquire the potency of standing for extraordinary things. In this world, ordinarily incompatible things may be combined or

reconciled into unprecedented and convincing unity" (p. 89).

Ritual reminds us that not all cultures value originality. Some have created explicit canons of accepted creative activity such as "country." The how-to is both familiar and unexpected. One of its surreal qualities is its language structure. When taken out of context, it resembles a fragmented code. In the next section, I deal with the how-to in a narrative manner. As I reconceptualize step-by-step instructions, the complexity of popular craft will become noticeable, as will its ties to the public education system.

The How-To: A Narrative Reconceptualization

"1. Trace the bunny pattern in the pattern section and use the band saw to cut it from the wood. Drill the hole for the dowel as indicated on the pattern. Sand the wood and wipe it with a tack cloth."

Pre-modern philosophies shared a goal of harmony and balance of proportion in all things. This view permeated Greek and Western thought "until the time of Galileo and Descartes" (Doll 1993, p. 19). The oneness with nature in pre-modern worldviews gave way to Enlightenment principles embodied by Descartes' *Four Methodological Rules for Directing Reason in the Search for Truth* (p. 30). Craft gives way to the assembly line: "First Rule: Accept only that which presents itself to the mind so clearly and distinctly that its truth is self-evident"

"2. Use the sponge brush and white paint to basecoat the front and back of the bunny white. Let dry between paint colors and each step."

"Second Rule: Divide each difficulty into as many parts as possible for an easier

solution."

"3. Use the graphite transfer paper to transfer the details to the front of the bunny. Use a small sponge to lightly sponge the cheek fiesta pink. Use the half inch brush to paint the spots, eye, nose, and wood dowel black. Use the liner brush to paint black whiskers."

"Third Rule: Think in an orderly fashion, as did the geometers of old with their long chains of reasoning, always proceeding by gradual degrees, from that which is simplest and easiest to understand the more complex."

"4. Apply several coats of varnish to the entire bunny, letting dry between coats."

"Fourth Rule: Review all the foregoing to be certain that nothing is omitted"
(Doll 1993, p. 30).

Doll links Descartes' rules to the *Tyler Rationale*, perhaps one of the most influential conservative curriculum texts of the 20th century. Here, learning consists of 1) chosen purposes, 2) provided experiences, 3) effective organization, and 4) evaluation. Learning is a closed system, limited to the already known (p. 31). Cherryholmes (1988) sees the *Tyler Rationale* as essentially sequential and linear, moving from simple to complex tasks. The *Tyler Rationale* and the craft how-to share the structural characteristics of anonymity, appearance of ideological neutrality, ahistorical design processes and steps that are insignificant once removed from the system (p. 25).

"5. Refer to the photo to glue ivy leaves across the bunny's neck. Tie a multi-loop bow with ribbon streamers. Glue the bow over the leaves, spot gluing the streamers winding throughout the leaves. Glue the daisies and more leaves to the

center of the bow."

Most schooling discourse-practices are from a decidedly modernist and structuralist frame, even though we have moved rapidly into a postmodern and poststructural society. Teachers claim to follow "reforms" and to "appreciate diversity." Yet they continue to rely on structured uses of textbooks, instruction based on learning objectives, artificial separation of theory and practice, curriculum as a linear system, and concepts of learning based on a supposed body of knowledge and skills (p. 1).

"6. Glue the dowel into the drilled hole in the bottom of the bunny" (*Crafts* April 1997, p. 18).

It is no surprise then, that people appreciate the apparent simplicity of the how-to when crafting. They've done it for at least 13 years as a student, then in the workplace as well as in the home. One can say that the female is situated in the how-to worldview. Considering women's lesser status in schools, the directional method is reinforced further. Girls are not given as many chances to assert independence because it is assumed that they will either fail and/or suffer low self-esteem. Teachers, a large portion of whom are female, are handed "teacher proof" materials, further discouraging them from expressing autonomous thought.

How-to's are easy to recognize, thanks to a shared educational background. But, as Cherryholmes points out, do we merely react to practice, or do we begin to examine the structure behind our practices? (p. 6). Instructions for a crocheted potpourri box in *Crafts 'n Things* begin with a short, descriptive sentence, sort of an "anticipatory set": "Crochet a box with sport yarn, stiffen with fabric stiffener, and embellish with trims. Fill the box with potpourri or your favorite mementos" (April 1997, p. 30). This sentence

does two things. It makes a command sound voluntary and it may also describe a future use for the craft object once completed. There is no sense in undergoing a lesson with no purpose (remember elementary school?). An object must have usefulness, even if it is decorative.

Next, a finished size is given for the box: five inches diameter, three inches tall. Cherryholmes discusses the concept of educational metanarratives. Texts like the *Tyler Rationale* and *Bloom's Taxonomy* make no transcendent claims but do provide the conditions to achieve lofty goals. "Such a claim is that the practice will be good, beautiful, true, reasonable, desirable, or efficient, if metanarrative prescriptions are executed completely and correctly" (p. 12). Metanarratives function to outline what is or isn't efficient, acceptable, or desirable (p. 11). In the case of the crochet box, we are given the metanarrative in the form of a finished size, and a materials list telling us what to buy to make a good, beautiful, reasonable, efficient craft object.

A series of instructions follow, and for those not familiar with crochet, the directions read like a strange code. "Crochet the box. Beginning at center bottom ch 2." "Rnd 1. Work 6 sc in second ch from hook. (6 sc)." "Rnd 2. Work 2 sc in each st. around. (12 sc)." "Rnd 3. Sc in each of next 2 sts, 2 sc in next st; repeat from * around. (18 sc)..." Doll (1993) quotes: "Linear sequencing is, of course, the heart of mathematical order- at least of the simple, linear, calculus order Newton devised. This sequencing sees 1,2,3,4 proceeding in a series of uniform steps, each a composite of preceding ones. Such graduation pervaded our concept of curriculum. Both see change and development in uniform, incremental steps (p. 36).

Doll believes that curriculum was (and still is) seen as a set of graduated

instructions, organized in sequential steps, moving from simple to complex. When the element of time is added, curriculum becomes a cumulative measure of how much one can learn over a certain length of time. The assumption is that the more time spent on something, the more knowledge one accumulates (p. 37).

"Rnd 16. Ch 3 dc in the same st, dc in each of the next three dc, ch 3 skip next three dc, (sc, ch 3) in next dc, skip next four dc, * 2 dc in next dc, dc in each of the next three dc, ch 3, skip next three dc, (sc, ch 3) in next st, skip next four dc. Repeat from * around, skipping last three dc, join as before." The crocheter has used time as a measure of knowledge and can take on the complex tasks that the next level of step-by-steps demand. Even in more "free form" instructions than crochet, the assumption is that the crafter will progress through a set of tasks, from simple to complex. This is not unlike the textbook format, which Apple (1988) analyses in his essay "The Culture and Commerce of the Textbook."

Crafttext as Pedagogy

Apple isolates contemporary mainstream curriculum concerns as a) what should be taught and b) in what way? Although these aren't the only concerns worth examining, they dominate traditional educational discourse. The textbook, a cultural commodity, defines what is taught and the way it is taught in our schools (p. 225).

Even though most of us are familiar with textbooks, we actually know very little about them and do not pay critical attention to their ideological production (p. 226). The craft how-to suffers the same treatment in aesthetic pedagogical criticism. Perhaps Apple's most salient point is that textbooks and standardized curricula are not merely

thrust upon us, as part of a "conspiracy." Instead, we repeatedly re-create conservative discourse by simply following what we have made out to be "common sense" (p. 236). What we do in our daily educational routines keeps the textbook discourse alive and well. Crafters who follow the step-by-step are recreating their educational past over and over again.

Profit is the bottom line in textbook publishing. This means that unique views and approaches are too much of a risk for publishers to become involved with (p. 233). In craft magazines, the pattern designer is often told what specific craft projects are needed or desired. To be successful, the designer's instructions must be written at the second grade level, so that everyone will be sure to understand. Uncertainty is not what one wants in a craft publication. As a result, projects usually carry the claim that they have been pre-tested to avoid disappointments.

The layout of a how-to is orderly, much like the textbook. There is a "homogenization" of form from one text to the next that adds to its anonymity and power as an educational discourse (p. 223). Craft's how-to's clearly list needed materials, arrange their instructions in straight columns and show accompanying photos and pattern graphs, all to eliminate uncertainty and build publishing standards.

Reconsiderations

It isn't enough to perform simplistic analysis of the craft how-to as only a vestige of a modernist educational regime. Because of its complexity, popular craft activity deserves to be looked at as a contradictory postmodern discourse. Just as students and teachers quietly subvert the proposed established meanings of textbooks and required

curricula, it isn't unreasonable to believe that the same thing happens with the "everyday" crafter: "This change of focus and subject will place more emphasis on the runner running and on the patterns emerging as many runners run, and less emphasis on the course run, although neither the runners nor the course can be dichotomously split. Organization and transformation will emerge from the activity itself, not set prior to the activity" (Doll 1993, p. 4).

The above quote describes perfectly what is happening with craft today. Craft is eclectic, and as Doll suggests, eclecticism is one feature that makes postmodernism an exciting movement, as "psychedelic bazaar of pastiche" (p. 6). Popular craft is very colorful, with the synthetic masquerading as antique, where animals wear clothes and smile all the time. Here it's okay to like gaudy things such as glitter and sequins. It's also perfectly normal to prefer "corny" sentiment. Quite the antithesis of modern art!

Craft's "double coding" of new and old illustrates Doll's discussion of how postmodernism looks to the past while at the same time transcending it. New is fused with the old. Postmodern artifacts are often whimsical and ironic in appearance and function. Tried and true methods are mixed with the innovative (p. 8).

Cherryholmes (1988) speculates that textbooks can pose questions that are either structural or poststructural (p. 65). If this is possible, then what about the craft how-to? Craft magazines utilize the step-by-step instructional format, but these same texts also use the terms "ideas" and "creative." The concept of "transforming the ordinary" into something unique is a common one in popular craft. Ornamentation and decoration serve to make things special.

Is there room for difference within the how-to? Instead of answering, we need to

look at the aesthetic assumptions behind that question. The notion of artistic originality as paramount is a modernist view. Myths of the artist as lone possessor of creative talent need to give way to a more democratic view that includes a community of crafters. The how-to is only one fragment of a larger process. To isolate it is to limit it.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Lather (1991) contemplates the ambiguous role of the researcher in postmodern society: "Another problem in terms of description/interpretation, is the foregrounding of one's own perspectives. Can this be anything but an intrusive voice? How do we explore our own reasons for doing the research without putting ourselves back at the center?" (p. 91). With similar concerns in mind, I have attempted to minimize my voice in order to listen to crafttext. This has not been so simple, because research is inherently egotistical, and, I have to admit, I have a pretty big ego.

Hopefully, as far as comprehending crafttext, my approach was a satisfactory beginning. The postmodern characteristics of craft magazines points to a fragmentary, dynamic, eclectic and contradictory political site. Yet I realize that text analysis, however open to feminist theory and popular culture, is hardly the best way to understand crafters in action. In other words, I'm ready to move on and "talk to some folks."

The next phase of my popular craft inquiry is to both interact with and look at craft groups. What I would like to do is to develop a means to research groups while at the same time not remain quite so distant (the sort of distance traditional research requires). If anything, being a part of a craft group is not a foreign experience for me as I have been a member of my local quilt guild for some time now. I have even had my own

booth at craft shows. Personally, I enjoy being around crafters and being identified as one. This would probably change with regards to the group's perception of myself as I become a crafter/researcher.

In my future ethnographic work, I don't see myself "hunting" for the perfect site to "match my point of view." To me, this shuts out some intriguing possibilities. What I would rather do is to see what develops. So there will be no pre-set framing of my research in terms of economic class or race. The group I join will simply be who they happen to be. One possibility is a quilt guild, since quilters are probably the best at group cohesion. They meet regularly, are quite active, and share a diverse membership in terms of ability. Quilt guilds are also feminized spaces without being located in the home. So it will be interesting to see how women carry out their crafting in a different space. However, there are differences among groups such as quilters, and other types of crafters, such as those who buy and sell "country" crafts. The uniquenesses and functions of the group will need to be taken into consideration.

Some of the questions I wish to explore include the following: Are there any differences between how women are portrayed in crafttext and how they are in person? How important is crafting to them? In what ways do women organize their lives to make room for crafting (or vice versa)? What role does "country" play in group politics? What makes a craft group a "group?" Is this group identity more important than individuality?

Moving from text to people and from myself to a group will be quite a transition. I don't see myself doing a "touch and go" ethnography. In fact, I'm probably more along the lines of a two to five year stint, possibly longer. Beyond the workings of a guild I intend to look at group shows and sales as part of craft's public sphere, and that can take

a while. The fact that my chosen field of inquiry will not lead to any certain answers in any set length of time does not intimidate me in the least.

What implications does popular craft have for Art Education? While there are no direct lessons to be derived for "classroom application" in my research, the unavoidable fact remains that many people do engage in aesthetic activities outside the art room. Questions need to be raised such as: Who has the authority to say what is or isn't a "proper" artistic education? Why are art educators so concerned with the right way to teach art? Are people less aesthetically informed because they choose to pursue popular crafting? Hopefully, art educators will begin asking such questions.

By examining what creative activities people do outside of a formal art studio, the field of Art Education expands toward a validation of everyday life aesthetics. If television and other forms of mass media are beginning to be taken seriously by scholars, then why not popular craft? Discipline Based Art Education, with its focus on minimized studio time, replaced by more "rigorous" art history, traditional aesthetics, and art criticism loses ground in its appropriation of the everyday art of people. A better understanding of the popular arts would begin with exploring it on its own terms, and respecting it as an important endeavor. Unfortunately, Art Education's recent obsession with test scores, standardization, and being "taken seriously" has undermined the voices of students, teachers, and especially women, who enjoy the so-called "marginalized" arts.

It can be risky to question the motivations of an entire field, but if no one tries, then a one-sided picture of art remains. This in turn isolates many from what could be a life-changing experience. Perhaps what is most amazing is that despite the refusal of

most art educators to validate crafting, women are forming their own connections and communities. And it is these communities, formal or informal, that I wish to consider in my future research.

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APPENDIX

MAGAZINE INFORMATION

My text analysis was done using a total of fourteen craft magazines. Their dates are quite recent, ranging from April 1997 to April 1998. The following information helps frame each magazine in terms of frequency of publication, number of subscribers, and current subscription price:

Aleene's Creative Living

Published monthly; has daily television show

Subscription: \$29.95 for twelve issues

Subscription Rate: not listed

Country Woman

Published bi-monthly

Subscription: \$16.98 for six issues

Subscription Rate: two million

Crafting Traditions

Published bi-monthly

Subscription: \$12.98 for six issues

Subscription Rate: 700,000

Crafts

Published monthly

Subscription: \$21.98 for twelve issues

Subscription Rate: 356,308

Crafts 'N Things

Published monthly (except summer months)

Subscription: \$16.97 for ten issues

Subscription Rate: 308,199

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VITA

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